

Words: Darren Griffiths

# Blues lose sight of early 20th-century title bid...



**M**any supporters will be aware of some unfortunate events to deny successful Everton teams.

Notably we were reigning League champions when football was suspended for both World Wars. Less reported is how a London pea-souper effectively denied us the 1904/05 League title.

The first ever meeting between Everton and Woolwich Arsenal at the Manor Ground in Plumstead, on Saturday 26 November 1904, was an eventful one in every respect. The game was played in front of a 15,000 crowd, which was affected by fog that put the game in doubt before the start.

Coleman scored for Arsenal after 10 minutes but Sandy Young equalised straight from the kick-off, before Harold Hardman made it 2-1 for the visitors at the break. *The London Daily News* reported: 'How it was done could not be seen from the press seats.'

In the 76th minute, a second goal from Young extended Everton's lead, but immediately the Arsenal player Jackson complained about the deteriorating visibility to the referee. After consulting with his linesmen, Mr Bye decided play could not continue, with Everton leading 3-1. *The Liverpool Courier* reported that the Everton



Everton and Aston Villa in 1905 FA Cup semi-final action

players 'brought every influence on the referee to continue the game, though to no purpose.'

*The London Daily News* match report was headlined 'Lucky Arsenal' and stated: 'Everton are to be sympathised with, as they were clearly the better team, fully deserving their three goals...the visitors' secretary and a number of their directors walked on to the field and waited until time was up. They complained that the referee stopped the game prematurely.'

The full significance of the decision became fully evident only five months later. Everton had to close the season playing three games in 72 hours. After losing 2-0 at Manchester City on Friday 21 April, the initiative was handed to Newcastle United who trailed the Blues by one point but had a game in hand. The following day Everton travelled

to London for the re-arranged game against the Gunners, where they lost 2-1. Newcastle, however, couldn't take advantage - losing on the same day at home to Sunderland.

Everton finished their season on Monday 24 April with a 2-0 win at Nottingham Forest, to extend their lead to three points. Newcastle, however, had two away games still to play and victories at Sheffield Wednesday and Middlesbrough secured them the title by one point.

Of course, had the original game at Plumstead finished in Everton's favour, we would have secured our second League Championship in a season that proved to be one of near misses. A fourth runners-up position in the League added to the 2-1 defeat by Aston Villa in the FA Cup semi-final replay at Trent Bridge four weeks earlier.