

NAT LOFTHOUSE  1925-2011

# LIONHEART



**The Bolton News** 8-page tribute to the Wanderers and England legend



# NAT LOFTHOUSE – LIONHEART 1925-2011

# Nat – a with the

**FORMER** chief football writer Gordon Sharrock looks back on the life and career of a player a town took to its heart

THE dedication of his second autobiography — “The Lion of Vienna” — said everything about the most famous of all Boltonians.

Celebrating 50 years as a Wanderer, “man and boy”, Nat Lofthouse wrote: “To the people of Bolton. Without you, none of this would have been possible.”

As far as Lofthouse was concerned, the town he was born in, played in, and lived in all his 85 years, had every right to share in the honours he won on the football grounds of the world and those bestowed on him after his playing days had ended.

After all, they took him to their hearts and cheered him as their hero during the 40s and 50s, when Wanderers took pride of place at the top of the football ladder.

You could not wish to meet a man more proud, more devoted to his home town, and more grateful to its people than the one they dubbed “The Lion” for his amazing exploits in leading England to glory in Austria in 1952.

Though totally unaware at the time he penned that “Lion of Vienna” nickname, the late

■ IN 21 years as a player with Bolton Wanderers, Nat Lofthouse represented the club in 660 games and scored 441 goals.

■ He played 452 League games, scoring 255 goals, plus 53 cup appearances, adding a further 30 goals.

■ As an England International

he won 33 caps — including two in the 1954 World Cup in Switzerland — and scored 30 goals.

■ Thirteen appearances for the Football League netted a further 21 goals including a record six against the Irish League at Wolves in September, 1952.

Desmond Hackett of the Daily Express could not have chosen a more fitting beast as he painted a picture in words to describe the Bolton centre-forward's performance.

Lions were important to Nat Lofthouse. Two, to be precise! “I’ve been privileged to travel the world,” he once said, “and I’ve seen some wonderful places.”

“But nowhere compares with Bolton. It’s always been nice to come home and see those two lions on the Town Hall Square!”

That deep-seated passion for the place often led to hurt feelings when he had his leg pulled as he assembled for his 33 international appearances.

“Eddie Baily (the Spurs inside forward) always used to ask me why I wasn’t wearing clogs and a flat cap! Some of the lads used to pull my leg about the cobbled streets and stuff like that,” Nat

recalled. They were only having a laugh, but it used to hurt, because I was proud to come from Bolton. Apart from the people, who are great, I’ve always liked the place. I don’t think there’s a nicer sight anywhere than our Town Hall Square.”

For all that, Nat could have turned his back on Bolton, on England in fact.

The soccer brain drain might be a relatively modern phenomenon, but Nat could have been one of the pioneers 50 years ago — even before the great John Charles made it big at Juventus — if he had accepted an offer to join Italian club Fiorentina. A home for Nat and his late wife, Alma, private schooling for his children, Jeff and Viv, and £60 a week (“about eight times what I was on at Bolton”) made up a package he admitted he was tempted to take.



**LEGEND** Nat is injured scoring against Austria but is hailed as “The Lion of Vienna” for his bravery

## Nat Lofthouse OBE 1925-2011

- **Born** Bolton, August 27, 1925
- **September 4, 1939** Joined Bolton Wanderers ground staff.
- **March 22, 1941** Bolton debut v Bury (scored twice in 5-1 win).
- **August 31, 1946** League debut v Chelsea (scored twice in 4-3 defeat).
- **November 22, 1950** England debut v Yugoslavia at Highbury (scored twice in 2-2 draw).
- **May 25, 1952** Earned “Lion of Vienna” legend, scoring twice in England’s dramatic 3-2 win in Austria.
- **September 24, 1952** Scored a record six goals for Football League v Irish League.
- **April 1953** Named Footballer of the year.
- **May 2, 1953** Scored in 4-3 FA Cup Final defeat by Blackpool, having topped the First Division goalscorers with 30.
- **May 20, 1956** Broke Steve Bloomer’s England scoring record in Finland.
- **May 3, 1958** Captain and two-goal hero of Bolton’s FA Cup Final triumph over Manchester United.
- **November 26, 1958** Final England appearance (v Wales at Villa Park).
- **January 1960** “Officially” retired from game with an ankle injury.
- **December 17, 1960** Suffered knee injury in final league appearance at Birmingham after short comeback bid.
- **July 10, 1961** Appointed assistant trainer at Burnden.
- **June 21, 1967** Appointed chief coach.
- **August 20, 1968** Became caretaker manager.
- **December 18, 1968** Appointed manager.
- **November 4, 1970** Became administrative manager.
- **August 12, 1971** Appointed Wanderers chief scout.
- **November 20, 1978** Returned to Burnden after six year absence to become executive club manager.
- **December 6, 1985** Accepted caretaker manager’s job for second time, aged 60.
- **October 30, 1986** Named Wanderers president.
- **December 2, 1989** Made a Freeman of Bolton.
- **January 1, 1994** Receives the OBE in the New Year’s Honours List.
- **January 18, 1997** Bolton Wanderers name the East Stand of the £35million Reebok Stadium “The Nat Lofthouse Stand”, incorporating the “Lion of Vienna Suite”.
- **August 4, 1998** Named among football’s 100 League Legends.
- **March 20, 2005** Honoured by fans and Bolton Evening News readers in a “Legends” poll as the greatest Wanderer of all time.



**WEMBLEY JOY** Nat Lofthouse gets a hug from Wanderers manager Bill Ridding after the FA Cup final



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# Bolton legend heart of a lion

"But Bolton wouldn't let me go. And in those days they could hold you to your contract as long as they wanted," he admitted, reflecting on what might have been.

"Oh, I'd have gone to Italy, all right! I don't mind admitting it now. But I'm glad I didn't. "I wouldn't swap Bolton for the world."

At the time, Lofthouse had just started to lay the foundations of a playing career that would become legend: 30 goals in 33 England appearances, honoured 13 times by the Football League, adding a further 21 goals (including six in one game against the Irish), and without taking war-time games into account, a club record 285 goals in 505 games for Wanderers.

Yet he was always modest about his abilities. "I could run, shoot and head, and that was it," he said often, before quickly trotting out the names of Matthews, Mannion, Lawton, Carter and Finney who, by his own admission, were all better footballers.

But he did all right for a Castle Hill schoolboy who shinned up a drainpipe to get into Burnden to see his Wanderers heroes — Ray Westwood, Harry Goslin and Jack Milsom — play Manchester City in an FA Cup tie.

That was 1933 when he was just eight.

Six years later, he left school and signed for Wanderers, and, at the age of 17, signed full professional forms.

"Bolton gave me £10 — two of those big, white fivers — just for signing on," he would tell anyone who enquired about that special day — September 4, 1939. "I took them home and laid them out on the table to show my mum."

"Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I could see my dad's expression. I'd embarrassed him."

"He worked as a coal bagger for the Co-op and only earned about £3.15s a week!"

"When he retired, they gave him a small lamp standard — he'd worked for them for more than 50 years. They gave me the Freedom of Bolton for playing football."

"Doesn't seem right does it?" Not that Lofthouse Snr wasn't proud of young Nat's achievements.

"He wasn't all that interested in football until I started playing. He used to kid me, and tell me I'd never be as good as Joe Smith, who still holds the club record for most goals in a season."

But I remember him coming down to London to see me play for England for the first time against Yugoslavia at Highbury. He saw the 1953 FA Cup Final,

but he'd died by the time 1958 came around."

That was Nat's, and Wanderers' finest hour. Bolton captain that day, he scored both goals in the 2-0 victory over Manchester United, and proudly lifted the famous cup.

There has been nothing to match it since, and it was a great source of frustration to Nat as it was to the supporters when his beloved Wanderers languished in the lower divisions.

But he was as proud as club president — as he was throughout his playing days and in his various roles as trainer, coach, manager and chief scout — to see them re-established as a top-flight force.

Yet whatever the team's fortunes, he would defend the honour of Bolton Wanderers as fiercely as the supporters he used to meet touring the pubs and clubs as the revered figurehead of the highly successful commercial team.

With genuine emotion he explained how he would interact with his fellow fanatics: "Guys might have a moan at the club and tell me Saturday's game was awful — but they love the Wanderers just as I do and, in the end, I'd get some of them to join Lifeline or Goldline. I understand them. Everybody has a go at their own club. But you let an outsider try and have a go . . .!"



## United by Wembley goal that lives on

■ NAT scores the goal for which the 1958 FA Cup final will always be remembered, but he and Harry Gregg, the Manchester United goalkeeper he bundled into the net on that day, stayed friends for life



**TROPHY WINNER** Nat Lofthouse holds the FA Cup aloft on the Town Hall steps in 1958



**UP FOR THE CUP** Nat Lofthouse (left) and John Higgins (right) lift the FA Cup aloft on the shoulders of team-mates and John Higgins on the Wanderers beat Manchester United in 1928





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# What the football world said to honour 'Our Nat'

“ HE was a great servant to Bolton Wanderers but he was also a magnificent international and his England record speaks for itself.

He was always a thorn in our side whenever I played against him during our days as rivals in the First Division.

And one of my greatest memories of Nat was playing against him in the 1953 Cup Final. I was on the winning side that day while Nat, despite his obvious disappointment — he never enjoyed losing — was a sporting opponent in every sense of the word.

The fact is that he was always a perfect gentleman on the field — very hard but very fair — and a perfect ambassador for the game in everything he did.

■ The late **SIR STANLEY MATTHEWS**

“ HE is remembered by football followers everywhere with affection because he always remained the same, modest, unassuming fellow as we knew him — and tremendously loyal to his club and country. He showed an unselfish devotion and outstanding contribution to our national game and in particular to his home town, Bolton. I was pleased to call him a true friend.

■ **SIR TOM FINNEY**

■ **NOT** only was Nat Lofthouse a man of the people, he was also held in high esteem by those who knew him in the world of football. Here is how Bolton's Lionheart is remembered by team-mates, admirers and opponents

“ You have to put him in with those two great players, Stanley Matthews and Tom Finney.

Nat Lofthouse, you just put the ball in there at any height and he was so brave. He just scored phenomenal goals in the air. In his day if you were a centre-forward you had to do more than score goals; you had to lead and be tough.

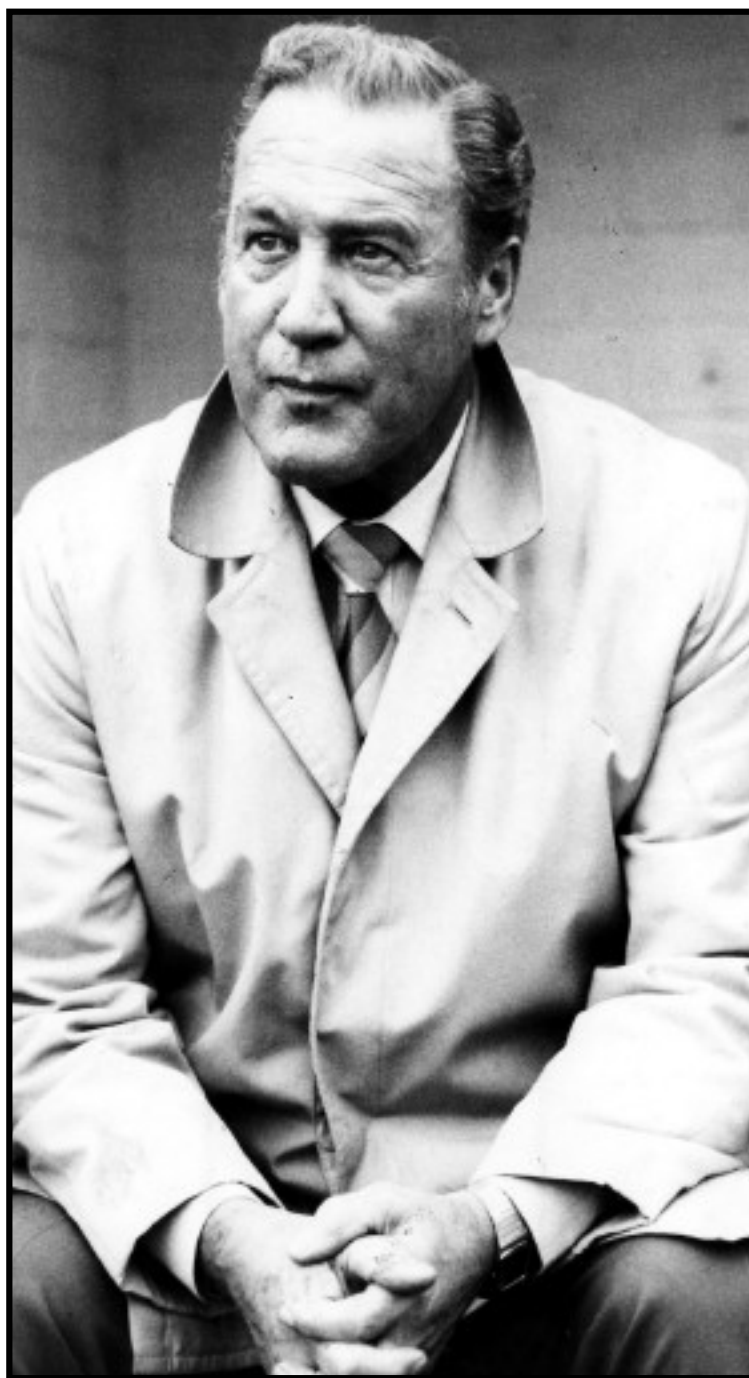
The first time I ever saw a professional game Nat was playing as a centre-forward and they were talking about him as this youngster who had just burst onto the scene, and he was just fantastic.

He was a leader, he had fantastic ability in the air, and he was strong, but he was also a talisman.

He played four or five games with England at the end of his career and I felt he was the one who was in charge, he was the leader.

I'm really sorry, and anybody in this part of the world will be very sorry, that he isn't with us any more because he was a fantastic credit to the game.

■ **SIR BOBBY CHARLTON**



**IN CHARGE** Nat Lofthouse in the dugout as Wanderers' caretaker manager in 1985

“ NAT Lofthouse was everything an English centre forward should be. Strong, robust, good in the air, good on the ground, and he could score goals by the bagful.

He epitomised the traditional English “leader of the line”. He wasn't dubbed the Lion of Vienna without good reason.

■ The late **SIR MATT BUSBY**

“ **PLAYING** for England to him was a real honour and he wore the England shirt with great pride on all the 33 occasions he played for his country with

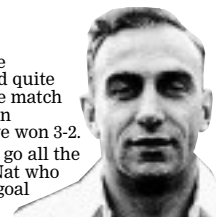
great skill and determination.

He will always be remembered, and quite rightly so, for the match against Austria in Vienna, where we won 3-2.

It was touch and go all the time but it was Nat who got the greatest goal for us, running from the halfway line, being tackled all the way. But his strength took him to the goalkeeper and he slipped the ball into the net for a great victory.

That was Nat's greatest moment and England's, and, being skipper made me feel so proud — as all the British soldiers in the crowd agreed.

■ The late **BILLY WRIGHT**





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**HONOURED** Nat Lofthouse is presented with the Freedom of Bolton by the Mayor Ken MacIvor in 1989

“Before my first game at Burnden Park I was ordered to give the ball to Nat. I questioned whether Nat had been told to give the ball to me. He was a wonderful player and I still remember playing for England with Nat at centre-forward and playing versus Blackpool at Wembley in the 1953 Cup final.

His greatest asset was his heading ability. He was the best header of a ball.

I always regarded him as a friend and in later life nothing would please him more than a chat about football.

**HAROLD HASSALL** who played alongside Nat in the 1953 FA Cup final and for England

“Playing today he would be priceless.

He was as strong as an ox and I don't care who they put up against him, he was brilliant in the air – even though he was only just over 5ft 9. There was nobody better.

And there was nobody with a better scoring record for England when you look at the goals he scored against the number of games he played – at a time when there was a lot of competition at centre-forward.

He was Mr Bolton Wanderers – a one club man who, even after he'd stopped playing, played a big part in bringing the club back from bankruptcy with all his work on the commercial side.

**TOMMY BANKS**, Wanderers and England full-back who played in the 1958 FA Cup final and remained a close friend of Nat's

“You always looked for Nat. He was a great outlet if you were under pressure as an individual or as a team. He was so strong and powerful and when he was on his game you could always look to Nat to take the pressure off you. He was always capable

of coming up with an equaliser or a winner.

There was a lot of shoulder to shoulder stuff in those days, physical challenges that you don't get nowadays and Nat used to have some great encounters with opposition centre-halves, massive tussles. I don't know whether young people today who will know the name of Nat Lofthouse will really understand how good he was. He was a great goalscorer and if he was playing these days he would cost millions and millions to buy.

**DOUG HOLDEN**, the Wanderers and England winger who played alongside Nat in both the 1953 and 1958 FA Cup finals

“I loved the man to bits. He'd always be there with a smile, and a “morning Sir John” when you'd come into the club, and it was that common touch that made him special to the lads.

He had done it all in the game, yet there wasn't a single hint of arrogance in the man. He would give you advice if you wanted it but would never talk down to you.

Bruce Rioch used to sit players down and point to him as an example of loyalty in a football club. For me, he should have been knighted for what he did for the club, and the game in general, a long, long time ago. Bolton Wanderers was his club. It didn't matter whether it was the Reebok Stadium or Burnden Park, he loved to be there, and feel a part of things, even if his health meant he eventually couldn't do that as much as he would have liked.

It's a crying shame that the club hadn't put up a statue in his honour. I'd like to think that will be done for certain now.

I remember doing a promotional thing at the stadium one day with him. We had our picture taken holding a new ticket that was going on sale. I got a copy given back to me and he signed it. That remains one of my most treasured possessions.

I'll remember him as a strapping figure of a man who, despite everything he'd achieved and done in the game, had time to talk, a smile on his face, and the right

advice to give. I'll never forget him.

**JOHN MCGINLAY**, former Wanderers striker

“He was such a nice man, and someone who, when I was a player at Bolton, I took a particular liking to. I was full of admiration and respect, not only for what he did as a footballer but also as a man.

He worked tremendously hard for this football club and was a great ambassador. For me, he summed up everything that is great about Bolton Wanderers.

As a player, he played with such spirit. He was a terrific footballer who accomplished so much in the game for club and country. When we were players at Burnden Park he was around the place all the time. Myself and John McGinlay in particular enjoyed to be in his company. We were full of admiration for him and remain so, he was a lovely man and he will be missed greatly.

**OWEN COYLE**, Wanderers manager and former Wanderers player

“Nat Lofthouse will forever be an absolute legend. There is no other way to describe him.

For me, he is Bolton Wanderers. He's a massive part of this football club and I'm sure he will be missed.

I have seen him around the club from time to time and he always seemed so pleasant, so dignified.

A few people have said there are similarities between us, but from my point of view I am nowhere near. I don't think anyone at this club ever will be.

His name will forever be associated with Bolton Wanderers Football Club, and that says it all really.

**KEVIN DAVIES**, Wanderers captain

“Nat Lofthouse

was more important to Bolton Wanderers as president of the Burnden Lifeline Society than he was as a player.

He was the only credible personality we had at the club in our time of need. The club was in grave danger of going bust and without a Lofthy there was nobody else. His name became synonymous with Lifeline. His photograph was on the front of all the brochures with the headline “I'm a member, are you?”

And when we were selling the Lifeline idea and our expertise to clubs the length and breadth of the country to raise even more money for Bolton Wanderers, Nat was the man spearheaded the missions.

Commercially he was the perfect front man, opening doors for us that no one else could possibly have done.

**ALF DAVIES**, former commercial manager of Bolton Wanderers

“I knew about Nat Lofthouse the legend before I came to Bolton but it was only when I got there that I got to know Nat Lofthouse the man.

I had many a chat with him about football and being a centre forward I had a strong affinity with him.

The man is a legend in every sense of the word and he is what Bolton Wanderers is all about.

It is sad to lose someone like him and my thoughts go out to his family and everyone up there at the football club.

But the memory of the man will live on.

**DEAN HOLDSWORTH**, former Wanderers striker and now manager of Aldershot

“I can understand why people said he deserved a knighthood.

He was a one-club man all his life and not only played for Bolton with distinction, he did a lot of work keeping the club afloat during the hard times.

Personally, I loved him. When I first came to the club I struggled to get my form going and got a bit of stick from the fans.

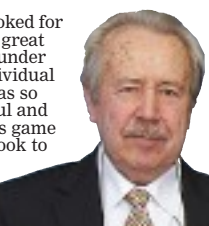
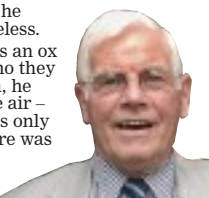
I remember Nat coming in one morning and taking me aside and advising me: “Get back to basics, keep it simple and it will come.”

He told me I was a good footballer and that I would soon get back to my best . . . and I did. Suddenly it clicked. I got my form back and started to win over the fans.

Even then he'd still come over to me and say in that familiar style of his “Keep going cocker!”

And he was like that with all the lads and when we were having those great nights at Anfield, Goodison and Highbury in the FA Cup runs, he was always there to shake our hands and tell us how happy we'd made him.

**TONY KELLY**, former Wanderers midfielder and now academy coach and fans liaison officer.





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**WEMBLEY DREAM** Nat Lofthouse puts Bolton Wanderers ahead against Manchester United in the 1958 FA Cup final as goalkeeper Harry Gregg makes a despairing dive



**HEAD FOR HEIGHTS** Nat illustrates his heading ability



**INTERNATIONAL STAR** Nat playing for England against Russia



**HOT SHOT** Lofthouse fires another attempt on target