



By Richie Gillham

130-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF GOODISON PARK'S FIRST GAME

Next month will be the 130th anniversary of the very first Football League fixture played at Goodison Park.

Nottingham Forest were the opponents on a wet Saturday afternoon in September 1892 – although, technically, the first match had been a few days earlier when Bolton Wanderers provided the opposition for a friendly to celebrate the opening of the brand-new stadium.

Forest's visit to Merseyside was their first ever League game following their elevation from the Football Alliance, which ran for three years from 1889 to 1892 and included teams including Newton Heath (later to be Manchester United), Ardwick (later to be Manchester City), Small Heath (who became Birmingham City) and Bootle.

The Everton team for that historic fixture was David Jardine in goal; Bob Howarth, and James Dewar as backs; Dickie Boyle, Johnny Holt and Hope Robertson were in the half-back line and the five forwards were Alex Latta, Alan Maxwell, Fred Geary, Edgar Chadwick, and Alf Milward.

The game, officiated by a Mr Ormerod, attracted 14,000 supporters and it took just 10 minutes for the first goal.

Unfortunately for Evertonians, the inaugural Football League strike at Goodison Park was scored by Forest's Horace Pike.

The honour of bagging the first Everton goal went to Fred Geary as the midway point of the first

half approached. Geary dribbled past a couple of defenders before finding the net. (The striker had also scored at Goodison in the friendly win against Bolton.)

Geary, ironically, was born in Hyson Green, a neighbourhood of Nottingham, and started his football career with a team called Notts Rangers of the Midland Football League.

He later spent time with Grimsby Town and Notts County before joining Everton in 1889 at the end of his third spell with Notts Rangers.

The Nuggets report in the *Cricket and Football Field* reported his historic goal against Forest as 'Geary is in demon form at present, and shoots like an 81-ton gun'.

In the 80th minute of the match, Everton keeper Jardine cleared to Latta, who worked the ball to the other end of the pitch where Geary pounced to give Everton the lead.

The first Football League match at Goodison Park ultimately ended all-square, though, when Scottish international Alex Higgins equalised for the visitors with five minutes remaining.

Fred Geary scored 86 goals in 100 games for Everton before leaving for Liverpool in 1895.

Post-retirement he worked as a publican and finished his working life as a groundsman at Goodison Park. He died in 1955 at the age of 86 and is buried in Anfield Cemetery, in full sight of the famous stadium he graced.



• Horace Pike



• Fred Geary