

Gunners' Glory

14 Milestones in Arsenal's History

Graham Weaver



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For Amy, Maddie and Joey

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Chapter 1

THE FIRST TRIUMPH

FA Cup final
Arsenal v Huddersfield Town
Saturday, 26 April 1930

As the 'Roaring Twenties' ended and the 1930s began, Association Football in England was still very much a northern game; in its first 40 years no team south of Birmingham had won the league championship, and only Tottenham – in 1901 and 1921 – had won the FA Cup.

The most successful team of the decade had been Huddersfield Town. As well as winning the FA Cup in 1922 and reaching the final on two further occasions, they had achieved a hat trick of league championships between 1924 and 1926, and were runners-up in the following two seasons. In 1925, however, their manager, Herbert Chapman, was lured south by Arsenal – a club that had yet to win a single major honour.

Herbert Chapman was one of the greatest football visionaries of all time and he made revolutionary innovations both on and off the field of play – some of which are still evident at Highbury today: it was Chapman who persuaded the London Electric Railway to change the name of Gillespie Road underground station to Arsenal, and it was

also his idea to erect a clock at what is now known as the Clock End at Highbury. Chapman realised the potential that the London club had and he was prepared to move from the most successful team in the country to a small struggling side in order to realise it.

On his arrival in London, Chapman announced that it would take him five years to build his team, and in April 1930, almost exactly five years later, the still trophyless Arsenal reached the FA Cup final for only the second time in their history. The club was now only 90 minutes away from its first-ever major trophy but, ironically, the team that stood in the way was Chapman's old side, the mighty Huddersfield.

Every Arsenal fan knows that the club went on to dominate the 1930s and become one of the most famous teams in the world, but if Arsenal had lost that one game all those years ago would the team have been broken up, would Chapman have survived a fifth season with no trophies to show and would Arsenal have become the world-renowned club that it is today?

THE PLAYERS

If there was one player who must have been desperate to win an FA Cup-Winners' medal it was goalkeeper Dan Lewis. The Welshman had played in Arsenal's first Cup final in 1927 against his fellow countrymen from Cardiff City. There were only 16 minutes remaining when Lewis dived to meet an innocuous-looking shot, but as he did so the ball squirmed beneath him and, as he tried to retrieve it, he turned the ball over the line with his elbow. It was the only goal of the game. Three years on he was still Arsenal's first-choice goalkeeper but remained desperate to make up for his mistake.

In defence lay the chalk-and-cheese partnership of Eddie Hapgood and team captain Tom Parker. The experience was provided by Parker: signed from Southampton in 1926, he

more than made up for his lack of pace with his intelligent positioning and accurate passing from defence. The youth came from Hapgood who had been signed in 1928 at the age of 19 having played just 12 games for non-league Kettering. Despite his inexperience, he soon proved that his speed and fitness made him the perfect partner for the Arsenal skipper.

Until the 1970s when George Armstrong broke his record, Bob John had appeared in Arsenal colours more often than anyone else. John, playing at half-back, was one of the few remaining players that had been at the club before Chapman arrived. He was not the most eye-catching footballer, but he was quietly efficient and dependable and Chapman soon appreciated his importance to the team. John's fellow half-backs were Alf Baker, a fellow veteran of the pre-Chapman era, whose versatility was such that he is the only player in the club's history to have appeared in all 11 positions in first-team games, and Herbie Roberts. Roberts was very much a defensive player, rarely venturing upfield, but he consistently won the ball and fed it to his more skilful team-mates. Also playing at half-back was Bill Seddon, whose strengths were accurately summed up by *The Times* in their Cup-final preview when he was described as 'a stout-hearted worker'.

The Arsenal forward line contained some of the most famous names in the club's history: Joe Hulme, David Jack, Jack Lambert, Alex James and Cliff Bastin. Hulme and Bastin were probably the club's greatest-ever pair of wingers. The former was reputed to be the fastest in the game, while Bastin had sufficient skill to embarrass any defender. Their crosses would invariably be aimed at Lambert, a classically tall and strong English centre-forward, but they would score as many goals as they created. In the 1932-33 season the two wingers scored 53 goals between them, and with 150 league goals in his Arsenal career, Bastin is still the club's all-time leading goalscorer in league games.

The player with the greatest big-match experience was David Jack. He had already won two Cup-Winners' medals with Bolton when he joined Arsenal for the record-breaking transfer fee of £11,500 in 1928. Jack was one of the best-known players in the country, with his ability to constantly feed the ball to his two wingers and his eye for goal being of vital importance to the team. Completing the forward line was the great Alex James. The Scotsman was signed from Preston in 1929 and went on to become one of the greatest players in British football history. On the eve of the Cup final *The Times* summed up his ability: 'He has generally played this season far back . . . roaming all over the place, seeking to rescue the ball from the opposing forwards or his own defence and get it clear away with long and well-directed passes . . . but James can play another way, up in the front, dribbling as no other can with a ball that seems to be fastened to his boot, tricking man after man and making the chance for his neighbour to score.'

THE BACKGROUND

Arsenal began the 1929-30 season in great style winning five of their first six games, including a 2-0 away win to defending champions Sheffield Wednesday - who would go on to retain their title that season. The optimism that this engendered soon foundered as Arsenal proceeded to win only four of their next 20 league games. Arsenal began their FA Cup campaign, therefore, knowing that it represented their only chance of glory that season.

The third-round draw gave Arsenal a home tie against Chelsea who were looking like they would be promoted from the Second Division. With Arsenal in such poor form it looked to be a difficult game and Chapman decided that changes would have to be made. With only three goals having been scored in the five games over the Christmas period Chapman felt that the service to the forwards had

not been good enough and so he controversially dropped Alex James.

Fifty-six thousand spectators packed Highbury to see if infirm Chelsea could beat their First Division neighbours, but Chelsea rarely threatened to do so. Arsenal took the lead after 28 minutes when Lambert latched on to a through ball from Hulme and shot past Millington, the Chelsea goalkeeper. Six minutes after half-time Hulme again created a goal when his centre across the goalmouth was driven in by Bastin for Arsenal's second. Shortly afterwards the pitch was turned into a quagmire by a storm of rain and sleet, which made a Chelsea comeback almost impossible. Arsenal's defence stood firm and they eased their way into the fourth round.

In the next round a fortnight later Arsenal met Birmingham City at Highbury with James still missing from the line-up. Dan Lewis was also missing after injuring his knee and he was replaced by the reserve goalkeeper Charlie Preedy. Birmingham were similarly placed in the First Division so Chapman knew that Arsenal had to make the most of their home advantage. At half-time everything was going to plan; despite Birmingham's defensive tactics Arsenal found themselves with a 2-0 lead. After 23 minutes a free-kick on the edge of the Birmingham penalty area was touched to Jack who scored and placed the home side into the lead. Eighteen minutes later Bastin received a long pass from the right, warded off a challenge from a defender and hit the ball against the underside of the bar and into the net. After the break the visitors resorted to all-out attack and completely outplayed their opponents. With 15 minutes left they were back on level terms and by the final whistle the majority of the 43,000 crowd were relieved that Arsenal had escaped with a draw.

Having seen Birmingham dominate the second half to such an extent, Chapman knew that Arsenal would have to play very well to survive the replay. They would obviously

have to have all their best players on show and that meant that Alex James would have to be recalled. In the return match James shone as Arsenal gained a hard-fought victory. The only goal of the game came after 50 minutes when Lambert was tripped in the penalty area. Baker hit the resulting spot-kick hard and low into the corner of the net to win the tie.

The fifth round saw Arsenal travel north to Ayresome Park to take on a Middlesbrough team that had already beaten them 2-1 earlier in the season at Highbury. Fortunately, the Gunners produced one of their best performances of the campaign and it was James in particular who caught the eye. James's dribble and pass to Bastin in the first minute almost produced the perfect start, but it was merely a prelude to the opening goal just minutes later. James ran at the Middlesbrough defence and dribbled past two defenders before squaring the ball to Lambert who had only the goalkeeper to beat. A low shot into the corner of the net gave Arsenal the lead. By half-time it was 2-0 after Lambert flicked on a long pass from Parker and Bastin headed into the top left-hand corner. There was no chance of Arsenal losing the lead as they had done in the last round. After the break they were content to sit back in defence, and the returning Lewis in goal was rarely troubled by the Middlesbrough forwards.

The quarter-final draw meant that Arsenal again had to travel to play a team that had already won at Highbury that season. The journey this time was much shorter as they were paired with West Ham for their second London derby of the competition. The strength of both teams lay in their forward line, and a close, high-scoring game was expected in a match that contrasted West Ham's home-grown talent with Arsenal's expensive purchases. In the end only Arsenal's forwards lived up to their reputations as they cruised to a comfortable victory. After just 11 minutes David Jack's header towards goal was handled by a West Ham

defender and Baker scored from the penalty. Despite incessant pressure Arsenal did not increase their lead until an hour had been played when Lambert ran strongly through the centre of the Hammers defence and gave the goalkeeper no chance with his shot. Four minutes from time Lambert rounded the goalkeeper to score his second goal and seal an impressive 3-0 win.

On reaching the semi-final stage, Arsenal finally received the luck of the draw. They managed to avoid the big guns of Huddersfield and Sheffield Wednesday – who had won five of the last seven league championships between them – and were drawn against Second-Division Hull City who surprisingly had beaten the First-Division sides of Manchester City and Newcastle in previous rounds.

It looked, on paper, as though Arsenal had secured an easy route to Wembley, but Hull's performances in the Cup so far were such that nothing could be taken for granted. Arsenal were in confident mood, however, as the players kicked off at Elland Road before 48,000 spectators.

It soon became clear that Arsenal were in for no easy match. The forwards were continually frustrated by their opponents offside trap and Hull were quick to break upfield and attack the Arsenal goal. After 15 minutes the favourites were rocked by an opportunist goal: Lewis in the Arsenal goal made a poor clearance and the ball dropped ten yards inside the Arsenal half to Howieson, the Hull forward, who immediately lobbed the ball over the stranded goalkeeper and into the net. On the half hour things got even worse for Arsenal: Howieson's pass found Duncan whose cross shot went into the net off Hapgood.

Half-time came and went with no further score and it looked as though Arsenal were on their way out. Chapman knew that something had to be done to counter Hull's offside ploy so he decided that the thoughtful and intelligent Jack should swap positions with the strong and eager Lambert, in the hope that Jack could time his runs better

and beat the trap. As a result, Arsenal were not caught offside once while Jack played forward, and they exerted more and more pressure on the Hull goal. The early second-half goal which Chapman so dearly wanted did not materialise, however, and with just 20 minutes to go it seemed that Arsenal would never score; but then came the vital breakthrough. James found Hulme on the wing who ran half the length of the pitch before sending a low cross into the centre where Jack ran in to control the ball and beat the goalkeeper from close range.

Now Arsenal were right-back in the game and the bombardment around the Hull goal became even fiercer. A powerful shot from Hulme was just tipped over the bar by the Hull goalkeeper Gibson, a free-kick on the edge of the penalty area saw Lambert send his header just wide, then Gibson saved a shot from Bastin at the expense of a corner.

With six minutes remaining Hull's resistance was finally broken when James found Bastin who dribbled the ball to the edge of the penalty box – leaving defenders in his wake – and hit a hard, curling shot into the net. *The Times* reported: 'The ball travelled so fast that the goalkeeper had hardly moved when it entered the net at about the level of his shoulder, and a finer goal than this was is seldom seen.'

The replay took place four days later at Villa Park. Arsenal received a blow when the injured Hulme was unable to play, but his replacement Joey Williams was to be instrumental in creating the winning goal. After quarter of an hour, James swung a long pass out to the right-wing which seemed certain to run out of play, but Williams raced towards the ball and just kept it in before crossing the ball into the centre. Jack was there to meet the cross and drive the ball into the net.

From then on Arsenal had little trouble in keeping their lead as Hull seemed increasingly to be more concerned with kicking lumps out of their opponents than chasing an equalising goal. Eventually their centre-back Arthur Childs

was sent off for sending a flying kick at James. Arsenal missed several chances to make sure of victory, but in the end they were comfortable 1-0 winners and were on their way to Wembley for only the second time in their history. Their opponents in the final were to be Huddersfield - who had beaten the league leaders Sheffield Wednesday 2-1 in the other semi-final.

With the players that they had at their disposal, Huddersfield were going to be no push-over in the final. Ray Goodall, a former England captain, was reputed to be the finest right-back in England, while the skipper Tom Wilson had been the stopper at the heart of the team's defence for ten years. Bob Kelly in attack was one of the greatest forwards of his time and if any pair of wingers could match Bastin and Hulme it was Huddersfield's Jackson and Smith.

Much is now made of the fact that English football teams play too many games, but judging from Arsenal's experiences this is not a new phenomenon. Between the replay at Villa Park and the final itself, Arsenal played eight games in just 24 days, losing only once. This included an 8-1 win over Sheffield United, a remarkable 6-6 draw at Leicester and a 2-2 away draw to Cup-final opponents Huddersfield.

Following their epic draw at Leicester just five days before the final, Arsenal travelled to Brighton where they trained for the big day. On the eve of the final they journeyed back up to a private hotel in Hendon for the night. Before retiring for the night, Chapman held a team meeting inside a locked sitting-room where, with Jack sitting at his right hand, he elaborated on the tactics for the game. A diagram of the ground was laid out on the table with figures to represent the 22 players as they discussed the players Wembley roles. Every one of the Arsenal team was ordered to be in bed by 10.30 p.m. and Chapman went round the hotel corridor to check that all the lights were out. The Huddersfield team spent the night at Bushey Hall Hotel and just before having

an early lunch on the day of the match, they held a secret conference to discuss match tactics.

The Football Association's ticket arrangements meant that obtaining a Cup-final ticket was even more difficult than it is today. The clubs were allocated only 7,500 tickets each when they could both have sold 50,000, hence there was, as usual, a roaring black-market trade. Extra trains – especially laid on for the occasion – brought people from all over the country into London just so that they could be in the capital on Cup-final day. An estimated 120,000 football fans arrived on 150 special trains with many thousands of them, of course, coming from Huddersfield.

Most pundits agreed that the two teams were well matched and few would venture an opinion on who would emerge victorious. The *Daily Mirror* thought that: 'there never was a more open final. By no purpose of analysis is it possible to pick the probable winners.'

THE MATCH

Having played so many games in the run-up to Wembley, Arsenal were fortunate that only one of their players – goalkeeper Dan Lewis – was ruled out by injury but this was no consolation to Lewis who so desperately wanted to make up for his mistake in the Cup final three years previously. Instead the replacement goalkeeper Charlie Preedy came into the team.

There was already a carnival atmosphere at Wembley even before the teams took to the field. King George V had not been seen in public for 18 months due to illness, so a great cheer went up around the ground when it was announced that he was on his way to the stadium from Windsor. The traditional community singing that followed raised spirits even further.

As the two teams entered the arena they made history by being the first two teams to walk out side by side at a Cup final. The King then received a great ovation as he came out

to be presented to the players, and the national anthem was said to have been sung with particular gusto.

The game started with some of the most thrilling football ever seen at a Wembley Cup final. Both teams went forward with skill and pace as the attacks went from one end to the other. Both goals came under threat, but there was no doubt that the most dangerous attacks came from Arsenal. From a free-kick just outside the penalty area, Parker's shot just skimmed over the bar, then Lambert found himself through on goal before Turner, the Huddersfield goalkeeper, came out to smother the ball, next Lambert flicked the ball on to Bastin who looked certain to score but could not control his header. Arsenal came even closer to scoring when Lambert headed against the Huddersfield crossbar followed by Jack shooting wide off the rebound. At the other end, Preedy's nervousness in goal was providing heart-stopping moments in the Arsenal defence, but the Londoners still looked the most likely to score and it was no surprise when, after 17 minutes, they took the lead.

In his book *Arsenal from the Heart*, Bob Wall, who was then Arsenal secretary, recalls that the opening goal came as a result of a conversation on the Wembley-bound coach when Alex James turned to Cliff Bastin and said: 'If we get a free-kick in their half Cliff, I'll push out a quick pass to you. Let me have it back immediately and I'll have a shot at goal.' Wall also reports that 'as Alex was essentially a creator rather than scorer of goals, his suggestion caused some amusement among the rest of the team'. James's team-mates, however, would soon be thankful for his pre-match planning.

After being fouled by Goodall just inside the Huddersfield half, James took the free-kick quickly and played the ball out to Bastin on the wing. Goodall chased the Arsenal winger towards the corner flag before Bastin wrongfooted him by checking his run and pulling the ball back to the edge of the penalty area where James ran in to shoot the ball into the

net. It was only James's sixth goal of the season – but what an important one! Alex James thus went down in history as the first player to score for Arsenal in an FA Cup final.

Shortly afterwards came one of the most famous moments in FA Cup history as the giant German airship, the *Graf Zeppelin*, appeared overhead. Flying at just 2,000 feet, the *Daily Express* reported that the airship 'dropped so low that it seemed near enough to touch'. Passengers in the cabins leant out of the windows and waved at the crowd, but not all of the spectators were happy at such an intrusion and there was much booing from those who did not want to be distracted from the game itself. There were also complaints after the match when it was discovered that the pilot had taken part in several air-raids over London in the Great War. Nonetheless, when the airship dipped its nose to salute the King he raised his hat in return as the *Graf Zeppelin* made its way overhead.

Up until half-time, Arsenal continued to threaten the Huddersfield goal and a drive by Hulme flashed just inches past the post. There were also scares at the other end, however, and there were three occasions before the interval when the ball had to be scrambled away by Arsenal defenders after being dropped by Preedy.

The first 45 minutes had certainly belonged to Arsenal and they deserved their lead at the interval. In the second half, however, the game changed completely with Huddersfield attacking ceaselessly in an attempt to cancel out their opponents' lead. James and Jack were forced back to defend against the repeated onslaught on the Arsenal penalty area, and for much of the half it seemed inconceivable that Huddersfield would not score. Only the massed ranks of Arsenal defenders in their own penalty area kept them at bay, but with so many men back in defence Arsenal could only clear the ball by hitting it far up the field where it would invariably be met by an opposing defender who would set up another Huddersfield raid.

Fortunately for Arsenal Preedy rediscovered his form in the second half, otherwise the Cup would almost certainly have headed north once again. Smith, the Huddersfield winger, repeatedly sent teasing crosses into the area only to see them either flash across the penalty box, intercepted by defenders or hit wide of the goal by one of his forwards. Wilson twice narrowly missed from dead-ball situations while Raw was denied by Preedy. The Huddersfield captain later wrote: 'I remember two thrilling occasions in the second half when I said to myself, "Here's a goal." One was when Preedy made a great save from Raw's head and the other when Jackson made a magnificent shot at the Arsenal goal. Seddon, the Arsenal centre-half, tried to clear it with his head, but as it happened the ball just went over the bar. Those are just two of the narrow escapes that the Arsenal goal had in the second half. If I remember rightly there were eight or nine occasions on which Huddersfield almost produced a goal.'

For 43 minutes of the second half Huddersfield continuously attacked the Arsenal penalty area and yet, with just two minutes remaining, it was Arsenal who scored, putting victory beyond doubt. Yet again a Huddersfield attack was foiled and Alex James sent a long ball downfield. This time, however, the ball fell not to a Huddersfield defender, but to Lambert who raced between the two backs and bore down on goal. The goalkeeper raced off his line to meet him but Lambert managed to stab the ball past him and score Arsenal's second goal. Lambert turned with his arms outstretched, ready to accept the congratulations of his team-mates, but they were all still down at the other end of the field, so Lambert had to applaud himself as he jogged back down the pitch.

The Huddersfield spirit was finally broken and just two minutes later the referee, Mr Crewe, blew the final whistle - Arsenal had won their first major trophy. The heroes of the hour were Parker and Hapgood, who led the desperate

rearguard action in the second half, and Alex James who not only scored one goal and created another – but with his running and tackling which helped his defenders keep the Huddersfield attack at bay – was also instrumental in Arsenal's survival when they were under the cosh.

The majority of the spectators at Wembley that day were supporting Arsenal and as the *Daily Telegraph* reported, 'the victory of the Arsenal was a popular one, and when the captain, Parker, received the cup from the King there was unbounded enthusiasm'. Such enthusiasm was shown by the large turnout of fans the following Monday afternoon when the team was given a civic reception at Islington Town Hall. Later that same day Arsenal were greeted by more of their supporters as they took on Sunderland in their penultimate league fixture of the season. The *Daily Telegraph* reported that: 'The Arsenal were accorded an enthusiastic reception when they appeared on their ground at Highbury to play a league match with Sunderland last evening. There was a brave display of the colours of the club; a huge duck, their mascot, was perched in the centre of the stand; innumerable rattles, cornets and fireworks were employed by way to commemorating Saturday's triumph at Wembley. The team, played on to the field as "conquering heroes", were met by their visitors who greeted each member by a hearty shake of the hand and the kick-off was done to the roar of 35,000 spectators.' Arsenal lost 1-0 and were also beaten by Aston Villa the following Saturday, but few people cared. The important work had been done at Wembley.

In the next eight seasons Arsenal won five league titles and won the FA Cup once more – Huddersfield have yet to win another major trophy. We can only guess at what might have happened if all that Huddersfield pressure had paid off that day and they had won the Cup, but what we can say for sure is that 26 April 1930 was the day that the breakthrough was made for Arsenal Football Club with the likes of Herbert

Chapman, Alex James and Jack Lambert setting Arsenal on the road to fame and glory. The club may have been founded nearly 50 years earlier, but as far as being the great club that we know today – with its marble halls, huge support and bulging trophy cabinet – is concerned it was that day in 1930 that saw the beginning of Arsenal as a club to be reckoned with.

FINAL SCORE

Arsenal	2	Huddersfield Town	0
James	17 mins		
Lambert	88 mins		
Attendance:	92,488		
Arsenal:	Preedy, Parker, Hapgood, Baker, Seddon, John, Hulme, Jack, Bastin, James, Lambert		
Huddersfield:	Turner, Goodall, Spence, Naylor, Wilson, Campbell, Jackson, Kelly, Davies, Raw, Smith		

Chapter 2

FOR THE TEAM

FA Cup final
Arsenal v Liverpool
Saturday, 29 April 1950

After their FA Cup triumph in 1930 Arsenal had gone on to dominate English football until the onset of the Second World War. They were league champions in 1931, 1933, 1934, 1935 and 1938 and had won the FA Cup again in 1936. By now Arsenal were the biggest and most famous club in the country.

The spectre of war in Europe brought professional football to a halt for seven years as both players and spectators fought and, in many cases, died together. When the war was finally over football began again, but all the clubs were now virtually starting again from scratch with many teams having only a few of the players that had started the foreshortened 1939-40 season.

Initially, Arsenal struggled to recapture their pre-war form and when play finally resumed in 1946 they could only finish 13th in the First Division. It was only when manager Tom Whittaker signed more experienced players like Ronnie Rooke and Joe Mercer, that Arsenal recaptured the glory days of the 1930s by winning the championship in 1948.

Unfortunately, their championship success was short lived. The 1948-49 season saw Arsenal finish a disappointing fifth in the league and their indifferent form continued through the following season. As a new decade began, however, Arsenal embarked on a Cup run that would see them go all the way to Wembley.

The team that reached the Cup final was unusual in that it was one of the teams to reach that stage with the majority of players in their thirties, and yet it was also a typical 'Arsenal team'. Like the great Arsenal sides of the past and of the future they had outstanding individuals such as Joe Mercer and Jimmy Logie, but the emphasis was always on playing for the team. As centre-forward Reg Lewis recalled: 'We were all a team. We would run for each other and work hard and get kicked till you were black and blue. You would run till you dropped to win that game. The team was everything.'

The players had a pride in playing for 'The Arsenal' and a determination to help each other to succeed. With so many of them reaching the end of their careers, this appeared to be their last chance of glory. And so, as they got nearer and nearer to Wembley, the question on everybody's lips was: could this ageing team work together to bring the Cup back to Highbury, or would they fall at the final hurdle?

THE PLAYERS

In goal for Arsenal was one of the survivors from the 1938 championship-winning team, George Swindin, Swindin had been signed from Bradford City in 1936 and in his first years at Highbury he was one of several men who seemed to share the goalkeeping position and in each of the three seasons leading up to the war he had never played for the first team more than 21 times. After the war, however, he was firmly established as the club's number one goalkeeper and was ever present in both the 1948 championship-winning side and during the 1950 Cup run.

In defence was Walley Barnes: Barnes was equally effective in both full-back positions and went on to captain both Arsenal and Wales. He made his Arsenal debut during the first post-war season and amazingly, considering the continuous trouble that he had with his knee ligaments, he was still playing for the Gunners in 1955. His bravery in the face of so many injuries and his excellent defensive play were an example to the rest of the team. Barnes's fellow full-back was Laurie Scott: Scott had first appeared for Arsenal in the wartime competitions and had since then kept his place in the team, playing an important part in Arsenal's strong defence.

Although his versatility was such that he was known to play at centre-forward, Leslie Compton was at the heart of the Arsenal defence from the end of the war until 1951. Even in his late thirties he was a commanding presence at the back and in November 1950 he made his debut for England at the ripe old age of 38. During Arsenal's Cup run he was accompanied in the team by his younger brother Denis. Denis Compton was one of the great English sporting heroes of the generation - not only was he a dashing forward for Arsenal but he was also one of the best batsmen in the world. The pressures of combining his cricket and football careers were starting to catch up with him, however, and the 1949-50 season was to be his last for Arsenal before he retired from the football pitch with knee problems.

Completing the defence was Alex Forbes. Forbes's performances at inside-left for Sheffield United had impressed the Highbury staff and prompted them to pay £12,000 for him in 1948. A goal in his debut match quickly endeared him to the Arsenal supporters and his strong running and fierce tackling made the Scottish international a favourite with the crowd for years to come.

In the first few months of post-war football, while Arsenal were struggling near the foot of the First Division, the club