

# The Game Back Then, THE DEMISE OF THE TACKLE

The art of tackling was something many of us held as dear in the game as we did the skills of 'The Fox in the Box'; for every Jimmy Greaves or Denis Law there was a Norman Hunter or a Nobby Stiles. No team tried to play without a hard man, no team would ever dare. The game back in pre Premier League and Champions League loved both the hero and the villain and understood the respective merits of each. Not so today.

This year sadly saw the passing of the wonderful Dave Mackay the former Spurs and Scotland Captain. A man who helped Spurs to their 1960/61 double and who even more famously threatened to throw Billy Bremner over the White Hart Lane Stand for an over the top tackle that could have broken his only recently mended leg! Dave was no stranger to a hard tackle but on that occasion saw his opponent as a dirty little git rather than a skilled artisan of the 'proper hard tackle'!

Players like Dave Mackay, Peter Storey or Vinnie Jones would never finish a game these days, indeed it's most unlikely they'd even make the team sheet such would be their astronomically high risk assessment score!

These days the leaders of the modern day game such as Michel Platini advocate for contact free football and suggest we will all enjoy the game more for it? Absolute nonsense and I wonder if a quick poll went on around the stand today if we'd find much support for Michel's view. I doubt it very much.

I am unashamedly a fan of the tackling game. I loved the players who could tackle and I loved

those who could avoid the tackle. Anyone who ever saw the famous clip of Chopper Harris of Chelsea trying to cut George Best in half as he ran from his own half to score for Manchester United will know what I mean. Chopper knew he had to stop him, but George knew it as well and he wasn't for backing out. He met him head on, hurdled the thigh high challenge and went past him moving on to the penalty area where he went around the sprawling Peter Bonetti and plonked it in the Chelsea net. It remains to this day a thing of beauty. Chopper was more than ready to take a booking or worse for the team, and George saying 'come on my son try it'!

If the modern day equivalent was Cristiano Ronaldo running towards the same Chopper Harris what would be the result? A diving and rolling CR screaming in false pain, and a Manchester United free kick half way up the pitch. I know what spectacle I want to watch.

We need to see more physical contact not less and football is a lesser product now it's been so denied of this skill. Worse still I'd further argue it's actually now created a risk, as serious injuries are occurring not because players are dirty but because they aren't used to coping with the art of the tackle.

It's refreshing when watching non-league football that tackling remains a more fundamental part of the game and that as a consequence the diving and rolling around are much less common. Again go around the stand on any day in any ground and ask the fans what they hate and I guarantee that diving and lack of tackling will be very close to the top objection to the modern product.

Next issue I will be arguing to bring back the long lank greasy hair styles of the seventies, plain black football boots, scarves tied around the wrist and the two pint paper beer cups.

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