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Opening Extract from...

Three Lions versus the World

England's World Cup Stories from the Men Who Were There

Written by Mark Pougatch

Published by Mainstream Publishing

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Three Lions Versus the World

England's World Cup Stories from the Men Who Were There

Mark Pougatch

EDINBURGH AND LONDON

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Lyrics from the song 'This Time (We'll Get It Right)'
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FOREWORD

For as long as I can remember, it has been my dream to manage the England team. It came true for me more than two years ago, and right from that moment all my focus has been on the World Cup. As a club manager, I took my teams into important finals, important tournaments, but even with the likes of AC Milan and Real Madrid we were representing just one city. With a country it is different: you carry the expectation of an entire nation with you. It is a big responsibility, but it is an even bigger honour and something to make you very proud.

I have been made to feel very welcome in England since the first moment I came here. I have travelled to watch games up and down the country, and the people I meet are fantastic. My life in football and away from my job has been perfect. The affection I have for this country and everyone I have met here will stay with me once we are at the World Cup. You have to keep in your mind those who are supporting you, who follow you everywhere you go.

I am looking forward to South Africa, when we will have the chance to have the team together for a long period, like a club environment. It will be a big challenge but one I will relish, having waited such a long time to have this opportunity.

My recollection of taking part in the World Cup is not a good one, and I hope to change that. I was part of the Italy squad that travelled to West Germany in 1974, and we went out in the first round. It should have been the ultimate sporting moment for me, but it was one of the lowest points. I hope to create new memories with England. This new chapter – perhaps it could be lucky number 13.

Enjoy reading this document of England at the World Cup, and I will do all that I can to create a new story in South Africa with my staff and the players. Mark is a respected journalist who has spoken to the people who lived these stories, who are part of history, and it is an important record of England's World Cup story.

Fabio Capello
February 2010

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BRAZIL 1950

I had just been asked to write this book when I ran into Mick in the village post office. He is a Wolves fanatic, a seasoned football fan and a walking encyclopaedia on the game. He was adamant about who I should interview: 'Tom Finney. You must go and see Tom Finney. The greatest player this country's ever produced.' I promised Mick I would go and see him first – not just to avoid one of Mick's lengthy monologues on the England goalkeeping situation, the lack of English players at Arsenal or who should replace Andrew Flintoff but because I knew Sir Tom was in a unique position to give me an insight into the early days. He is the last man remaining to have played in England's first three World Cups. A couple of weeks later, I drove to see him at his home in Preston.

Sir Tom was born in the street next to Preston's home ground of Deepdale. He was a frail boy and not even 5 ft tall by the age of 14. When Preston offered him terms, his father insisted he still completed his apprenticeship at the family's plumbing business, and he continued to work in the trade for some time after the war to supplement his weekly wage from football. Inevitably, he became known as the 'Preston Plumber'. He stayed at this same club throughout his football career, and such is his status in the town that there are a Sir Tom Finney Stand and a Sir Tom Finney statue at Deepdale; they held a Sir Tom Finney Day in March 2009 in his honour; and, to reach his house, I drove up Sir Tom Finney Way.

Sir Tom, now 88, sat contentedly in his chair, surrounded by photographs of his family and from his days in football, as his son and grandson led me into his sitting room. I asked him about playing in the 1950 tournament: 'It was very strange being asked to play for England in the World Cup.

It had never happened before. It wasn't the strongest squad that went to Brazil. In those days the members of the FA Board didn't really meet that often, and I felt sometimes they left better players out.' That quote alone says so much about the way football was run in this country in the post-war period. Despite being the so-called 'home of football', England had not yet played in the World Cup, and, in stark contrast to the way the game is today, the power then was totally with the administrators and the clubs – and certainly not the players.

England had missed the first three tournaments, held between 1930 and 1938, because they had withdrawn from FIFA over an argument regarding the status and treatment of amateurs and professionals. In the run-up to the 1928 Olympics football tournament, FIFA ruled that 'broken-time payments' had to be paid to cover the expenses of the amateurs involved. The four Home Nations regarded this as unacceptable interference from the game's global governing body and resigned from FIFA. They rejoined in 1946, and the World Cup Committee responded by generously designating the British Championship a qualifying zone not just for the winners but for the runners-up as well.

Both England and Scotland won their first two games to secure the two spots on offer ahead of their meeting at Hampden, but, far from embracing the World Cup Committee's gesture, the Scottish FA truculently decided they would accept the invitation only if they travelled to Brazil as British Champions. The clash at Hampden suddenly assumed far greater importance. Chelsea's Roy Bentley scored the only goal of the game for England, Bert Williams had a blinder in goal, Scotland hit the bar and the Scottish FA obstinately refused to budge, despite protestations from their own players.

Walter Winterbottom had become England's first full-time national manager in 1946, but he never had official responsibility for picking the team. That fell to a group of selectors who were club chairmen or directors, and it often felt as if these selectors would press for their own players even if others were in better form or if the team suffered from a lack of continuity as a result. Hence what Sir Tom meant when he suspected better players were sometimes left out.

The clubs held all the cards. Players were tied to them by what was known as the 'retain and transfer' system. Clubs could keep a player's registration – and so prevent him from moving – while refusing to pay

him if he asked for a transfer. Even if they did get a move, all players were subject to the maximum wage, which had been enshrined in the game since the previous century. No player, whether at the bottom of the game's pyramid in the Third Division South or North, or a regular international like Tom Finney, could earn more than £12 a week in the 1950–51 season. Win bonuses and international match fees (£20 for the 1950 World Cup) would top that up, but in the 1950s professional footballers' earnings were very much on a par with the average working wage. Only a few players earned enough to buy a car or a house, and most lived in property owned by the club and travelled to training by bus. They weren't quite serfs, but they simply were not permitted the chance to earn anything like the sum commensurate with their ability – and they played through an era when the game was enormously popular. Attendances rocketed to a record of just over 41 million in the 1948–49 League season as a war-weary and indebted nation, which was still subject to rationing, looked for some cheap entertainment at the weekend.

These enormous crowds were certainly not watching football that was the result of sophisticated training methods. Training consisted mainly of lapping the pitch, to keep or get fit, and many clubs never even got a ball out during the week, working on the bizarre principle that it would make the players want it more and look after it better on a Saturday: a sort of absence-makes-the-heart-grow-fonder approach for the 1950s footballer. Tactically, England knew what they liked and stuck to it, because more often than not it worked. They lined up in what was known as the 'WM' formation. Three defenders and two half-backs, or wing-halves, made up the 'M', and five in attack the 'W': outside-left, inside-left, centre-forward, inside-right and outside-right.

England travelled to South America as one of the hot favourites, and yet to some extent they were in a state of flux. The core of the team, which had existed since the end of the Second World War, had gone. Goalkeeper Frank Swift had retired; Laurie Scott's broken leg virtually finished his career; George Hardwick was injured, and struggled for form from then on; and Tommy Lawton dropped down to the Third Division with Notts County. Raich Carter had retired in 1947, his best years being lost to the war.

However, England's results were impressive, with just four defeats in twenty-nine matches following the resumption of international football.

Dubbed the 'Kings of Football' by the Brazilian press, they were led by the fair-haired Billy Wright at wing-half and had some fine players to choose from up front. The great Stanley Matthews was thirty-five but still a top-class player, and with him on the right wing and the marvellously two-footed Finney on the left, there was a stream of chances created for the other forwards, chiefly Stan Mortensen and Wilf Mannion. Tom Finney had made his England debut in 1946 and had been a fixture in the side ever since.

The reason Sir Tom was, and is, held in such regard by everyone, from Mick in my post office to the great former Liverpool manager Bill Shankly, was because of his ability to play in so many of the different forward positions they used in the '50s. Shankly was a teammate of Finney's at Preston and said of him, 'He would have been great in any team, in any match and in any age . . . even if he had been wearing an overcoat.' Equally at home on the right wing, the left wing or even as centre-forward, Sir Tom remembers his rivalry with the great Stanley Matthews as a friendly one, and when Finney was switched to the left to accommodate Matthews down the right, the upshot was a 10–0 win against Portugal in Lisbon in May 1947 and a 4–0 humbling of the still World Champions Italy in Turin a year later.

The FA clearly still regarded this international jamboree as a bit of a gimmick, and just to underline how seriously they were – or were not – taking the World Cup, they arranged a goodwill tour of Canada to overlap with the start of the tournament. Seen through the prism of today's World Cup and all the hoopla that goes with it, it is a decision that seems barely believable, but the FA really felt the only decent football was played at home – and they were only going to Brazil very reluctantly. The trip to Canada included England's most valuable blue-chip commodity, Stanley Matthews, who, as a result, arrived in Brazil just three days before the opening game, after the slog of a 28-hour journey from Canada via New York and Trinidad. Manchester United had also organised a trip to the US and requested that none of their players should go to the World Cup, a request the FA did not turn down flat – as might have been expected – but prevaricated over before saying the United players were wanted in Brazil.

Just before the squad left, the issue of the maximum wage came back to bite England hard on the backside. The Stoke centre-half Neil Franklin

had accepted a lucrative offer from the Colombian club Santa Fe. Stoke held his registration, so the move was against FIFA regulations and Franklin became ineligible for the England team. An outstanding centre-half, fast and strong, he had missed only two England matches since 1946, forming the valuable partnership in midfield with Billy Wright that had served England so well. Now, with the World Cup imminent, that partnership was being broken, and England went into the tournament with a new and inexperienced defensive unit. Billy Wright was annoyed but sympathised with his teammate's motives, as he outlined in Norman Giller's book, *Billy Wright: A Hero for All Seasons*:

> It was a complete shock, because Neil was a close friend, but he had kept everything secret even from me . . . Now we had lost our linchpin with the World Cup just weeks away. I was fond of Neil and understood his motives for taking the offer to go to Bogotá. We were so poorly paid in England, and he wanted to put his wife and children first. But I could have kicked him for his timing.

The goalkeeper in Brazil, Bert Williams, is now a sprightly 90, and he is England's oldest surviving World Cup player. His memories of this time are very sharp. I went to see him at his home in Shifnal in Shropshire, where he has one whole room dedicated to his career – full of photographs, sketches, newspaper cuttings and mementos. Bert, who won the League and the FA Cup with Wolves, said that Franklin regretted the move almost immediately: 'Had Neil played, I'm sure we would have gone on to win the World Cup. He told me later that as soon as he got to Bogotá he realised he had made a mistake and phoned the FA and told them, but they said it was too late. He got a £750 signing-on fee in Colombia.'

Bert's hair was quite long in those days, and he used a bootlace to keep it out of his eyes and always played in a flat cap, thanks to some paternal influence. 'I played for Walsall reserves against West Brom reserves, and my father told me to put the cap on to keep the sun out of my eyes,' said Bert. '"Then," he said, "if by chance they get a penalty, take your hat off and nonchalantly throw it into the back of the net to show confidence." Well, they got a penalty, and if I had have stopped it, it would have killed me! I said to Dad when I came off, "Dad, I don't think the idea of the cap's going to help me any more!" But I wore it out of respect for him.'

As England prepared for the World Cup, the Scottish players had to deal with the frustration of being barred by their own administrators, and they were not the only ones. Argentina argued with the Brazilian Federation and refused to play a World Cup in their own backyard; Czechoslovakia and Turkey wouldn't compete, meaning the French received a call-up, but, after two defeats in warm-up matches, they took one look at their schedule, which compelled them to play group matches two thousand miles apart, and threatened to pull out if it wasn't changed. The Brazilian Federation refused, and so France ducked out. Germany were still excluded from FIFA following the war, Austria thought their team too inexperienced, Hungary and Russia were locked behind the Iron Curtain and Portugal declined to take Scotland's place.

The upshot was that the qualifying sections in Brazil had a ludicrously lopsided look. There were two groups of four, one of three and Uruguay had to beat only the hapless Bolivians to advance to the final pool, from which the eventual World Champions would emerge. There would be no 'final' as such, although, serendipitously for the organisers, the last pool game turned out to be the dramatic, showpiece occasion everybody wanted in the chase for the renamed Jules Rimet Trophy. It was fitting that the World Cup was now named after the French lawyer and FIFA president who had done so much to establish the competition and who had kept the trophy hidden under his bed, from the Germans, during the war years.

England were drawn in one of the groups of four, along with Chile, Spain and the US. The Bristolian Roy Bentley had made his international debut away to Sweden the year before, where he seemed more taken aback by the locals than the football: 'We went into this shoe shop, and, my God, they were all size 14. The men were so tall, all well over 6 ft!' Bentley was fighting for a place in a front line full of goalscorers but had timed his run in to the side well with his first international strike in only his second appearance in that vital win at Hampden in April 1950. He was captain of the Chelsea team who went on to win the League in 1955, and, aged 86, he still goes to Stamford Bridge today from his flat in Reading.

England endured a torturous journey to Rio de Janeiro, a 31-hour marathon that took in Paris, Lisbon, Dakar and Recife. They arrived jet-lagged and exhausted, but Bert Williams remembers that initially they were not allowed off the plane: 'These three blokes came on with huge

gas masks and bottles on their backs and sprayed us all because they feared we would bring some bugs in with us. So that was a good start! We were all coughing and spluttering.'

The squad stayed in a normal tourist hotel, the Luxor, right on the main road on Copacabana Beach. Coach Walter Winterbottom later conceded in Dave Bowler's biography of Sir Alf Ramsey that that was a mistake but blamed one of England's leading clubs:

> The accommodation was hopeless – we were stuck on Copacabana Beach. Arsenal had put us up to it, they stayed there the year before, but of course they were on an end-of-season tour, so to be on the beach was uproarious for them! The kitchens were dreadful, the smell used to go up into the bedrooms and the food was swimming in oil . . .

The food seems to have been a real issue. Bert Williams recalls the first meal without any affection: 'It was a bowl of olive oil with a piece of bacon floating about in it. I shared with Alf Ramsey, and I said to him that we couldn't eat this. So Alf went to the desk and asked if we could have some fruit in our room. We were invited out that night, and when we came back the fruit was on the table and there was a black line coming off the table, down the table leg, across the floor, up the wall and then out of the ventilation shaft – ants!'

Some players complained the food was too spicy, others went down with stomach illnesses and a few existed solely on bananas. At one stage, Winterbottom himself went into the kitchens to prepare everything. The players, naturally enough, wanted to go and enjoy themselves on one of the most famous beaches in the world, but they were forbidden to do so after 10 a.m., because they were told the sun would make them lethargic.

The squad had trained for just four days in London before flying out, and the shock on arrival was palpable. The players went from a mild English summer to temperatures in the 80s, and they had to deal with the altitude as well. When they visited the Maracanã Stadium before the first game, they saw oxygen tanks and masks in the dressing room, and then it dawned on them what sort of challenge lay ahead.

England had asked for some lightweight boots in preparation for the heat and humidity, but when the boots arrived the players found they were more like heavy rubber gardening boots. The players' feet sank ankle-

deep in the thick grass. With the conditions, the altitude, the food and the hostility of the crowd, the English team had more than just the 11 opponents on the field to overcome.

England might have been one of the favourites, but the stark truth is that in 1950 Walter Winterbottom and his players knew precious little about the threat posed by the South American teams. There was no television, of course, no way that, unless you had seen these teams in the flesh, you would have any idea of how they really played or how good they were. The only information anyone could access about these sides came from reading magazines. Winterbottom himself had never seen Brazil play, and it was only after watching them in their first game, when they thumped Mexico 4–0, that he appreciated the speed and inter-passing of their forwards. He realised then what an enormous threat Brazil posed. The England squad went to that game, but it was the pre-match entertainment that Bert Williams recalls: 'All round the pitch were cages of pigeons, and quite suddenly we thought a bomb had gone off. They had got cannons on the ceiling of the stands, and Bill Eckersley and I had these pieces of concrete falling down on us. We thought we were being bombed!'

With all these obstacles in their way, it seems absurd that England were one of the pre-tournament favourites, and they almost suffered another setback on the eve of the first match, as Rio's desire to beautify itself for the tournament very nearly cost them their centre-forward. The city was tearing down trees to replace them with broad parades, but one worker forgot to fill in a hole and Stan Mortensen walked straight into it. Thankfully, he came to no harm.

In contrast to the enormous excitement and anticipation that surrounds the World Cup today, Bert Williams says it was all very different 60 years ago: 'There was no publicity attached to it at all till the latter games. I'm sure most of the players weren't aware of the importance of it, to be quite honest. We didn't realise it; it's not like today. It was just another match. We weren't aware it was something exceptional like it is today with all the razzamatazz. We didn't realise the euphoria that would be connected with it.'

On Sunday, 25 June 1950 England played in the World Cup finals for the first time. Workmen were still putting the final touches to a revamp of the famous Maracanã Stadium, and fewer than 30,000, in a ground that held 200,000, came to watch England play Chile in the rain.

Laurie Hughes of Liverpool played in the vital centre-half position vacated by the exiled Neil Franklin, and Stan Mortensen of Blackpool played at centre-forward between Roy Bentley and Wilf Mannion of Middlesbrough. Tom Finney was on one wing and Jimmy Mullen of Wolves on the other – in place of Matthews, who had arrived from Canada too close to the game to be considered. A 2–0 win, fought out in bad weather as puddles appeared all over the pitch, was a decent start, even if the team acknowledged they hadn't quite clicked as they struggled with the humidity and the conditions underfoot.

Mortensen scored in the first half, heading in a Jimmy Mullen cross, and Mannion grabbed the second. Bert Williams didn't have much to do in goal. Nicknamed 'The Cat' after the Italian crowd had chanted '*Il Gatto*' at him during a spectacular display in an international at White Hart Lane the year before, Williams was the sort of goalkeeper who liked to be on the move and didn't like to think anything could beat him. One Brazilian radio reporter in the Maracanã surprised him more than the Chilean attack: 'They were taking a corner, and I was at the far post. There was this bloke standing by the post, and he shoved a microphone at me and said, "Say a few words." And I said, "Bugger off." And he said, "Thank you very much!" There were a few more words I would have liked to have added!'

England still had much work to do, but the *Daily Mail* signed off its match report with comforting and, at the time, perfectly reasonable words:

> England came through the first test fairly satisfactorily, considering the strange conditions and the hostility of the crowd. All things considered, England should take the game against the US in their stride as a preparation for the stiff test against Spain.

One can hardly blame the *Daily Mail* for its sentiments, because after all, England, with its team of hardened First Division players, many of whom had great international experience, were now preparing to play a semi-professional American side in the lower altitude at Belo Horizonte. The US had led Spain by a goal to nil until ten minutes from time in the other group game, when the Spanish finally came alive and scored three times. Even the American coach admitted his team had no chance

against England. Bill Jeffrey was a Scot who had emigrated 30 years earlier and done wonders with the American national team, but he was so sure they would lose against England he allowed his players to stay up late the night before the game. One London bookmaker offered odds of 500–1 against an American win.

A change of venue meant a change of base for the England squad, and so they gladly moved to be guests of the English-owned Morro Velho gold mine, which employed 2,000 British workers. The squad swapped the hustle and noise of Copacabana Beach for the mountain air and tranquillity of what Roy Bentley remembers as a peaceful place in the middle of a forest: 'It was beautiful up in the hills. When you were in a taxi, you had to drive along with the windows shut, otherwise the red dust kicked up by the car would cover you and get stuck in your ears and nose.' Bert Williams wouldn't want you to think it was some sort of country club, though: 'We stayed in wooden huts, workmen's huts, like army quarters. Lots of the players had been in the army or the navy, and Wilf Mannion used to march up and down, shouting "Halt 1-2-3-4" and "About turn." That was about all the entertainment we got!'

Bentley's room-mate was a Sunderland player who would go on to do great things for England but not with a football at his feet: 'There was a lovely cricket ground there, and every bit of spare time we had I would go and bowl at Willie Watson, who shared with me, and he would knock me all over the place. A lot of people were surprised he didn't get a game in Brazil, and when he got home he was determined to get back into the limelight in the game for which he was known: cricket.' Three summers later, Watson and Trevor Bailey denied the Australians victory in the Lord's Test match with a doughty stand that played its part in the Ashes coming home after a nineteen-year absence.

When he wasn't bowling at Willie Watson, Bentley would go for walks around the forest: 'You could see these monkeys, and they would throw things at us. They had the coldest water in the showers, home-made efforts, and it was like putting blocks of ice on you.'

In Dave Bowler's biography of Alf Ramsey, the full-back recalled the terror of the bus ride from the training camp to the stadium:

> Never will the England footballers who made the journey to the camp forget the nightmare experience of being driven round 167 hairpin

> bends on a road which seemed to cling to the side of the mountain . . . The driver was possibly the only fellow aboard the coach who did not give an anxious thought to the possibility that the coach might hurtle hundreds of feet into the valley below.

Stanley Matthews was now available for selection, but, as we have already seen, whether he played or not was not down to the coach, Walter Winterbottom, in these arcane times. The team was picked on this occasion by the one selector on duty, Arthur Drewry, a director of Grimsby Town and later chairman of the FA and president of FIFA. Winterbottom had served with the RAF during the war and was now combining the job of national manager with being director of coaching at the FA. He was initially met with a degree of suspicion by some internationals who felt they didn't need coaching at their rarefied level. He had also never managed a club, which, for some, left an unbridgeable gap in his experience. Bert Williams outlined it very elegantly: 'I think you respect a person who has seen a lot of football himself, like Matt Busby, like these top managers. I don't think anybody had heard of Walter Winterbottom till he came in.'

Winterbottom now had to sit by while Drewry insisted he would not change a winning team. In today's language, it is like Fabio Capello looking on helplessly as an FA mandarin refuses to restore a now fit-again Wayne Rooney to the starting line-up. Winterbottom wanted Matthews to play to unlock the American defence, and it has even been suggested that the secretary of the FA, Stanley Rous, went to see Drewry to press for Matthews's inclusion, but the selector held firm. The journalist Norman Giller later compared Drewry's decision to 'leaving Wellington on the beach at Waterloo'.

Tom Finney, for one, certainly thought that Matthews should be drafted in – he thought it odd Matthews hadn't been with the party since the beginning of the World Cup – and Roy Bentley was of the same opinion, even if he knew the Blackpool winger wouldn't have enjoyed all his recent plane journeys: 'Stan himself was a bit dubious about what was going to happen. I don't think with his age [he was 35 now] that he was terribly keen on the travel. He had a routine which he never broke – the same food – and he had a black holdall he carried round, which had his lotions and potions in. He was a fanatical trainer and trained like a boxer, which his father was. He would do the skipping and shadow-boxing all day

long. I was always dancing round doing the necessary, and he would do his routines. He hated travel and smoking.'

So with Matthews sitting idly in the stands in Belo Horizonte, America and England, in unfamiliar blue shirts, took to the field, although Roy Bentley argues it was barely that: 'The ground was an old bullring and not even a first-class bullring. They had it returfed for the game, but it was still sand basically and there were walls all the way round. If you kicked the ball out of play hard enough, it would bounce back off the walls. We thought, "Oh my God, what have we got here?"' The walls were about 12 ft high, and with the stadium still being rebuilt, the dressing rooms were so dirty that England got changed a 5-minute coach ride away at the Minas Athletic Club. Despite the support of the British workers from the mines, the crowd was largely hostile once again, with the locals realising England represented the biggest threat to their own World Cup dreams.

Over the years, many publications have suggested that the US team arrived 'through Ellis Island' or were a sort of 'United Nations' team, but eight of their seventeen-man squad were actually born in the same place: in St Louis, Missouri. On the day of the game, three of the starting line-up – Joe Maca, Joe Gaetjens and captain Eddie McIlvenny, a Scot who eighteen months earlier had been given a free transfer by Third Division Wrexham – were not US citizens, but they had declared their intention to become so and were subsequently allowed to play under US Soccer Federation rules. Of the three, only Maca went on to swear the Oath of Allegiance, but later in 1950 the US were cleared of any violation under World Cup rules.

Their team was made up of semi-professionals: midfielder Walter Bahr was a high-school teacher; Haitian-born forward Gaetjens washed dishes in a New York restaurant; and St Louis provided two postal workers in Frank Wallace and Harry Keough, a dock worker in Gino Pariani, a meat cutter in Charlie Colombo and also the busiest man of the afternoon, the goalkeeper Frank Borghi, who was a funeral director. When the American team turned up for the game, some were wearing cowboy hats and others were smoking cigars.

The game quickly settled down into what both sides anticipated, namely England's attack against America's defence. When, almost 60 years later, I asked Sir Tom Finney about the nightmare of Belo Horizonte, he chuckled

softly in his chair in his home in Preston: 'It's best forgotten! We really didn't anticipate any problems. We thought they were just there to make up the numbers. They were classed as just learning the game, and we had twenty-five shots on goal to their one!'

Roy Bentley hit the crossbar three times, two of them headers: 'I got above the bloody keeper for one and really met it and thought, "That's a goal." But I got too much power behind it, so it didn't drop.' The keeper, Frank Borghi, was born to Italian parents and served as a field medic during the war. He was an all-round sportsman, talented enough to play two seasons of baseball in the minor leagues. He started playing football in the winter to keep fit, and with his large hands and excellent hand–eye coordination he had won his first cap a year earlier. Bentley thought he got away with a great deal that day: 'The goalkeeper was diving through the air and grabbing people. He got Tom [Finney] in a rugby tackle.' Even so, it seemed it would be just a matter of time before England's persistence bore fruit, but then, eight minutes before half-time, the unthinkable happened. Walter Bahr shot from 25 yards, and, with goalkeeper Bert Williams seemingly having it covered, Joe Gaetjens ducked and diverted it into the net with his head.

The second half followed a similar pattern, as England kept on pushing for a goal. Alf Ramsey scored from a free kick, but it was disallowed for an infringement, and as the game wore on a feeling of inevitability descended upon the England XI. 'The longer the game went on, the more we didn't look like winning it,' said Sir Tom. 'They were a rubbish side really, but it's hard to explain why it materialised the way it did. It was the most disappointing match of my career.'

Looking on forlornly from the other end as England slipped to an astonishing 1–0 defeat was Bert Williams. 'The reason we lost was simple,' maintains Bert. 'Everybody in the world knew the Americans wouldn't win. They came under the impression that they didn't expect to win, but they didn't want to lose by a hatful of goals. As a result of this, the retreating defence came into operation. Everyone on their side came back onto the goal line, and you couldn't see the goal. We couldn't score if we were still playing now. We couldn't believe it.'

All Stanley Matthews could do was sit and suffer, as he made clear in his autobiography, *The Way It Was*:

> The game was purgatory to watch from the stands, and come the final whistle I thanked my lucky stars I hadn't been part of it . . . All I know is that England missed a hatful of chances and never looked capable of scoring, even if we'd played for 9 hours, never mind 90 minutes. Even allowing for the uncomfortable journey to the game, the poor pitch and the fact we dominated the match it was a humiliating defeat.

The crowd chanted 'One more!' as they willed the US towards an astonishing victory, and as full-time neared, the Brazilian fans took out their handkerchiefs to wave England goodbye. Borghi continued to stop everything thrown at him, using his face when necessary to repel England, until, as Brian Glanville wrote in *The Story of the World Cup*, 'at the final whistle, newspapers burned on the terraces, a funeral pyre for England, and spectators rushed onto the pitch to carry the brave American team shoulder-high.' Only one US reporter saw the game. Dent McSkimming from the *St Louis Post-Dispatch* paid for his own airfare to Brazil after his newspaper refused to cover his expenses. 'It was like Oxford University beating the Yankees in baseball,' he wrote.

Gaetjens was 26 and never played for the US again after 1950: he returned to his native Haiti to open a dry-cleaning business. In 1964, during the reign of 'Papa Doc' Duvalier, he was arrested by the Haitian secret police and disappeared. Fifteen years later, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights published a report that concluded: 'The fact that Mr Gaetjens, a football player of international standing, has not been seen since his detention in 1964 leads to the conclusion that he is dead.' Witnesses later claimed that within days of his arrest he was lined up against a wall and shot.

The disbelief shown by the England players that they had actually lost to this American team was shared by those back home. The website On This Football Day quotes a scene from the *Daily Mirror* offices. Ken Jones, a *Mirror* correspondent, remembers it like this:

> When the 'flash' result was passed to a sub-editor he smiled – understandably assuming an error in transmission; he reached for a pen to correct the score – surely, England 10, USA 1. Still smiling, he turned to a colleague and said 'England defeated by the United States. Now that would have been some story.'

It was a busy day on the sports desks, as England's cricketers also lost to the West Indies for the first time in a Test match.

Roy Bentley's father thought there had been a misprint in his paper and assumed England had scored 12 without reply. Bentley can laugh uproariously at the result six decades on, but at the time the FA machine whirred into action as they set about limiting the damage. He calmly recalls how the players received clear instructions on how to deal with this humiliation: 'Whatever you do now, you will be accused of trying to find excuses for a bad display, so just take it on the chin. You can't talk about it. If you start saying "Oh it's a bullring, how do you expect us to play on a bullring?", they will say you're looking for excuses. We will never live that result down, will we?' The American defender Harry Keough had some sympathy for the England players, as Michael Lewis wrote in *Soccer Digest*: 'Boy, I feel sorry for these bastards. How are they ever going to live down the fact that we beat them?'

Walter Bahr acknowledged in an interview with Reuters that his team had ridden their luck:

> We knew it was an upset. Of course we were excited about it. Things went our way and, in the run of play, they should have won the game, but they didn't score. As the game went on, we got a little bit better and they got a little bit more panicky. Nine times out of ten they would have beaten us, but that game was our game.

The British press savagely criticised the team in a manner that has become familiar. The *Daily Worker* called it 'the worst display ever by an England side', and the *Daily Mail* labelled the result 'the biggest soccer upset of all time. England were beaten because of bad shooting, over-anxiety in the second half and the failure to settle down on a small pitch.' England have avoided playing in blue shirts ever since. They had been told not to moan to the press about the conditions or pass on any stories at all, even though the newspapermen were there every step of the way – in planes, in taxis and in the team hotel. Roy Bentley remembers one pressman getting so drunk on the flight out to Rio that he started singing a popular vaudeville song at the top of his voice and trying to open the cabin door 23,000 ft up in the air. 'But they kept that out of the papers,' Bentley noted whimsically.

England retreated to their base in the forests to nurse their battered pride, play cards and watch films, but after setting out as one of the favourites to win the World Cup they had made the headlines for all the wrong reasons. 'Bloody ridiculous,' said Wilf Mannion. 'Can't we play them again tomorrow?'

They returned to Rio for their last group game against Spain knowing they could still qualify for the final stage, but that crushing defeat in Belo Horizonte followed them all the way, even onto the training field. 'We were so deflated after that result,' Tom Finney recalls. 'Spain were rated as an ordinary side, but we couldn't beat them.' Stanley Matthews belatedly made his World Cup bow, and the forward line had a very different look to it, with Wilf Mannion and Roy Bentley making way for Newcastle hero Jackie Milburn and Tottenham's Eddie Baily. 'There was a big gap between Baily and I; he was three yards slower,' says Bentley. 'But in his prime he was a good player and always had that bit of cockney about him, as in, "I'll show you, you buggers!"'

Tom Finney moved to the left wing to accommodate Matthews on the right, and after 14 minutes Milburn headed in a Finney centre, only for the goal, wrongly, to be disallowed for offside. Finney twice had very legitimate penalty appeals turned down, and five minutes after half-time Zarra headed the only goal of the game. Spain won Pool Three and the 'Kings of Football' had to come home with the nation ready for its first World Cup inquest.

Tom Finney returned to Preston, and people would stop him on the street and ask, 'What happened, Tom? What happened?' He and the squad knew that they were far better than their results had shown. The press liked to build up the rivalry between Finney and Stanley Matthews, but as far as the two players themselves were concerned, their relationship was perfectly friendly and built upon mutual respect. They had shown in the defeats of Portugal and Italy that they could play together, and we will never know what might have happened had the dogmatic Arthur Drewry not consigned Matthews to a place in the stands in Belo Horizonte. Neil Franklin was clearly a loss in defence, but England had had more than enough opportunities to win the games against America and Spain.

With England gone, Uruguay stood between Brazil and a home triumph. Having reached the final pool phase of the 1950 World Cup by thrashing their only opponents, Bolivia, 8–0, Uruguay then drew 2–2 with Spain and

beat Sweden 3–2 to set up a thrilling denouement with the hosts in Rio de Janeiro. Brazil had been scoring goals for fun in dismantling the Swedes 7–1 and the Spanish 6–1. Ademir had grabbed four against Sweden, and Chico a double in both games. A draw would suffice for this technically brilliant Brazil side to win the World Cup for the first time.

On the morning of 16 July 1950, the streets of Rio bustled with activity as an impromptu carnival readied itself to celebrate a World Cup victory. Hubris was to bring the Brazil side down. Just before going out to face a crowd of somewhere around the 200,000 mark, the Uruguayan captain Obdulio Varela gave an impassioned speech to his team, the rank outsiders, about how they must not be intimidated by the crowd. He finished with the line, '*Muchachos, los de afuera son de palo. Que comience la función*' (Boys, outsiders don't play. Let the show begin).

Brazil went on the attack straight away, but Uruguay's defence, held together by Varela, stood firm and Máspoli was elastic and acrobatic in goal. It was goalless at half-time, enough for Brazil to take the title, and two minutes into the second half Friaça scored. Surely that would do for Brazil, as Uruguay now had to score twice to deny them the title. But far from being demoralised, Uruguay seemed galvanised by the goal. Juan Alberto Schiaffino equalised in the 66th minute, and with Varela now the dominant force, Uruguay went in search of the goal that would claim their second World Cup. Eleven minutes from time, Alcides Edgardo Ghiggia made it 2–1 and the Maracanã was silenced. When the Englishman, George Reader, signalled the end of the match, the World Cup returned to Montevideo after a 20-year absence and the term *Maracanazo* was born: the victory of an underdog in the Maracanã Stadium.

Brazil, and England, would have to try again four years later in Switzerland, and for all the pre-tournament worries surrounding Neil Franklin's defection to Colombia and the inexperience of their defence, England's problems had actually been at the other end of the field. Billy Wright went straight to the heart of the matter in Dave Bowler's book, *Winning Isn't Everything . . .* :

> The England forwards were brilliant in their approach work. Time and again they tore wide gaps in the defence, which tried to halt their progress, but once the penalty area was reached! I can assure you that schoolboys would have been spanked by their masters for

> missing the same simple chances . . . the primary lesson being that too many English forwards in their mania for football perfection overlook the fact that it is goals that count most of all.

If England's attack had been guilty of over-elaboration, then the English game as a whole was accused of being an ostrich by its best-known player. Stanley Matthews's frustration is evident in his autobiography:

> If ever there was a time when English football should have sat down and taken a long, hard look at itself, it was in the aftermath of the 1950 World Cup. The standard of British football wasn't bad, in fact it was good, but other countries were catching us up; some had overtaken us. We stood still, our insular attitude reinforced by the notion we had invented the game. We had superbly gifted individual players, but little was done to form them into a unit, a team who could play to a system with players who would help one another so that individual skill and guile also became collective skill and guile.

As soon as England went out of the World Cup, all the newspaper journalists went home and, far more tellingly, so did Walter Winterbottom and Arthur Drewry, as if they would learn nothing from watching the other teams at the latter stage of the tournament – giving further credibility to the supposition that whatever happened in Brazil in 1950, England felt they were superior. They were England, the home of football, the inventors of the game, and everything was in order. That perception was about to be blown apart.