



By Gavin Buckland

SUNDAY SOLUTION THAT FAILED TO CATCH ON

Fifty years ago today there was a piece of Everton history: the first ever Sunday game played by the Club.

Staging matches on the Sabbath is commonplace now, of course, but then the move was seen as momentous – and controversial. The change happened because of the energy crisis which forced Prime Minister Edward Heath to invoke the ‘three day working week’ in late 1973 so, with Saturday now a normal working day, attendances fell.

Consequently, Sunday games were seen as a solution by the footballing authorities; nevertheless, Everton were initially sceptical. “Transport problems are worse on a Sunday than in midweek,” said Club secretary Chris Hassell. “In future years it might be a good thing, but I don’t think it will work now.” However, he added a caveat: “I have my doubts over whether it would work, but we would certainly talk about the idea.”

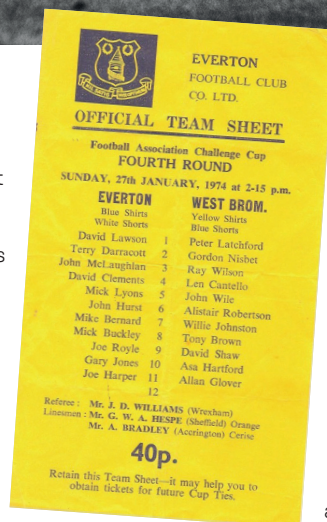
But when both Merseyside clubs were drawn at home in the FA Cup fourth round in January 1974, it was impractical for their ties to be played simultaneously because electricity suppliers were unable to guarantee power at both grounds. As a result, Everton moved their game against West Brom to the final Sunday in the month. “This does not mean to say we are now in favour of Sunday football,” Hassell said. “We do think, though, that this is an opportune moment to experiment and test the reaction.”

However, the move was unpopular. Unlike today, Sunday was seen as a day of rest, with most shops closed, and a survey in the city found two-thirds were against the proposed plan, primarily for religious or family reasons. In addition, the Liverpool Sunday League feared many



of their 2,000 players would prefer to journey to Goodison. There was one other issue. The Sunday Observance Act prohibited the charging for entertainment, so clubs circumvented this by making admission free but allowing entry only if supporters paid for a programme – or in Everton’s case a teamsheet, which later became a sought-after piece of memorabilia.

On the historic day, with a 2.15pm start so floodlights would not be required, those in attendance swiftly realised they may have been better off snoozing on the couch as a hard, niggling contest ended goalless. Everton were rewarded for their initiative



with a huge crowd of 53,509 who paid receipts of £30,600 – but ‘that was before anyone asked for their money back’, according to *The Guardian’s* Eric Todd.

Thereafter, there was no appetite for regular Sunday football domestically until the formation of the Premier League, meaning those present at Goodison 50 years ago were experiencing something seen then purely as a one-off but is now something we take for granted today.

By the way, Albion won the replay at The Hawthorns, thanks to a single goal from Baggies legend Tony Brown.