

CUP FIGHTERS OF YEOVIL

Down in Somerset is a football ground which slopes, and this weekend a local team hopes to send powerful Sunderland headlong to defeat

PLAYERS and officials of Football League clubs drawn to visit Yeovil in the F.A. Cup shudder, cross their fingers, and hope for the best. Yeovil is the oldest-established giant-killer in the business, and everyone in Somerset is convinced that Sunderland, due there this weekend in the Fourth Round, is beaten already.

This is Yeovil's Jubilee Season, and already the club has advanced further in the tournament than ever before. Down the years there have been twelve Cup ties against League clubs on Yeovil's famous sloping battleground. This is the thirteenth—a pointer which is not lost on the superstitious race that footballers are. Five of the League giants have been humbled there, and Somerset folk sav Sunderland will be the sixth.

There is the slope, which needs getting used to. There is good teamwork and the incentive to win that always makes non-League sides play a little above themselves. Above all, there is the shattering experience, for visiting players, or having "Play up Yeovil" shouted in their faces from spectators only a yard or two from the touchline.

That is the logical side of Yeovil's argument. But there is another force supposed to have played its part in its success: the lucky seagulls, the rabbits' feet, the horseshoes, the white heather, and the secret potions. What chance does Sunderland, with only manager William Murray's lucky cigarette case, stand against this formidable array?

Befitting a club whose colour is green Yeovil, through its chairman, Herbert Smith, confesses to a slight superstition. Mr. Smith is so satisfied with the progress made while wearing the old shirts that he is reluctant to start wearing the brand new ones presented by the women's supporters committee.



Team Mascot ten-year-old Rex Rainey. He is the one who puts ball on spot and calls heads. He has never seen his team beaten

This, however, is his only personal concession to the occult. With a reverent glance towards the horseshoe over the office door he explains that a giant silver-paper one hanging on the desk facing Alec Stock, the player-manager-secretary-inside-right-captain, was handed to Stock as he ran out for the First Round tie with Romford, and it would be a pity to throw it away.

All the other spell-binders have just as logical an explanation. The lucky seagulls often seen floating over the ground are there to mop up sandwiches left behind from the previous match. Rabbits' feet have almost disappeared since the war, in their place is a luxuriant growth of white heather.

Mr. Smith produced a box of heather, sent him by his sister on the morning

of the Bury tie in the Third Round with instructions for its immediate return. She wore it on her wedding day, but it would be foolish to risk something so precious in the post at this time of year. So it is still in the office.

As for the potions, apart from the egg and sherry, and "secret something" concocted by vice-president George Fox, the only one they can think of is the cider left-half Nick Collins serves to centre-half Les Blizzard in his pub on Sunday mornings. "There is not even a secret plan," says Mr. Smith. "Plans have a way of coming unstuck. Playing ability and the enthusiasm of our supporters is our real secret."

To Yeovil people the team is never "they" or "them" but "we" and "us." The players feel they are among friends and neighbours, as indeed they are. Eight of them live and work in the town.

Yeovil fans do more than their part in shouting—they look after the programmes and refreshments and attend to ground improvements. Already this season they have carried out a "jubilee terracing" plan and can cope with a bigger crowd than ever before. Even so, only 15,000 will be able to watch Sunderland struggle.

The supporters, for their part, have no worries about superstition, ground conditions, or anything else beating opponents before a game begins. "The slope doesn't help us," they say. "Any decent player can soon get used to that eight-foot drop from side to side."

And to prove their disdain for such things, they have committed themselves to the heresy of levelling the pitch as an item in their improvements scheme. They are convinced that League clubs will still dread a visit to Yeovil.



Key Man Alec Stock, only full-time player, is club official rest of week. He's dealing with telegraphed applications for tickets



Centre-forward Eric Bryant works at corn chandler's. He finds heaving sacks good practice when he gets into charging duel



Left-half Nick Collins, distributes the ball on Saturdays and on other days serves beer and cider at the pub which he runs



Centre-half Les Blizzard, ex-Bournemouth and Queens Park Rangers, is Electricity Board storekeeper. Has he goals in store?



Lorry-driver Goalie Stan Hall who works in London, was with Leyton Orient. Blizzard, Collins, Stock were with London clubs



Commercial Traveller at Torquay and right-half for Yeovil, Bob Keeton has a telephone call wishing him the best for Saturday



Glove Maker Ralph Davis plays left-back. Is only locally discovered player in team. He hopes his tactics will fit like a glove



At Work And Play right-back Arthur Hickman (left) and Eric Hamilton, outside-right, are firm colleagues. Jobs are on aircraft



Inside-left Ray Wright, worker at an aircraft factory, engineers many of moves on field. Was with Wolves, but not in final



Left-winger Jackie Hargreaves is another aircraft worker. He works at Bristol where he lives and does his training for Yeovil

Dressing-room Table is good place to talk over tactics. Player-manager Alec Stock (standing, centre) shows how he wants a quick goal scored immediately after kick-off



Floodlight Training two nights a week helps keep the team together. They practise moves they hope the opposition will be unable to see even in daylight on this Saturday afternoon



Women Supporters sweep, mop the stands, mend players' clothes, serve refreshments. New shirts they have prepared have even buttonholes stitched in green and white, club colours



Secret Punch—egg, sherry and "something else"—is handed out by vice-president George Fox. George, a glove manufacturer, is certain his special drink will win the Cup

