

HERE'S THE FIRST ENGLISH PLAYER TO SCORE AGAINST MIGHTY BARÇA...


CHRIS WHEELER

tells the story of the charismatic Lancastrian who abandoned his desire to become a priest and ended up inventing the goal celebration...

HE WAS well known for quoting Shakespeare to his team-mates, opponents and even referees in the middle of a game and widely credited with inventing the goal celebration. He was also the first English player to score against Barcelona in European competition.

Robby Brown, a man who in his early life wanted to join the priesthood but ended up becoming the Paul Gascoigne of his day, one of the most charismatic players English football has ever seen.

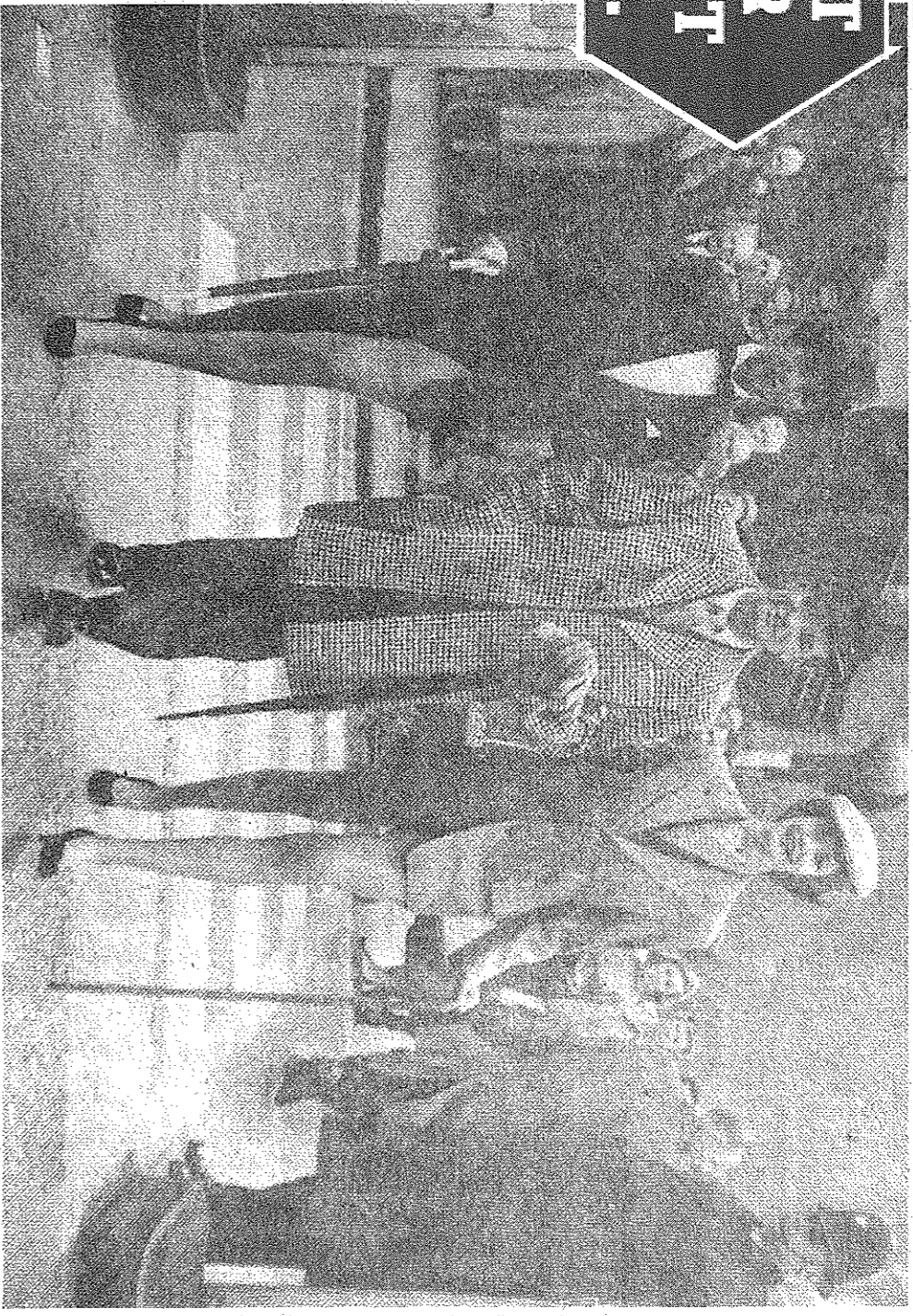
While Gazza was prone to somewhat more controversial celebrations, Brown entertained his audience after scoring by hugging policemen and shaking hands with the corner flag.

On one occasion he went missing altogether, having disappeared into the crowd to share a soft drink with two supporters.

'Yes, I was eccentric,' Brown once said. 'Not crackers. Just eccentric.'

Gascoigne is also unlikely to break out into a rendition of 'Friends, Romans, countrymen...' on the pitch or tweak Shakespeare to suit his needs.

Among the mentees of Brown's colourful career at his home in Preston are the handwritten notes he crafted from *Julius Caesar*, *Anthony and Cleopatra* and *The Merchant of Venice* to praise his team-mate, Tom Finney, before, after and often during games. He



The man about town: Eddy Brown looking dapper while modelling for a fashion line with two long-legged female friends

Eddy Brown: male model, versed in Latin, the bard of Birmingham... and a thorn in Barcelona's side

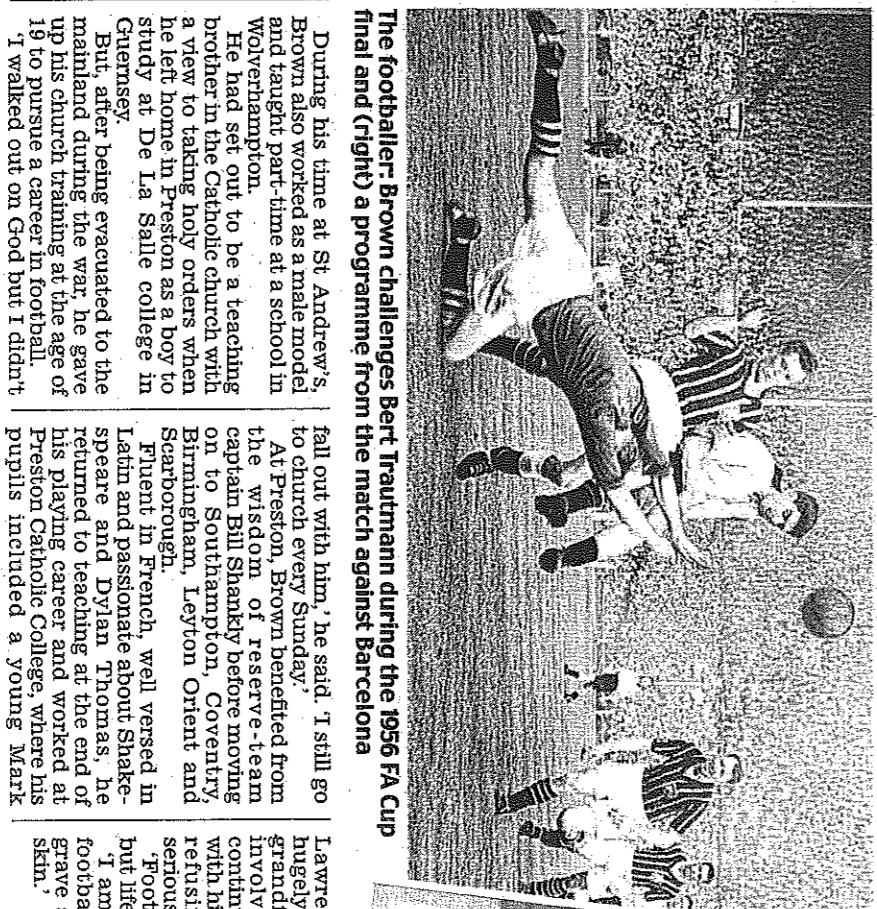
finish sixth in 1956. It remains Birmingham's best performance in the top flight.

That year Brown, a lightning fast striker with a devastating right foot, was their leading scorer on the way to the FA Cup final. Indeed, his header led to the fateful collision between Peter Murphy and Bert Trautmann that left the Manchester City goalkeeper with a broken neck.

Birmingham lost 3-1 and Brown would later say: 'The Queen came up to me afterwards and said that if I was playing the following year she wouldn't come. I was that bad.'

Ten days after that, Birmingham became the first English club to compete in a European competition when they began their Group B campaign in the new Inter-Cities Fairs Cup — a tournament that, bizarrely, took another two years to complete.

After qualifying ahead of Inter Milan and Zagreb, they met Barcelona in a two-legged semi-final and Brown's second-minute opener in a 4-3 win at St Andrew's meant he became the first Englishman to score against the mighty Catalan club.

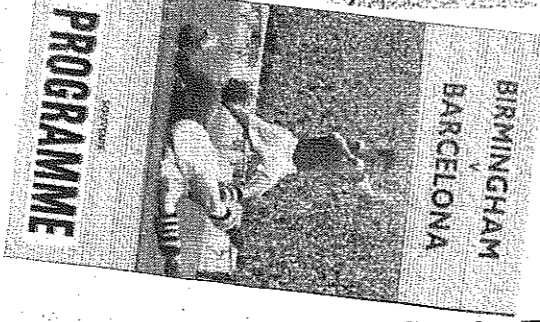


The footballer: Brown challenges Bert Trautmann during the 1956 FA Cup final and (right) a programme from the match against Barcelona

During his time at St Andrew's, Brown also worked as a male model and taught part-time at a school in Wolverhampton.

He had set out to be a teaching brother in the Catholic church with a view to taking holy orders when he left home in Preston as a boy to study at De La Salle college in Guernsey.

But, after being evacuated to the mainland during the war, he gave up his church training at the age of 19 to pursue a career in football. 'I walked out on God but I didn't



fall out with him,' he said. 'I still go to church every Sunday.'

At Preston, Brown benefited from the wisdom of reserve-team captain Bill Shankly before moving on to Southampton, Coventry, Birmingham, Leyton Orient and Scarborough.

Fluent in French, well versed in Latin and passionate about Shakespeare and Dylan Thomas, he returned to teaching at the end of his playing career and worked at Preston Catholic College, where his pupils included a young Mark Lawrenson. Until recently, the hugely popular father of two and grandfather of six was heavily involved in local football and continued to entertain audiences with his after-dinner speaking, still refusing to take himself too seriously.

'Football was very good to me, but life is for living,' he said. 'I am still getting a kick out of football and I've one foot in the grave and the other on a banana skin.'

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The celebrity: Brown meets entertainer Harry Secombe

would address match officials in much the same fashion.

Sadly Brown no longer lives at the house. Like Sir Tom, the 86-year-old is in a Preston nursing home, where Sheila, his wife of 49 years, visits him three times a day. But his legend lives on at the clubs where he scored more than 200 goals in 450 games as a dashing centre forward in the Fifties and Sixties.

It was at Birmingham City where Brown really flourished. Many years later, on the day Eddy turned 70, Brummie comedian Jasper Carrott turned up at the front door singing *Happy Birthday* before realising he had got the wrong house.

Brown was voted the club's all-time top striker ahead of Trevor Francis and Bob Latchford for his role in helping Birmingham win promotion to Division One (he scored a hat-trick in a record 9-1 thrashing of Liverpool) in 1955 and