



A Queer Football Adventure of Herlock Sholmes, the World's Worst Detective, recorded by his faithful friend, Dr. Jotson.

WITH that amazing intuitive perspicuity of his, Herlock Sholmes darted out his fork and helped himself to the last rissole. The secret flank attack, which I had developed from behind the potato dish, had come to naught. I sat back in my chair and tried to look dignified.

"Half the ills of the human flesh are due to over-eating," I remarked ponderously. "I strongly advise—"

There was a knock at the dining-room door and Mrs. Spudson put her head in the room. "Two footballers and a gentleman to see you, sir."

"Shoyummup!"

"Show them up!" said Sholmes. A minute later we heard ponderous footsteps on the rickety stairway, and rising from the table Sholmes led the way to the consulting-room. Here we found the "two footballers and the gentleman" announced by our landlady.

Herlock Sholmes greeted the visitors and found seats for them.

"Pray be seated on the cocaine cask, my dear Jotson," he said to me, as he sank into his armchair. "Gentlemen," he went on, addressing the clients, "this is my faithful friend, Dr. Jotson, a surgeon of no small ability. Anything you have to say may be safely said in front of me."

Seated on the hard wooden lid of the cocaine cask, I was able to take stock of our queer callers. Two of them were dressed in football garb with overcoats. Their jerseys were green and sky-pink—such as one sees at sunset—and their navy knickers were caked in mud. The third man was a stout, ponderous individual of about fifty years who wore a heavy gold watch-chain across his ample yellow waistcoat.

At first I thought he was a pawnbroker or a bookmaker. But he introduced himself as Erasmus Pondersby, the Mayor of Dudmore, proprietor of the Cow and Cartwheel Inn and patron of the Dudmore Hyenas Football team.

After providing us with this information, the plump visitor in the stylish civilian attire furnished us with the names of his companions—George Gumble and Fred Bunyan, the Captain and Vice-Captain respectively of the Dudmore Eleven.

When the introductions had been completed, Herlock Sholmes placed the tips of his elongated fingers together and lay back in his chair in the characteristic pose I knew so well.

"Now, gentlemen," said Sholmes, "if you will state the case which has impelled you to visit me here in Shaker Street, I will do my best to render you such service as I can."

"To begin at the beginning, sir, the Dudmore Hyenas are in the consomme," said Gumble. "Just on the very day when we have the most important match of the season we have got it where the chicken got the chopper. In other words, we are flummoxed, flamboozled, fed-up, and far from home and off the map completely. If it were any other than Ginger Dick I should say let it rip, but seeing as it's Ginger—" He paused. "I hope I am making it clear, Mr. Sholmes?"

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"As clear as pea soup," said Sholmes smiling. "From what I can make out, the team has suffered some reverse just before an important match, and that Ginger Dick is in some way mixed up with the catastrophe."

"Ginger Dick's our goalie," continued Gumble, "the finest goalie as ever bumped his head against a cross-bar. And here, just before the match, he has gone off!"

"Off his clump?" asked Sholmes.

"No; off the map. He has vamoosed, hopped it, done a bunk, hit the trail and gone to Jericho. Anyway, he is not at Dudmore, and in half an hour's time we have got to play the Punkton Blades for the Pondersby Bowl."

"You suspect foul play?" demanded Sholmes.

"We do," said George Gumble. "Some of those Punkton blokes have spirited him away, I am reckoning. We want you to find Ginger Dick. Godling's his real name. If we take the field at three o'clock without him, we are licked."

"Have you no other goalkeeper?"

"No, Mr. Sholmes. Not one that is a patch on Ginger Dick. He is the most tallest, elongated, spryest, nimblest specimen of a goal guardian as ever punched a forward's nose."

Sholmes glanced at the clock.

"There is little time to spare!" he remarked, rising. "The match begins at three o'clock, and you say it is a most important game?"

"It is for the Pondersby Bowl," cried Fred Bunyan. "It has been the custom of Mr. Pondersby here to fill the bowl for the victors at his hospitable hostel, the Cow and Cartwheel, every October. It ain't so much the Bowl that matters, though the boys like to win that—but what Mr. Pondersby fills it with. As sure as eggs ain't cheese, the bowl will go to the Punkton Blades if Ginger Dick ain't found."

"He shall be found," said Sholmes. "Where did you see him last?"

"We went out this morning for a limboosener. When the other chaps left the stand, Ginger Dick stopped to look out some of his old football togs for the wash. Old Daniel Dibbett, the club groundsman, never saw him leave at all. He never left that football stand. He has vamoosed completely. Fred Bunyan and me went back and could find no trace of him. It is a mystery—a dark mystery, Mr. Sholmes."

Sholmes filled his snuff-box with cocaine out of the cask and strode across the room. "Come," he said, "we will take a taxi to Dudmore—ahem! at your expense."

We arrived at the football clubhouse at Dudmore at two-thirty p.m. Only half an hour before the match against the notorious Punkton Blades was due to begin.

Sholmes' first move in the investigations was to submit Old Dibbett, the groundsman, to a thorough cross-examination. The old man swore that Ginger Dick had never left the stand. He had seen the other players depart and had remained at the place for over an hour.

"Did no one enter that stand during that period?" enquired Sholmes.

"No, sir—er—that is no one except the men who called for the laundry,"

"What!" almost shouted Sholmes. "How many men entered this place?"

"Four, sir. They had a cart with them and they brought out the big bundle of washing."

Sholmes grabbed my arm and entered the players' club-house, almost falling into a plunge-bath fitted with green water. To the dismay of myself and the Dudmore men, a big, shameless patch lay under the water at the bottom of the bath.

"Good gracious!" breathed George Gumble, going pale. "It's Ginger Dick!"

"Ginger Dick! Fiddlesticks!" said Sholmes. "It is the bundle of washing! Ginger Dick must have had a knock on the head and was then carried away under the very eyes of Dibbett wrapped in a canvas bag."

The two Dudmore footballers and Mr. Pondersby, their patron, gave deep groans.

"Then Ginger Dick will not be here for the match this afternoon?"

The steely eyes of Sholmes glistened with determination.

"Your goalkeeper shall be found," he said. "Listen to me. Take the field at three o'clock with your ten men. The goalie of the team shall appear in his appointed place. Leave it to me, Gumbo—er—Gumble, I mean. Have you a photograph of Ginger Dick?"

The Dudmore captain took down a small print from the wall. I looked over Sholmes' shoulder as my famous friend took it. The photo showed a hatchet-faced individual with a mop of fair hair and a toothbrush moustache.

"Good! I will keep this for the time being," said Sholmes. "Now, tell me, how far's Punkton from here?"

"It's the next town," said Gumble—"five miles distant."

"Is Ginger Dick known in the district?"

"No, I should say not," volunteered Mr. Pondersby.

As Sholmes strode away I bounded swiftly after him; but he laid his hand across my moustache and pushed me back.

"Remain in the grand-stand, my dear Jotson," he said. "I can travel fastest alone. Look out for me at three o'clock, or there about."

Seidom did Herlock Sholmes treat me in this fashion, and I knew that there was some deep reason in his mighty brain.

In due course the Dudmore and Punkton players rolled up, and garbed themselves for the fray. Then the lads of the village surged to the grandstand, together with hundreds of the Punkton supporters. At ten minutes to three a mass of spectators bordered the playing-pitch, and with every passing minute I grew more anxious.

Three o'clock struck in the local church tower, and the Punkton Blades, in their pale-green-and-yellow jerseys, filed on to the field, to be greeted by a thunderous cheer. Then George Gumble led his men out—ten of them.

"Gin-ger! Where's Ginger?"

That cry was being hurled from stand to stand throughout the vast assembly.

But Ginger Dick did not appear. The captains tossed and the referee blew his whistle for the kick-off, and as the teams lined up there was the Pondersby goal unguarded.

"Good gracious!" I murmured. "Has Sholmes failed?"

The cold perspiration broke out on my brow as again that cry arose from the anxious Dudmore supporters:

"Gin-ger! Gin-ger!"

And then I felt a foot placed heavily against the small of my back, and I was rudely hurled on one side.

Two lean, lank individuals had thrust their way through the crowd in the grandstand. One was wearing blue knickers, red jersey, football-boots, and huge leather gloves. By this attire, and the fact that he had ginger hair and a toothbrush moustache, I was able, thanks to the detective abilities I had developed with Sholmes, to identify him as Ginger Dick, the missing goalie. The other elongated figure, attired in a mauve dressing-gown and check cap with flaps, was none other than my old friend Herlock Sholmes!

Now the crowd saw the couple. They cared not a rap for the famous sleuth in the dressing-gown, even if they recognised him. Their eyes were fixed on the ginger-headed individual scrambling through the throng to gain the field.

"Gin-ger! Gin-ger!"

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"The Unguarded Goal!"

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Now there was no tinge of anxiety in the cry—naught but a note of ecstatic triumph. Bounding across the field, the tall goalie took his place between the posts. Directly the ball was kicked off the Blades started up the field, and Ginger Dick ran out to clear a fast grounder. He missed the ball entirely, but kicked the ground in front of it, sending a huge clod of earth against the forward's chin. Luckily, the ball rolled behind, and the goalie went to retrieve it as the unfortunate centre-forward was being revived.

Clearly Ginger Dick was not in form, and I shrewdly suspected that his unfortunate kidnapping experience was responsible for it. But I said nothing to Sholmes, who stood morose and silent. Well did I know that Sholmes would speak when the time came for explanation at the end of the story.

Three times did Ginger Dick kick chunks out of the football-field instead of the ball, and only by good luck and bad throwing on the part of Punkton was the Dudmore citadel unfallen at the end of fifteen minutes' play.

The first score was registered by the captain of Dudmore with a beautiful straight drive into the centre of the net.

At half-time the score was still at one-nil in favour of Dudmore. The return of the players to the field was greeted with enthusiastic cries of the Dudmore supporters, who were not inclined to overlook the curious display given by their much-vaunted goalie.

"Hy-eeen-as! Hy-eeen-as!"

Now, however, the Punkton Blades were on their mettle. The captain, dribbling the ball through the Dudmore wing and directing the half-back, sped down to the Dudmore goal. Ginger Dick rushed out to meet him. His left fist caught the Punkton captain on the nose, his right struck the ball as it rose from the forward's foot. There was a sound like a burst motor-tyre, and the leather football hurtled through the air in a shapeless mass.

"Good old Gi-ger!"

While the Punkton captain was being taken to hospital a fresh ball was procured; but ten minutes later Ginger Dick disposed of that in the same manner. The third ball shared the same fate. Never had the audience seen such a terrific display of punching.

At last the final whistle sounded. The Hyenas were the victors by one goal to nil! Once more they had won the Pondersby Bowl!

My silent friend in the dressing-gown and I followed the Dudmore team to the Cow and Cartwheel directly the men had changed.

Ginger Dick was carried shoulder-high.

In the quiet secrecy of the hostel Pondersby produced a great silver goblet, and filled it with nut-brown brew.

And then the cry arose from the footballers:

"Herlock Sholmes!" And once more the metal bowl passed round. Then, to the surprise of everyone, the goalie in the red jersey slipped to the sanded floor from the shoulders of those who supported him.

"Thank you, gentlemen, for drinking my health! I have been happy to render the Dudmore Hyenas a service!"

A great gasp of astonishment arose. The appearance of the man was that of Ginger Dick. The voice was the voice of Sholmes himself!

Then, to the further astonishment of everyone, the goalie proceeded to divest himself of a ginger wig and false tooth-brush moustache.

"Tarn me!" gasped George Gumble. "Then it was you who played in goal, Mr. Sholmes?"

"None other," he said. "This gentleman who is wearing my dressing-gown is Ginger

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A Footballer's Diary!

Extracts from the Chronicles of TUBBY MUFFIN the Rookwood MARVEL!

MONDAY.

Played my first match of the season to-day for the Classic Side against the Modderns. Jimmy Silver was reluctant to let me play at first, but I pointed out that the team would be wacked to the wide unless I filled the sent-her-forward birth. So Silver consented, and I turned out in my rainbow-cullered jersey, prepared to play the game of my life. I soon got into my stride, and piled up the merry goals, while the crowd round the ropes shouted themselves horse with applause. Tommy Dodd & Co. of the Moddern Side had the shock of their lives. They larfed at me before the match started, and called me a clumsy bladder of lard, and other choice epythets. But they didn't larf when I kept on running through on my own and scoring goal after goal! They piped to another tune. To cut a long story short, our side was victorious by ten goals to nicks; and it was me who scored the nicks—I mean the ten!

TUESDAY.

Had no chance to play footer to-day, owing to being detained by that beast Dalton—our Form master, you know. Jimmy Silver & Co. played a match against the Fifth, and were hopelessly

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Dick. Unfortunately, he has had a nasty crack on the head, and would have been useless. Therefore, as we were both of a height, I disguised myself and took his place on the field."

"But how did you find him?"

"It was ridiculously simple," answered the great detective. "At first I could not make out how the men, who were four members of the Punkton team, would dispose of their bundle. But after I saw that photo of Ginger Dick I knew that one method would surely present itself to them. Ginger Dick was not known in the neighbourhood of Punkton, so he could be safely taken in that direction. There were fields on the road. All the men had to do was to put a prop up his coat and another through his sleeves and stick him up to scare crows. They estimated that it would be some time before he returned to consciousness, and that, anyway, he would be too ill to take his part in the match. So, gentlemen, I proceeded along the Punkton road, and sure enough I discovered our friend frightening birds in a cornfield!"

"But how on earth did you manage to play the game you did, Mr. Sholmes?" asked George Gumble. "I was not aware you were a footballer. The way you laid out the Punkton captain and burst those balls would have done credit to an International!" Giving another smile, Sholmes drew off his left glove. There was a metallic clatter as a horseshoe fell on the floor.

"I carried this for luck," he murmured.

Then he drew off the other glove. In his hand was a nail, firmly held between his first and second fingers.

"Always in this world, gentlemen," said Herlock Sholmes, "brains will beat brawn. And proof is that you have again won your biggest match of the season!"

THE END.

I beaten, which was only natcheral, without the servisses of their star player. To-morrow I have been invited to play for Latcham Louts, a big local team. I've no doubt I shall cover myself with mud and glory!

WEDNESDAY.

I put up a glorious game for Latcham. You ought to see what the local paper's got to say about it in their "Stop Press" kollum! "Muffin was wonderful—a perfect wizzard! He was here, there, and everywhere, and no goalkeeper in the kingdom could have stopped his fierce shots. He scored so many goals that our special reporter lost count! We shall soon see this talented young man in the cullers of the Spurs or Aston Villa." Yes, and they soon will, too! I'm not kontent to go on hiding my light under a bushel by staying at Rookwood—a place where talented footballers are never properly appreciated.

THURSDAY.

I got up a team of my own to-day, and challenged the Rookwood First Eleven to a match. But Bulkeley, the kaptin of Rookwood, refused to take me seriously, and wouldn't play. Matter of fact, he was in a blue funk about it, and he knew jolly well that Muffin's Eleven would make shavings of Rookwood First!

FRIDAY.

It was wet this afternoon, so we played footer in the junior Common-room, using the fireplace for one goal and the door for the other. I was kicking towards the fireplace, and I shot with such force that I put the fire out! I also had the distinction of breaking two windows, and laying out the goal-keeper several times with the force of my shots. Finally, "Dicky" Dalton came in and stopped the game, and awarded impotts all round. I was fined a bob for the broken windows; but that duzzent matter. I'm broke!

SATURDAY.

I went to see the Spurs play to-day, bekwase I wanted to see whether these professional players were really as good as they are made out to be. I came away with the impression that I was streets ahead of any of the Spurs players; so before the season is out I hope to have got an engagement with one of the leading League clubs. Perhaps I shall assist one of them in winning the English Cup. Who knows?

(Vañity, thy name is Muffin! Why, you're not nearly such a fine footballer as me!—ED.)