

DARING DIXIE STEALS THE LIMELIGHT

By BRIAN SWAIN

ALTHOUGH Keith Barber was lying in hospital in considerable pain at the time, there was a lot of hilarity on the Town coach as it came back down the motorway from Nottingham.

The luckless goalkeeper was probably better left out of the celebrations, because his broken ribs would surely have been subjected to even greater pain—from laughter—as the players re-lived the last 23 minutes of a memorable game.

The Town were two up, well in control, when Barber spread himself at the feet of Vinter to take the ball off the striker's toes.

The clash left Barber helpless, and he was carried off on a stretcher with three ribs broken.

Match Details

NOTTS COUNTY 0, LUTON TOWN 4

Half-time: 0-1

TOWN: Barber (replaced by Deans, 67 minutes, with sub Husband going into the attack); Price, Buckley, Faulkner, Paul Futchter; Chambers, West, Fuccillo; Ron Futchter, Deans, Aston.

NOTTS COUNTY: McManus; Richards, Mann, Needham (Sims 8 minutes), Stubbs; Probert, Carter, Busby; Vinter, Bradd, Scanlon.

THE GOALS: West, 39 minutes, from cross by Aston; Aston, 60 minutes, after one-two with Ron Futchter; Husband, 81 minutes after Fuccillo shot half-saved; Buckley, 85 minutes, 25-yard piledriver.

ENTERTAINMENT: Remarkable and memorable, with Deans putting on a one-man comedy show, making the odd save in between giving his team-mates a series of heart attacks.

REFEREE: Harold Hackney, Barnsley: Allowed the game to flow, but got in the way of the action a couple of times.

ATTENDANCE: 10,009 — and hundreds of the Notts "supporters" went home early in disgust.

BOOKINGS: Fuccillo for dissent after the referee obstructed his attempted tackle; Aston for a late tackle on Richards.

For most teams this would be a crisis of major proportions.

John Aston was the official second-choice goalkeeper. Said coach Roy McCrohan: "When I reminded him of that as Keith was carried off I swear his face went pale."

"I didn't see where Dixie had gone to."

Hardly anyone did, but while the Town players, manager, coach, physio and an assortment of first aid men crowded round Barber, Deans had vanished into the players' tunnel.

As McCrohan said afterwards: "The next thing I saw was a green shirt streaking towards us. We could hardly believe it when he saw Dixie was inside it."

Deans explained: "I've never played in goal before, but I've tried it in training and enjoyed it. I didn't do too badly, did I?"

Deans's offer to stand between the posts brought the colour back to John Aston's cheeks, and amazingly, when Notts County must have thought their big chance had arrived, the Town survived at one end and calmly scored two more at the other.

Deans looked as though he would be lucky to win a goalkeeper's place in a Sunday morning pub team, but it turned out to be a day for fairy tales to come true.

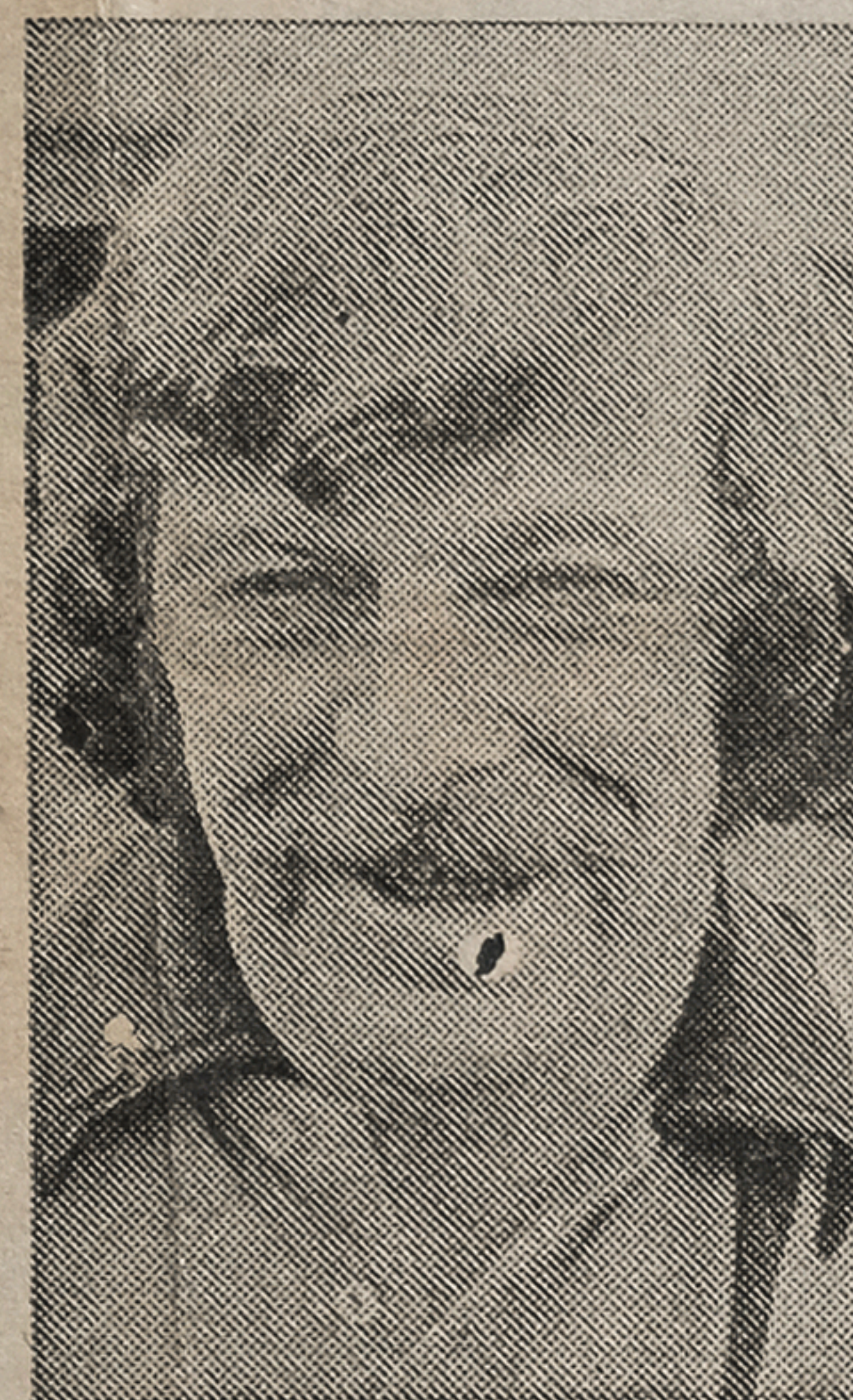
He was a real McRoy of the Rovers. When he missed one shot Paul Price kicked it off the line. Another hit a post.

CHARMED

He made one good catch, dropped several others, punched like a boxer at anything above his short stature, and generally enjoyed a charmed existence. As a goalkeeper, he looked a very good striker.

It was knock-about comedy stuff, and after Deans had left to drive home to Scotland, John Faulkner gave the perfect summing up: "He's living through it all over again. He probably wishes Notts County had been given a

Stand-in keeper shines after Keith Barber is carried off



● DIXIE DEANS

penalty. He'd have saved it if they had."

Dixie's unorthodox methods must have broken the home side's heart, although County's spirit was suspect throughout the game. County looked less like a team than the Town did.

They had their injury problems earlier: David Needham, strong man at the centre of their defence, injured a groin and had to go off after only eight minutes.

John Sims, a striker who

spent a month on loan at Luton three years ago, had to take over a defensive role.

In fact he played well, and so did Pedro Richards, who was marking Aston on the other flank.

AHEAD

County never looked like winning after Town went ahead in the 39th minute. Aston had lost the marking of Richards by wandering to the other flank and after West and Deans had worked the ball to him the winger went to the by-line and crossed for West to score after his first attempt bounced back off the goalkeeper.

Aston and Ron Futchter combined neatly for Aston to hit the second goal after an hour. County were a collection of individuals, doing nothing for each other, while the Town were organised and neat, with men always wanting the ball and running into space intelligently.

Attacks were built up quickly with the ball being switched accurately from one side to the other.

In the last 23 minutes, with defence and midfield men pulled back to try to

protect Deans in goal, the Town hit hard on the breaks.

Jim Husband scored after a shot by Fuccillo had been half-saved, and Steve Buckley rattled in the fourth goal from 25 yards from a corner by Aston.

Notts County and their supporters were demoralised and humiliated, and in the end it should have been 5-0 to the Town because Ron Futchter was let in by a back-pass, but forced wide by a despairing goalkeeper's dive.

PATROL

But I think my abiding memory will be the sight of Dixie Deans patrolling his penalty area in a strange criss-cross routine.

As he danced up and down, back and forth, facing all ways in turn, I was waiting for Peter West's voice to announce that the rest of the Central Scotland formation team would appear shortly — I swear Deans did a Paso-doble while one attack was on its way. He got maximum marks for effectiveness and even home supporters had to admit that they hadn't been treated to such heartwarming entertainment in many a long year.