



The Goalkeeper's History of Britain (text only)

Peter Chapman

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The beguiling story of one boy's dream to play in goal, that most British of positions, culminating in the moment when he faces the mighty Zico ...

If the French are the flair in midfield, the Germans the attack from the inside channels, the Italians the cry-foul defence, then Britain is the goalkeeper: stand alone, the bastion of last resort, more solid than spectacular, part of the team – and yet not. And Britain's place in the world is epitomised by its goalkeepers: post war austerity is embodied in Bert Williams (Walsall and England), a wartime PT boy whose athleticism scarcely concealed a masochistic edge: he ended his training routine with a full-length dive on to concrete; the end of Empire abroad came as the army and politicians were being humiliated in Suez and the football team, despite the best efforts of Gill Merrick (Birmingham and England), were being humbled by the Hungarians at home; the thawing of the cold war is begun not over Cuban missiles but over Lev Yashin, the superb and widely admired Russian whose arrival for the world cup in 1966 changes the attitudes of a nation – the Reds cannot be all bad if they have such an exemplary keeper. And for Peter Chapman (Orient Schoolboys and one appearance in the World Eleven to face Brasil), like his father before him (Armed Forces), it is always the goalkeeper who is the indicator of national well-being. A genuine, touching story of a nation's affection for football's perennial underdog, of a childhood obsession and of a glorious footballing tradition from Kelsey to Jennings, Swift to Trautmann, Bonetti to Shilton that culminates – perhaps ends even – in the last truly British goalkeeper: David Seaman.

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