

By Rob Sawyer

NICK WALSH AND THE FIRST BIOGRAPHY OF DIXIE DEAN

Dixie Dean - who has been back in the spotlight due to Erling Haaland's scoring exploits - notched a hat-trick on the final day of the 1927/28 season, against today's opponents, Arsenal. In doing so, he reached the never-beaten milestone of 60 league goals in a single campaign.

It would be nearly 40 years before the supreme marksman's amazing life story was properly told. The person to thank for capturing Dean's memories in book form was fellow Birkenhead man, Nick Walsh. Eight years the striker's junior, Walsh had spent much of his youth watching Everton and Liverpool on alternate weekends. He regarded football as a form of entertainment - but considered it an art form when performed with the rare virtuosity demonstrated by Dean. One night, on leaving his local pub, the Acorn in Bebington, he chanced upon Dixie at the adjacent bus stop and struck up a conversation. He told the goalscoring great it was disgraceful that no one had recorded his achievements in the game - and persuaded the hesitant Dean he was the man to pen his biography.

Walsh was an experienced writer - producing the national journal of the main staff association of the courts service. He subsequently met Dixie at his home on numerous occasions and interviewed him extensively. Dixie's colourful memory was not totally reliable, so the biographer spent countless hours fact-checking at the archives of the *Daily Post* and



Dixie Dean

Liverpool Echo, and in Liverpool Central Library. After several years of work, Walsh negotiated a publishing deal and willingly agreed to share the royalties with the Dean family.

Having retired in the summer in 1977, the biographer was working on the final version of the manuscript when he suffered a major heart attack. After several weeks in hospital, he returned home, only to suffer a further, fatal, attack on 16 August. It fell to Walsh's son-in-law, Dave Foulkes, to complete the final edit and work with the publisher to get the book in shape for release.

Dixie Dean: The Story of a Goalscoring Legend was published in November 1977, after a pre-release serialisation in the *Daily Post*. It was a fine summation of the great man's life and times. A demonstrably proud Dixie was at the book's launch event, held at Goodison Park. A few days later, he visited Bellefield and was photographed with Bob Latchford - who was then carrying the mantle of the Toffees' chief goal-getter. It's a crying shame that Walsh, after so much diligent endeavour, was

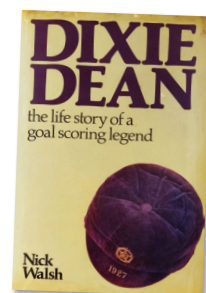


Nick Walsh

not there to witness these events.

I will leave the final words to Nick Walsh, who gave this succinct summation of the genius of Dean:

'In this day and age Dean can be set as a shining example of the heights soccer can reach, levels which make the game one of the greatest ever conceived by man.'



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