

December 2022



Dear Club Members,

It's been hard to avoid the football over the past few weeks. . . The men's football World Cup is one of the biggest global sporting events, but if it wasn't for the actions of the English Football Association in 1921 the women's World Cup would be a far bigger event than it is now. On Boxing Day (December 26th, a traditional post Christmas holiday in Britain) in 1920 a women's match attracted 53,000 spectators at Goodison Park, Liverpool. More than ten thousand were turned away at the gates due to lack of space in the ground.

One of the teams playing was The Dick, Kerr Ladies team, formed from workers at the Dick, Kerr and Co. munitions factory in Preston. At the time many factories had sporting teams, who were often sponsored by their employers. Particularly during the war years these sporting teams were recognised as raising morale and providing a much needed diversion from the tough work the women were doing in factories.. This match was to raise funds for charity, but the players were paid expenses, and were also recompensed for their loss of work time. This wasn't an uncommon arrangement, with matches often arranged to raise funds to support strikers, or people out of work from the mines or docks.

In 1921, the male run Football Association banned women from playing on FA grounds, instead limiting them to smaller recreational venues. FA officials were also banned from refereeing their matches. Their statement "The game of football is quite unsuitable for females and ought not to be encouraged." The popularity of women's matches was reducing audiences at the men's matches, and the fundraising aspect of the games, to support working class causes upset the upper class board members. Many teams did carry on playing, Dick, Kerr Ladies continued until 1965, but it wasn't until 1971 that the FA lifted the ban. It took until 2008 for them to issue an apology. A generation of women were lost from the game.

In 2008, at the same time as issuing an apology the FA inducted Lily Parr to the National Football Museum Hall of Fame. Lily was one of the players at that Goodison Park match in December 1920. At the time it was written that "she takes corner kicks better than most men, and scores many goals from extra-ordinary angles with a left foot cross drive, which nearly breaks the net." Author Barbara Jacobs said the left-footer had "a natural ability, magic, but honed by her refusal to conform to the art of being a woman. She wasn't having any of it." One future team-mate would describe her as having a "kick like a mule", she reportedly broke the arm of a male goalkeeper with one of her shots (footballs then were much heavier). The Dick, Kerr Ladies team played 67 matches in 1921, all whilst the players held full time jobs. The team continued playing after the ban, they even toured America, playing mens teams in front of crowds of 10,000+

In 1926 the team was renamed Preston Ladies, it took a further twenty years for Lily to be named captain aged 41, at that time it was reported she had scored 967 of the 3022 total goals scored by the team, and that she had missed just five matches. Born in 1905, she was the fourth of seven children, in a deprived area of St Helens. Whilst playing she qualified as a nurse, and became the first in her family to own her own home.

She openly shared that home with her partner Mary, they both worked in the same hospital, and made no secret of their relationship. Lesbianism was never made illegal in the UK unlike male homosexuality. Reportedly it was felt that any attempt to introduce legislation might produce publicity that could encourage more women to explore homosexuality.

Lily finally retired in 1950, scoring a goal in a match against Scotland that her team won 11-1. It's thought she scored over 900 goals in her career. In 1967 she developed cancer, and in 1978 finally died from the disease, having lived long enough to see the FA overturn its ban.

She's now remembered as a sporting legend, and as an LGBTQIA+ icon.

Football strips now are big business, but in the days of Dick, Kerrs Ladies Team players would generally wear much simpler clothing, often it simply being the correct colours was good enough! Many of the pictures of Lily often just show her wearing a white collared shirt, though the official team colours were black and white striped jerseys, which they wore with blue shorts.

"Only when we realise how great we once were, can we realise how great we can be again", says Gail Newsham author of *In A League Of Their Own*, the definitive history of the Dick, Kerr Ladies team.

Happy Spinning

Katie

Fibre Content- In case your parcel is missing the label
week

75% Superfine Merino

25% Bamboo Rayon

Further Reading-

Lily Parr

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/55884099>

<https://historyofsoccer.info/lily-parr>

<https://www.nationalfootballmuseum.com/halloffame/lily-parr/>

<https://www.fifa.com/news/lily-parr-the-pioneering-star-2593969>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDXIHfQA1kA>

Dick, Kerr Ladies Team

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dick,_Kerr_Ladies_F.C.

<https://www.dickkerrladies.com/copy-of-about-me>

<https://www.theguardian.com/football/blog/2009/sep/09/england-women-football>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/asifburhan/2020/12/24/100-years-on-dick-kerr-ladies-highlight-unfulfilled-potential-of-womens-soccer/?sh=d89d94e632d8>

History of LGBT rights in the UK

<https://www.bl.uk/lgbtq-histories/articles/a-short-history-of-lgbt-rights-in-the-uk#>

Documentary-

When Football Banned Woman available on All 4

<https://www.channel4.com/programmes/when-football-banned-women>

The FA ban-

<https://www.theguardian.com/football/2022/jun/13/how-the-fa-banned-womens-football-in-1921-and-tried-to-justify-it>