

ARTHUR DUNN

1861 – 1902

Arthur Tempest Blakiston Dunn was the finest and most accomplished footballer of the 1880s. He was born in Whitby, North Yorkshire and, although his parents struggled to pay the fees, he was educated at Eton. Though diminutive in stature relative to his peers, Arthur was actively involved in sports, particularly football. He was also academically capable, though less interested, and went on to Cambridge University.

At Cambridge he was more interested in socialising and sport than academic study and, much to the disappointment of his father, gained only a third class honours degree. At football, however, he excelled and played for the University. He never lost his attachment for his old school and if ever there was a conflict of interest between the University team and Old Etonians, it was always the school that claimed his services. In 1882 Arthur played for Old Etonians in the FA Cup Final when they defeated the then mighty Blackburn Rovers. In the 1883 Final Old Etonians lost to Blackburn Rovers in extra time. In the Press it was said that “Dunn, until injured (knee), played a capital game and it is undoubtedly to his absence that the Old Etonians owe their defeat”.

Shortly after Arthur had left Cambridge he became a master at Elstree School where he spent seven happy years without interrupting his football career. He played three times for England against Ireland; he captained England against Wales and Scotland. Against Scotland, as an amateur, he once captained a team of ten professionals and the Press recorded that “it was thought that his position would be irksome but, as it happened, these particular professionals turned out to be men of easy and gentlemanly demeanour and they found their captain a very sociable companion”. Even as his football career was coming to an end, his exploits were still being reported yet he never basked in self-glory. In fact, it was a characteristic of his sporting modesty that he slipped away one morning without telling his wife, Helen, that he was going off to captain England.

Arthur was an all-round sportsman and was a particularly good cricketer, a “neat and determined left-handed bat and a fast round-arm bowler”. With more time and opportunity for practice, he would certainly have appeared in first-class cricket and played with the greats of his day – W.G. Grace, C.B. Fry, etc. Once, on a tour in Ireland, he took five wickets in an over when overs consisted of five balls. When Arthur found he could play less football, he confided to friends that he wished that he had given his time to cricket which one can play into middle-age.

Arthur greatly enjoyed his time at Elstree but there was a problem. Elstree prepared boys chiefly for Harrow and Arthur believed that his true vocation would be to prepare boys for Eton. So he founded Ludgrove and in May 1892 he opened the school with T R Pelly as his only pupil. Many of the traditions at Elstree were transferred to Ludgrove where life included “some enjoyment of boyhood. Keeness was taught as a subject and games were given full scope. It was something to be taught football by a captain of England”.

The workload at Ludgrove was intense because Arthur bore total responsibility for the school. He did all the administration; he taught in class and he joined in the football. He lived on his nerves and by the end of each term he was always utterly exhausted. It is not surprising that he became irritable at times but it was his nervous energy which drove him to 'electrify' the masters and boys. On 18 February 1902 he played a game of hockey on ice and, for the first time in his life, he had complained of feeling slow. The next day was to be his last and, in recording his death, The Times said "it would be difficult to find another man of his age and position whose premature loss has been more widely and genuinely mourned". Arthur and Helen had been blessed with three children – John, Margery and Mary.

At the turn of the century the rift between amateurs and professionals was deep indeed. Shortly before his death, Arthur had expressed concern over the growing impression that amateur football was on the decline and that its ultimate insignificance was merely a matter of time: "There's nothing for it but an old boy association but who has the time to start it?" Arthur did not have time to follow this thought through but, just three weeks after his untimely death, an informal meeting of Old Boys was convened at which it was resolved that a trophy, to be called The Arthur Dunn Memorial Cup, or some such title, be provided for competition, to be held by the winners for one year. Arthur's beloved Old Etonians had to wait 103 years before adding their name to the list of winners.

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