
English Football During WW2

Football in the UK was affected substantially by World War 2 and British soldiers as a result were positively impacted by the Football War League Cup.

Introduction

Between the years 1939 and 1945, Britain had been under attack and exhausted during World War Two. Cities had been destroyed and burnt to the ground, millions of lives were lost and many horrific events had occurred along the way. The nation wondered and struggled to find a solution to keep the morale and spirits high.

How could the government get its people to support a war effort that had already cost millions of lives and valuable resources? In many countries across Europe, the answer was football and it had been working effectively. It was believed by many of the European countries such as Italy, Germany and France that the beautiful game of football would provide a certain comfort to the people and something to look forward to and escape the harsh reality of war.

What followed would change English football forever and the culture which surrounds the game till today.

Transition from the FA cup to Wartime football:

At the time of WW2, football in the UK had been impacted heavily due to the large numbers of players leaving their clubs to serve in the military. The government had made changes to the Football Association which affected attendance and competitiveness across the country.

On September 14th, the British government had announced that football in the UK would continue during the war but only if significant changes would be undertaken. Certain rules such as the 50 mile travelling limit and the 8,000 attendance cap would affect the football leagues in Britain greatly, but the support for the game had not changed as a result.

One of the most influential factors to the drop in quality and performance from team was the fact that many of the men had gone to war and left their clubs. Between 1939 and 1945, there are over 700 players all over the country that had joined the British war effort, 91 of them came from Wolverhampton Wanderers and 76 from Liverpool, these were two huge clubs at the time. Due to the large numbers of players being drafted into the war effort for Britain, the quality of football obviously decreased tremendously because of it, even some fans had the chance to play for their dream clubs at that point.

Football League War Cup Final 1941

The "cup final that wasn't" as it was named took place in Wembley Stadium, London during a time when the Germans had devastated the city of London with hundreds of air raids and bombings. Tens of thousands of innocent civilians had been killed in the destruction and up to

100,000 injured from the attacks. The German air force had previously targeted industrial towns, largely populated cities and attractions such as football grounds and arenas.

The game called for soldiers serving in the war to take a break from the war and stay off duty for the day whilst the game is played so they could enjoy the match between Preston North End and Arsenal. This match was a highly controversial call since it would allow the German air force to attack and bombard the defenseless city of London and deal a large amount of damage and casualties with no resistance from the British. The fact that 60,000 fans and supporters had turned out to the blitz-threatened Wembley Stadium on the 10th of May 1941 truly shows the passion and love that England had for the beautiful game.

“A good lead has been set against this cup final in wartime, but at least it gave the opportunity for the services and other war workers to refresh their minds with complete change. It has called for police and others to be on duty, but perhaps they found this duty not unpleasant. It is hard to decide whether we can afford this kind of festival today, but we probably work better after it”

Conclusion

Football in World War Two was a defining moment in British history. The moment showed the country how important the game was for them and how much the British people were positively impacted by football. The insane numbers of people who turned out to football grounds and stadiums on matchday whilst threatened by the heavy bombardment from the German Luftwaffe bombings is a powerful and unbelievably strong thing. The football culture in Britain gave the chance for everyone to take a break from the warfare and fighting for 90 minutes and enjoy The Beautiful Game.