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THE 'FORGOTTEN' STORY OF JOCK

10 Sep 2010
 On the 25th anniversary of Jock Stein's passing...

September 10 2010 marks the 25th anniversary of the premature death of legendary Scottish manager Jock Stein. Here, Jon Howe recollects the forgotten story of the "other" Leeds United manager that lasted only 44 days in the job.

Polar opposites; two words to describe not only the personalities of Jock Stein and Brian Clough, but also the confidence and buoyancy of the football club that each of these managerial appointees encountered upon entering the damned, cursed and fortified walls of Elland Road.



It is well written that Clough was a reviled figure within Leeds United when he was inexplicably hired in 1974, following Leeds' title win the previous May and Don Revie's subsequent move to the England job. He was loathed by the management and the fans, and that was the case before, during and after his inglorious 44 days in charge.

Conversely, Jock Stein was welcomed with open arms, an unassuming gentleman of the game with an impeccably tangible managerial record. Considered a significant coup by the Leeds board, in hiring Stein they had made a statement of intent that the clubs' slide under the successive reigns of Clough and Jimmy Armfield was about to be dramatically reversed.

Jock Stein had enjoyed unprecedented success as Celtic manager between 1965 and 1978. Having endured an 8-year barren patch with no trophy, unthinkable today, Celtic hired Stein as the club's first Protestant manager, and although a former Celtic captain, as a relatively fledgling manager Stein had a lot to prove. Such doubts were soon dispelled as Celtic won the league title in Stein's second season and followed this with eight further successive titles up to 1974. In only his second season Celtic became the first British club to win the European Cup, defeating Inter Milan 2-1 in Lisbon with a team consisting entirely of players born within 30 miles of Glasgow.

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This invincible period came to an abrupt halt when Stein was involved in a near-fatal car crash in 1975. Whilst Stein recuperated Celtic went into decline and eventually he was persuaded to resign in 1978 and was replaced by Billy McNeill. Stein took umbrage at the offer of a job behind the scenes at Parkhead running the Football Pools; rather than the seat on the Board that his status and circumstances more than warranted.

By 1978 Leeds' fortunes were running in parallel to Celtic's. A fruitful ten-year period had passed and the stench of transition was over-powering. Gradually, quality players were being replaced by average players, standards were slipping and before you knew it Leeds resembled relegation fodder. Stein's remit was to arrest that slide, and he arrived as an authentic contender to not only do that but to also furnish the club with the relentless success of his Celtic days.

Regardless of its battle-weary status, Leeds United was still clearly an attraction. The fearsome reputation of the Revie era was on the wane but the club remained a gargantuan animal while balanced precariously on the edge of a return to greatness, towards which Stein would receive unwavering backing from the Board. Also an attraction to Stein were the historical links with Scottish players, and despite the recent controversial loss of Joe Jordan and Gordon McQueen to Manchester United, and the transfer of ageing legend Billy Bremner to Hull City, there still remained a Scottish nucleus of Eddie and Frank Gray, Peter Lorimer, David Harvey, David Stewart and Arthur Graham.

The club's previous record of nurturing the best young, Scottish talent provided a small connection to home which will have been a crucial influence in tempting Stein down south. Fundamental, however, to Stein's decision to leave his homeland to work for the first time, was his inner anger at the Celtic board for being cut adrift with no recognition of his achievements. There was an element of shock therapy in Stein taking up a position that nobody expected, and was so far outside his comfort zone that the Scottish public must have quietly pondered his motives.

A central chapter in the Clough/Leeds story, and a further polar opposite with Stein's reign, was the opening speech to the first team squad. Whilst Clough openly berated and belittled some of the most talented players in Europe, Stein embraced his squad and declared a desire to play to their strengths. Peter Lorimer was present at both speeches, and remembers the whole squad being "instantly motivated" by Stein, already recognised as possessing Revie's quiet authority.

Stein's reign at Elland Road started on 23rd August 1978 with a 3-2 home defeat to Manchester United, somewhat overshadowed by the volatile returns of Jordan and McQueen. The subsequent nine games followed a similar inconsistent path to Clough's. But this time Leeds were on a different course, trying to attain plateau status on the way down, rather than already parading at the top. Therefore a record of won four, drawn three, lost three, was much more palatable, irrespective of the popularity of the manager achieving the results.

Scotland's abject performance in the 1978 World Cup had turned a demanding Scottish public against the beleaguered national boss Ally MacLeod. The Scottish team was as well equipped as it had ever been, but desperate under-achievement continued as the European Championship qualifying campaign started with a 3-2 defeat in Austria. Meanwhile, Stein was living alone in a hotel in Leeds, detached from home comforts and no longer the big man at "his" club, in "his" country. The impetuous reality of the decision he had made began to fester.

On September 26th 1978 Ally MacLeod resigned from the Scotland job, four days later Leeds beat Birmingham 3-0 at home in front of less than 24,000 people. Stein, anxious for two and two to be put together, was alleged to have contacted Archie MacPherson, later to become his Biographer, and requested he "invent" a story linking



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Stein to the Scotland job. From there, the transition from story to reality was brisk.

On day 43 of his reign, Leeds chairman Manny Cussins, in the face of insatiable speculation, made a forlorn attempt to dissuade Stein from a painfully early exit. Stein admitted remorse and guilt at the "hardest" decision of his life, but evidently he wanted a job where he belonged, a job that mattered to people he knew and cared about. The next day it was all over, and for Cussins there was none of the acrimony and resentment of Clough's sacking, just melancholic regret at wasteful potential.

Stein went on to accomplish two successive World Cup qualifications with Scotland, the second of which was achieved at Ninian Park, Cardiff with a 1-1 draw against Wales on 10th September 1985. In the immediate aftermath of this famous result, Stein suffered a heart attack and died, aged 62. The Scottish national side has been on the decline ever since and hence Stein, with his arresting of Celtic's fallow period in 1965 had book-ended a Golden era of football for a proud and affectionate nation.

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