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This Time...

The Dream is Coming True

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Extract

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INTRODUCTION

The symmetry is compelling. The Boys of 2006 are off to Germany to repeat the exploits of the Boys of 1966, the team who beat West Germany at Wembley to win the World Cup. Exactly 40 years on, This Time surely England will have their moment in the sun once again. The signs are good.

Last Time – when England won their one and only World Cup – three of the backbone of their side came from the East End. Back then, it was the Hammers trio of skipper Bobby Moore, midfielder Martin Peters and hat-trick hero Geoff Hurst who became legends after helping Alf Ramsey's England beat West Germany 4–2.

This Time, for Moore, Hurst and Peters, read Frank Lampard, Rio Ferdinand and Joe Cole, who grew up and were educated at the East End academy of West Ham. All three, centre-half Ferdinand, midfielders Cole and Lampard, graduated through the ranks at Upton Park before clinching multimillion-pound moves elsewhere.

Defender John Terry, 24, also has East End ties. He was briefly made England captain against the Poles at Old Trafford when Michael Owen came off in the World Cup qualifier – and he is tipped to become permanent skipper one day. The last time England's leader on the pitch came from Barking, as Terry does, he went on to

lift the old Jules Rimet trophy. That man was the late, great Moore – full name Robert Frederick CHELSEA Moore!

Terry, the Chelsea central defender, may be touted as the natural successor to David Beckham, but he is adamant that it is the Real Madrid midfielder who will lead England out in Germany, while he sets his sights on completing the dream double of winning the Champions League with his club and the World Cup with his country.

Terry said, 'Everyone can dream, and to lift the Champions League with Chelsea and the World Cup with England would be absolutely unbelievable. It was great winning the Premiership last season, but this is a big year for every footballer and, if I want to do well with England, it's important that I keep on doing well with Chelsea. There's no time to switch off. Qualifying for the World Cup was fantastic, but the big games keep coming thick and fast at club level now in the Premiership and Champions League.

'At the start of the season my main aim was to play for England more regularly. Hopefully, I have got there with the last couple of displays against Austria and Poland and it was something very special when I was asked to captain the team in the final minutes against the Poles. I did captain the side once before, on my debut against Serbia and Montenegro a few years back, but I think everyone apart from the referee was skipper at some stage that night! This time it was really special. I've kept the armband and I will get it framed along with the shirt.

'But I have said time and time again that in David Beckham we have got one of the best captains in the world. Becks is a fantastic player and everyone in the squad believes he is the right man to captain England.'

Terry's outstanding performances for Chelsea have made him England's No.1 centre-back, with Sol Campbell and Rio Ferdinand now fighting for the right to partner him. Terry added, 'I try to improve game by game and it paid off when I was named ahead of Rio for the Austria game. I understood how he felt because it was

me who was left out when we played Wales last season, but it was still nice of Rio to come up to me and wish me all the best. It just shows we have a great team spirit. No matter who is playing, the lads are 100 per cent behind each other.'

Jose Mourinho's young Premiership champions form the nucleus of Sven-Goran Eriksson's squad which carries the hopes of the nation in Germany. For an English club who hold the unwelcome distinction of having fielded the first all-foreign first team, against Southampton on Boxing Day 1999, times have changed. Mourinho has a sound backbone of English talent. Joe Cole said, 'It is good to have a lot of your club-mates around you because you know each other's games and it is great.'

In the aftermath of qualification after beating old foes Poland, the Chelsea player added, 'We played some great stuff against Poland, very attacking – we made it like a Premier League game. But it is not important. What is important is that, come the World Cup, we are all fit and everyone is ready. That's when you get the momentum.'

Frank Lampard's scorching volley sealed England's win against the Poles and put them into the World Cup finals draw on 9 December as Group Six winners. The manner of victory helped revive confidence at the end of a patchy qualifying campaign. Eriksson, in his third and final major tournament as boss, has faced flak for failing to get the best out of his squad, but Lampard said, 'We shouldn't criticise too much. We should take the good points out of games. Against Poland, there were a lot of good points. If we play like that in Germany, we can give teams a lot of trouble. You have to remember that, after the previous two games, we criticised ourselves more than anyone. There comes a stage where you don't need criticism from the outside. You can go too far with it. We have great fans. They are behind us. We are going to work hard in the games building up to the World Cup. We showed a bit of what we can do against Poland but we can get better.'

Prior to the World Cup draw in Leipzig, England were seeded only

one place below Brazil. Footballing legend Pele reacted by saying that England have a chance of winning if Rooney lives up to his status as 'the most brilliant young player in Europe'. Speaking in the build-up to the draw, the three-time Brazilian World Cup-winner, now 65, said he believed his own nation were clear favourites but picked out Rooney, 20, and England as a serious threat. Pele said, 'Everyone says Brazil are the favourites, but I don't feel comfortable with that because the favourites do not always win World Cups – injuries can make a team weak and, over seven months, a lot can happen. If a team's best player is not in good shape, that can cause many problems. I believe at the moment Brazil are the best team in the world, but England have Rooney, Beckham, Gerrard, Lampard and Owen – five good attacking players – and if they are in good shape for the World Cup, then they will be a strong team. I think Rooney is the most brilliant young player in Europe; I like him very much indeed. France also have good attacking players, such as Zidane and Thierry Henry, while Italy have probably the best defence in the world.'

Wayne Rooney himself believes that, if England can keep progressing at the rate that has helped them to World Cup qualification, as well as that impressive recent win over Argentina, they can lift the trophy. 'We've got the squad and we're capable of going all the way,' he said. 'The friendly against Argentina was a good game for us, but still it was only a friendly and we can't afford to get carried away. We've got three more friendlies. We've got to try to do well and work on the team in those games, and then hopefully at the World Cup we can get the results we need.'

It will be Rooney's first World Cup but, after his exploits at Euro 2004 in Portugal where he scored four goals, the striker will be a marked man in Germany. His first World Cup memories are of the 1998 finals in France, where Michael Owen arrived as England's secret weapon. 'It was Michael's first World Cup when he got in the team, and he did well. He was a young lad, 18, I think. He did

brilliantly and has carried on like that ever since,' said Rooney, now firmly established as Owen's partner up front. 'Michael likes to play on the shoulder and I like to drop off, and that works well. We've started to link up well now and obviously Michael's scored a lot of goals for England and he keeps doing that. It allows me to get space in behind because the defenders are always worried about him.'

It was Owen's strike partner at France 98 who was an early hero for Rooney. 'I tried to model my game on Alan Shearer, then I realised I wouldn't be able to do that role as well as Alan. From then I ended up just playing and always wanting to be on the ball. I always want to be on the ball and, if that means dropping 10 yards off the front, that's what I'm going to do.'

Since losing to Northern Ireland in Belfast and facing the backlash that followed, victory over Argentina in Geneva provided an answer to the question of whether the team could compete against heavyweight opposition.

While Eriksson may have taken a huge amount of media criticism when his team spluttered in the friendly with Denmark and then lost to Northern Ireland after a less than impressive display against Wales, the England manager at least succeeded in leading the country to Germany. And that has not always been the case with some of his predecessors. England failed to get to the World Cup finals in 1974 under Sir Alf Ramsey and missed out again in 1978 (Ron Greenwood) and 1994 (Graham Taylor).

Eriksson's latest group of players has been dubbed the 'golden generation', but they didn't look like it until they mastered Poland to top the group.

When the Football Association grasped the nettle and recruited their first foreign coach in November 2000, they had a five-year plan, designed to win the World Cup in 2006. And there must be a chance given the talents of John Terry, Sol Campbell, Rio Ferdinand, David Beckham, Frank Lampard, Steven Gerrard, Wayne Rooney and Michael Owen. To those eight add Gary Neville and Ashley Cole,

probably the best pair of full-backs in international football, and it should not be totally unreasonable to think England have a decent chance of coming away from Berlin as champions. The doubts are not down to the quality of the players available so much as whether Eriksson can bring out the best in them.

It is beyond dispute that England ought to have done better at the last World Cup, when Eriksson took the brunt of media criticism; he was accused of being unable to galvanise his players at half-time in Shizuoka. The media suggested Eriksson was as much to blame for the defeat by Brazil as David Seaman was after his misjudgement of Ronaldinho's free-kick. Two years later at Euro 2004, England's first foreign coach again saw his team eliminated at the quarter-final stage in a competition won by Greece.

Eriksson pinned his faith on some promising and outstanding young players, and, while it is a no-brainer that Wayne Rooney should be one of the best young stars of this World Cup, history shows there is always at least one fresh-faced player who appears in the England squad at a major tournament. At the last World Cup in 2002, 21-year-old Darius Vassell was the unforeseen interloper. His debut against Holland, only four months before England kicked off in the finals, featured an audacious goal from an overhead kick that was impressive enough to push him to the forefront of Eriksson's thoughts. Rooney was the breakthrough player in the run-up to Euro 2004. At the 1998 World Cup in France, it was 18-year-old Owen who won his first cap just four months before the tournament. At Euro 96, 21-year-old Gary Neville was Terry Venables's wing-back, even though a year earlier he still had to nail down a place in the Manchester United team.

When the England players accepted a £225,000-a-man bonus to win the World Cup, it is worth remembering that the hat-trick hero of 1966 Sir Geoff Hurst sold his most prized possession – his winner's medal. He accepted a substantial offer from West Ham, thought to be around £150,000, back in 2001. West Ham had

already paid £1.45m for the late Bobby Moore's collection of memorabilia, which included his 1966 winner's medal, and they also persuaded Martin Peters, their other member of the World Cup-winning team, to sell them his. The club wanted to show all three medals as the centrepiece of a new £3.5m museum, as part of their £35m stadium redevelopment. West Ham have always been proud of having provided three members of the team which achieved English football's proudest moment. Hurst said at the time, 'I'm happy that future generations of football fans will be able to see the medal. I've had to keep it locked in a bank vault for years because of burglaries. It was always my intention to leave my memorabilia to my three daughters, but how do you divide the medal three ways? As a family we decided the best thing to do was to place it in a museum and invest the proceeds for the girls.'

But money will not be the incentive for the players who make it to Germany in the England squad. Football is about glory and, hopefully, today's England players can live up to the example of the men who brought home the bacon back in 1966.

ONE

FROM 1966 TO 2006 – THE PLAYERS:
HOW DO TODAY'S SUPERSTARS STACK UP AGAINST THEIR ILLUSTRIOUS PREDECESSORS OF 1966, THE MEN WHO WON THE WORLD CUP?

GOALKEEPERS:
PAUL ROBINSON – GORDON BANKS

PAUL ROBINSON

Paul Robinson produced his best-ever display in an England shirt with a five-star performance against Argentina in the friendly game of 2005. Robinson pulled off a string of stunning saves to help England to a memorable 3–2 victory. England goalkeeping coach Ray Clemence gave his educated verdict: 'Paul has more than shown his worth. He has never let us down. He made three fantastic saves in the first 10 minutes alone and further excellent saves after that. If one or two had gone in, it would have made life very difficult for us. In games against one of the top three teams in the world, they will create chances no matter how well you play. But, if defenders feel they've got a keeper who is going to make great saves to keep them in the game, it breeds confidence in everybody.'

Robinson, 26, has been England's No.1 since taking over from David James. Clemence said, 'His strengths are his agility and speed around his goal.'

Before the Argentina game, the Spurs keeper knew he was far from established. Robinson vowed never to take being England's No.1 for granted as he knows he is 'there to be shot at', especially if he commits the same sort of errors that saw David James portrayed as a donkey in one national newspaper after a massive blunder in last August's friendly with Denmark in Copenhagen.

Robinson has been criticised for a couple of errors with Tottenham, although he claims he was not to blame for Robert Pires's late equaliser in the north-London derby. But the former Leeds player will take pains to study footage of any incident where he feels he may have been at fault to help cement the position handed to him by England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson.

Robinson added, 'Being a keeper is a very lonely position. When you make a mistake, there are not generally many people behind you to help you out. I've been first choice for a year now and I'm pretty pleased with the way things have gone. I feel I have taken to the job pretty well – but you can never take anything for granted.'

David Seaman is a good friend and helps his fellow Yorkshireman out when he can. Robinson said, 'I speak to David a lot, play in his golf tournament and see him now and again. I get the odd call and text message from him, telling me to keep going and giving me some advice and stuff like that. He's been an excellent goalkeeper over the years and, if I can achieve as much as he did over my career, I'll be very happy. But I must admit that getting his hair cut was not before time. And the one thing I can promise is I won't grow a ponytail like that!'

Robinson knows that, just like Seaman before him, his elevation to the top spot means more scrutiny than ever. Seaman was inconsolable after being caught out by Ronaldinho's free-kick in England's last World Cup match in Shizuoka, while his England career ended after 73 caps with another mistake from Artim Sakiri's

corner for Macedonia three months later. While he has not made a blunder in England colours, Robinson accepts he is in the line of fire. 'I'm in a position to be shot at and, if I make a mistake, I'll be criticised. I understand that. If you're playing for England, you've just got to make sure it doesn't happen. I've had two isolated incidents recently and, hopefully, it's gone now. But if you are a goalkeeper you have to be mentally strong – and if you're the England No.1, you have to be even harder on yourself and your own biggest critic. The day you start to listen to other people outside your coaches and your manager, that's when you've got a problem. You can't go into a World Cup game thinking about what might go wrong. Every game's got to be positive and I'm confident in my own ability. I know I'm good enough to cope.'

The move to Spurs came at the right time for Robinson. His last season at Leeds, where he had been since joining as a 14-year-old, was a trial he did not enjoy as the cash problems crippling the club saw players sold off and inevitable relegation. 'I felt like I was out there as fodder – every game there were goals going past me and it was really tough,' he recalled. 'I felt I was going stale, too, so I needed the move. Going to Tottenham was a breath of fresh air. It was a new challenge, new faces, new people to impress and it allowed me to focus more on my game and to achieve what I want from it.

'The World Cup is the biggest stage for every footballer, every goalkeeper. Every kid dreams of playing there. I've always wanted to be the No.1 and I've always aspired to be the man in possession. Things can change very quickly in football and no one knows that more than me. But I'm going to work very hard to keep hold of what I've worked a long time for.'

Two decades ago, Robinson was pretending to be Peter Shilton when Diego Maradona scored his 'Hand of God' goal; he was a seven-year-old watching on TV when Maradona cheated England in the 1986 World Cup quarter-finals.

The Spurs stopper said, 'I remember the 1986 game; that was the

first World Cup I really remember. I watched it and I was absolutely gutted afterwards.'

Robinson, 26, confessed his delight at his status as England's first-choice goalkeeper, adding, 'It's different class. There's nothing you can say to explain the feeling. To be regarded like that by so many people is a fantastic achievement. But it's also a responsibility to make sure I carry on doing that and keep people happy.'

Foreign goalkeepers rule England's top division, where they once carried a 'Made in the UK' hallmark. Every leading club seemed to boast a homegrown No.1. And if they weren't English, they would almost certainly qualify for one of the other home nations. A generation ago, Gordon Banks was regarded as the world's best and he faced England competition from the likes of Peter Bonetti, Alex Stepney, Jim Montgomery and the rising talents of young Peter Shilton and Ray Clemence. All that is now a fading memory and today's Premiership boasts a surplus of foreign goalkeepers. No single team position has been embraced as warmly by continental newcomers.

Despite the profusion of foreign keepers – and consequently the lack of choice afforded to Eriksson – Peter Shilton backed Paul Robinson to shine at the World Cup finals. Former England keeper Shilton said, 'Paul Robinson looks solid. He came in at a high-pressure time when David James was dropped and handled the situation really well.

'Young keepers need a sound temperament and Robinson appears to have one. The Tottenham fans love him and that's a good sign, too, because they've had some quality keepers over the years at White Hart Lane. His technique is excellent and he appears to be a confident lad. The only question mark is whether he can do it on the biggest stage of all, and we won't know the answer to that until we get to Germany. There isn't a huge amount of competition for the No.1 shirt right now, but I have confidence in him.'

Shilton, 56, starred for England at the 1990 World Cup finals in Italy and was part of the side that eventually crashed out on penalties to

West Germany in the semi-finals. The ex-Nottingham Forest star is convinced Sven-Goran Eriksson's side has a good chance of emulating that success – and even bettering it. 'I played for England over four decades and during that time we had some very strong squads, but sadly we could never repeat the glory of 1966. The current bunch certainly have a chance. But, until the England side gets to Germany, we can't really judge how good they are. All I can say is that Sven-Goran Eriksson is fortunate to have inherited a talented generation of players. I'd certainly say the current group have the best competition for places that I can remember.'

Robinson is now rated very highly, but even four years ago, as soon as England went out of the last World Cup to Brazil, I selected a team that would represent England in the 2006 World Cup finals... and Robinson was my No.1 choice.

Robinson is a gifted keeper who has the potential to justify his newfound status as England's first choice. But, for England, qualifying for the finals in Germany is the easy part, compared to fulfilling the nation's expectations once they get there.

Can Robinson be the man to stop Ronaldinho, Ballack and van Nistelrooy? After David Seaman's performance against Brazil in the quarter-finals, I felt it was imperative to develop a young goalkeeper and would liked to have seen Robinson given many more caps leading up to this World Cup.

For a number of reasons, it never quite worked out until Robinson came forward late on to take over from David 'Calamity' James. James has all the attributes of a world-class keeper but is prone to brain storms, hence Robinson is by far the more secure option. However, none of England's current keepers has any experience of 'international' club football in the form of the Champions League, which Sven-Goran Eriksson has insisted, in the past, is a prerequisite of playing for England.

Robinson moved on from Leeds to a Spurs side currently well placed in the table with every chance of a long-awaited return to

European football. But Robinson's build-up to Germany is more in tune with Wigan than Barcelona, West Brom rather than Real Madrid or Inter Milan.

GORDON BANKS

Auction prices for items connected with the 1966 final have often been high. Goalkeeper Gordon Banks's medal raised £124,000 at Christie's in 2001, while the shirt worn by Sir Geoff Hurst took the bids up to an impressive £91,750.

Official postcards of the 1966 mascot, World Cup Willie, with a Wembley and Harrow postmark, sell for £30–£40. But what price a Gordon Banks these days? Banks is the most iconic of English goalkeepers. That seemingly impossible plunge to meet Pele's header in the 1970 World Cup finals stands as one of the greatest saves of all time, let alone in the Banks repertoire.

The penalty save from Geoff Hurst in Stoke City's League Cup semi-final win over West Ham in 1972 is another Banks save that lingers long in the memory.

Paul Robinson may be the best of England's keepers at this moment, but he is no Gordon Banks. Well, for that matter he is no Peter Shilton. He's no Ray Clemence either. And he might not even be a David Seaman. Seaman was at the end of his illustrious career when he was made to look a mug by Ronaldinho in the World Cup. But the hero of Euro 96 has not really been adequately replaced yet by England. Robinson has the promise, but the big question is whether he is ready for the biggest stage of all.

Banks did not become a world-class goalkeeper until after England won the World Cup in 1966. England actually had a superior side in 1970, when Banks made that unforgettable save against Pele. When it comes to facing Brazil, or even Germany for that matter, this summer, can England win the World Cup without a world-class goalkeeper?

Unfortunately, once David James lost his way, there were no other options in goal. Eriksson led the way in bringing on young players,

but his big mistake was his failure to acknowledge that he should be working to a four-year cycle and not going for glory in the European Championships.

This is what I had to say immediately after England went out of the last World Cup. 'The young players who benefited from Japan and South Korea need to be retained and encouraged as fixtures in the side such as Michael Owen, Rio Ferdinand and Owen Hargreaves. Others need to be groomed by playing regularly right through the European Championship qualifying stages – Paul Robinson of Leeds in goal, a recall for Jonathan Woodgate and an extended run for Joe Cole and Blackburn's England Under-21 skipper David Dunn. Steven Gerrard, a great miss in this tournament, will be welcomed back.'

Banks missed the crucial World Cup quarter-final against West Germany in Mexico because of a tummy upset and his substitute, Peter Bonetti of Chelsea, was no Gordon Banks. It was an illness which cost England a great deal.

FULL-BACKS:
GEORGE COHEN – GARY NEVILLE

GEORGE COHEN

George Cohen believes that England's first-choice full-backs – Gary Neville, his opposite number in the England team, and Ashley Cole – compare favourably with himself and Ray Wilson, although they come from such different eras.

George compares his role to that of Gary Neville as he told me, 'I was 26 when I played in the final against the Germans, but Gary is a couple of years older and he has vast amounts of experience.

'I think he defends very, very well, and has improved as he has got older. He also goes forward very well, although, like me, he doesn't score many goals. But full-back was a vastly different proposition in my time: you were expected to defend first and foremost and going forward was a bonus.'

However, George is worried that the stand-in full-backs do not provide the same kind of security he likes to see around an England defence. He explained, 'All right, we have a couple of spare centre-halves, but we are short of full-backs, that's for sure.

'On the left side in particular, we are weak if the team is without Ashley Cole, and we've been without him for some time recently. Jamie Carragher has been tried there, but he is nowhere near as effective as when he stands in at either centre-back or right-back, or even a holding position in midfield.

'Everyone raves about how well we did against Argentina, but I thought they were a magnificent side who outpassed us and the two full-backs lacked experience, which shows they should have been played far more often in some of those so-called meaningless friendlies.

'But Sven has had this annoying habit of giving players little more than cameo roles and that has not been good enough to really try players out. Some of the most influential players throughout the generations, from Johnny Haynes to Glenn Hoddle, were said to be so influential yet they only spent two and a half minutes of the 90 minutes on the ball. So how many seconds would one of Sven's 25-minute substitutes have?

'Gary has great experience and we will need him as well as Ashley. We just won't be able to afford injuries in such key positions, as the back-up looks thin, frighteningly thin, to me. When there was some suggestion that Sven would even bring Gary's brother Phil back into the side to play at right-back, it shows how thin it is!'

Cohen feels that Ray Wilson would compare very favourably with Ashley Cole. Of his full-back partner from '66, George said, 'He was a "knowing" defender. He was brought up like the rest of us on the old WM formation and it wouldn't do modern-day full-backs any harm to study those techniques; they were vitally important for full-backs to understand how to defend and cover properly – and to appreciate why we were never exposed on our blind side – in order

to develop a formidable defensive unit. Ray didn't often go forward, but he was a very good defender, very quick over the first 10 yards especially, which came in handy against fast and tricky wingers.

'We didn't give many goals away in '66, but that was no surprise to us because we had been pretty good defensively for some time leading up to the World Cup, more than two years in fact. We had beaten the Germans twice in that time and outplayed Spain in Madrid.

'Alf knew his back four for at least one and a half years leading up to the tournament. Ray and I put together a run of 19 games uninterrupted and Alf based his success on solid defence.

'Perhaps Jack Charlton was a late addition but he did for the England team precisely what he had been doing for Leeds, winning the ball in the air and defending well. Jack used to say it himself, that he wasn't a great player but he wouldn't let anyone play against him; he would never let anything or anybody get past him, no matter what it took to stop them.'

Overall, George has a feeling that England will do well in this tournament. 'I think we have the players to go a long way, but whether we are good enough to win is another matter. I was so impressed when I saw Argentina; you have to fear holders Brazil and you can never rule out the Germans especially when they are at home. I was in Munich with Alan Ball when we beat them 5–1 and everyone was euphoric, and I must say it was the worst German side I had ever seen. But what did they do? They made seven changes and went on to reach the World Cup finals, while we went only as far as the quarter-finals. That's the Germans for you, so don't discount them.

'But England have a reasonable chance themselves, perhaps the best chance since we won it. Rooney, Lampard and Owen are all outstanding players. If we can keep Rooney on the pitch. This boy is a handful all right, but we need to wrap him up in cotton wool and make sure he doesn't miss a game. He is the most potent young player I have seen in a long time.'