



## A LOCAL LEGEND – LES STUBBS



When we noticed on Twitter (now X) that the grandson (Steve Lovell) of our former player Les Stubbs had wished his grandad a happy 96th heavenly birthday (Les passed away in 2011), we got in touch with Steve to see if he had a few memories of him that we could share.

Les was a Great Wakering man through and through – he was born there, lived there, played for the local team, and quite simply loved his local club which he ended up becoming Chairman and then Vice President of. Les also played a key role in the history of Chelsea FC by being part of their first ever Division One championship winning team in 1955. But Les was also a Shrimper, and a few of you reading this may recall his latter spell with us. Let's scroll back a bit .....

Les was born on 18 February 1929 and started playing football as an inside forward for Great Wakering Rovers as WWII ended. He did his national service with the army in Wales and still managed to help GWR win the Southend & District Division Two title. The former Arsenal and England defender Wilf Copping, working as a trainer at Southend United, spotted Les's talent and eventually signed him up for us in May 1948 on £18 per week when he then helped us to win the Essex Professional Cup.

Eventually making his debut on 1 April 1950 away to Torquay, Les hit the ground running scoring a brace in a 4-2 win at Plainmoor. For his home debut the next match there were 17,000 present at the old Grainger Road ground as we drew 2-2, Les netting again. Three more wins followed and promotion to Division Two looked to be a possibility, but just two draws from the last four matches saw us finish third and Notts County were promoted instead - but it was our highest ever league finish (a feat which was not bettered until the 1990/91 campaign).

The 1950/51 season saw Les establish himself in our first team, and in another period of relative success when we finished seventh, Les ended up being our top scorer with 19 goals from 31 appearances despite often playing on the left wing. The following season he finished with 18 goals from 36 appearances (missing out on the top scorer position to Albert Wakefield) which included five goals in an FA Cup run which saw us reach the fifth round for the first time ever when we eventually lost out narrowly to Sheffield United. Known to fans as 'the head', Les's good form attracted scouts from a number of clubs and also earned him an England B call up when he scored in a 3-0 win. Like many footballers of that era, Les played the game hard, played on some terrible surfaces, and once was found at half-time by the physio playing with some glass stuck in his leg which he didn't come off the pitch for. He never got booked.

Somewhat inevitably a top tier club came calling, and in November 1953 Ted Drake's Chelsea paid £10,000 for his services and upped his wages to £23 per week. He made his debut on 15 November 1952, still only age 22, in a 2-1 home win v Newcastle United. He went on to make 121 appearances for the Pensioners scoring 35 times, played his part in landing their first ever Division One title in the 1954/55 season often in front of huge crowds which regularly topped 50,000 at Stamford Bridge, and played alongside some greats of the game including the likes of Roy Bentley, Ron Greenwood, Jimmy Greaves and also a young Alan Dicks.

It was with Alan (today one of our oldest SUEPA members) that Les decided to take a pay cut (to £20 a week) and return to Roots Hall in 1958. As is often the case it seems, things weren't quite so good second time round, and after just 23 appearances and two goals he left in 1960 to spend one season at Bedford Town. Then, in 1961, he went home to Great Wakering, helping them to achieve great success, and finally finished playing aged 53 in the early 1980s.

When Chelsea won the Premiership title in 2005, Les and his surviving teammates from the 1954/55 title winning side, plus his wife Jean, went along to the trophy presentation and were invited to lift the cup which was not something they were afforded the opportunity of doing some 50 years previously.

Steve told us that, as a youngster, there'd often be himself and six others chasing Les around the pitch, but they could never get the ball off him and he was in his 70's!

One of a kind and from a different era, Les was a Shrimper who achieved many notable things in the game at all levels. He passed away in 2011, and it is a privilege to write this short piece on him.

Andy Leeder, December 2024