

Interview with Peter Bonetti

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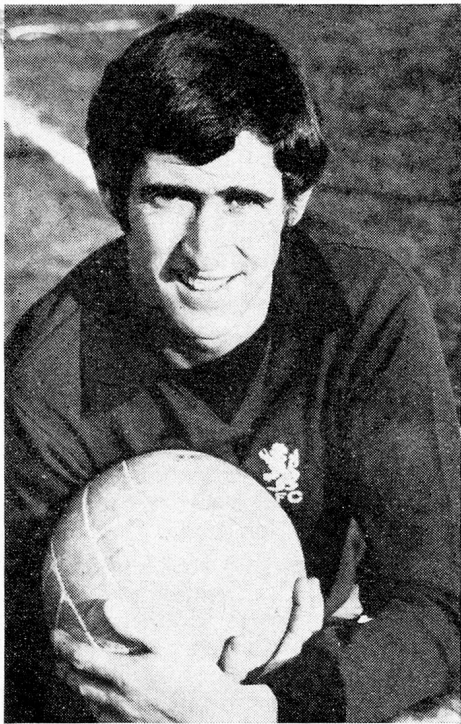
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Peter Bonetti

(picture received by courtesy of Mrs. J. Bonetti)

INTERVIEW WITH PETER BONETTI

Chelsea scarves, Chelsea lapel badges and Chelsea caps, for a good ten minutes. The players were having their shower, wiping off the mud accumulated in 90 minutes spent on a soggy pitch. Autograph books at the ready, the kids were pushing on the players' door. A highly-strung guardsman and a burly policeman had trouble in keeping them at bay. The door eventually half opened to let the Chelsea President get out. He was immediately stormed by a pack of schoolboys hoping to snatch an autograph. The football squire scribbled a few of them grudgingly and jostled his way to his Rolls-Royce, which later drove off with Chelsea's manager, Dave Sexton. The players usually go to the club tea-room after their shower, but I suspected they were escaping via the pitch to avoid the fans. Tommy Baldwin, the right forward who had scored the only goal of the game, appeared at last and walked resolutely to the tea-room, chased by dozens of autograph hunters crying out "Tommy! Tommy!" Chelsea's 18-year-old wonder boy, Alan Hudson, emerged on his crutches. He was recovering from an ankle injury and was clearly not in a happy mood. He was surrounded by young fans clamouring vainly for an autograph.

I hopefully knocked at the tea-room entrance. It was guarded by three wary wardens, but one of them sympathetically slipped a ticket into my hand. There were plenty of people in the tea-room, but no Bonetti. I had to wait for some time until I saw him in the adjoining hall talking with friends. As soon as I saw him leave them, I gave him a tap on the shoulder—upon which he looked a little surprised. I would even say guarded. I told him that I was writing for a Swiss paper, that my readers were Bonetti fans and that I hoped he could spare me a few minutes. He said that he had no time at that moment, having an immediate appointment. His team was off for pre-Cup Final training outside London and Bonetti told me that the only time I could see him was on Friday noon at the stadium.

When I returned to Stamford Bridge, an everlasting crowd of idolatrous fans was standing outside the main gates. Two touts were there too and offered me Cup Final tickets for £7. After a bit of negotiation with the wrinkly old man who kept the gate persistently closed, I was allowed in. Most of the Chelsea stars were in and around the club office receiving, so it appeared to me, their uniform suits for the festivities after the Cup Final. An official went inside the office to call Bonetti. He came out and told me that he would be with me in a couple of minutes.

Having accomplished his errands, he suggested that we should sit in his car, a white Cortina, so that I could conveniently ask whatever questions I wanted to put to him.

With his rather long face and deep eyes, Peter Bonetti has an expression which suggests sadness. He could be an El Greco character. He is rather reserved, even timid, but one guesses that there is plenty of will behind it all. He is modest and appears totally unimpressed by his professional fame. He has a gentle and friendly look which hides the grit and decision which he displays in his game.

He told me that both his parents were from Ticino. His father was born in England but has staunchly retained his Swiss nationality. Peter has plenty of relatives in Ticino and often goes there for holidays.

Surprisingly enough, he only speaks a few words of Italian. His singing accent in English is reminiscent of the north and one wonders where he picked it up. Peter went to school at Brighton and Worthing, where he played with the "Brighton Boys" and the "Worthing Boys". His football vocation developed early. I suspect that his mother sensed his wonderful possibilities for it was she who took the initiative of writing to Chelsea Football Club to consider him. He was engaged at 16 with the juniors and his performance was sufficiently encouraging for him to be signed on the following year. He played with the first team from the age of 18. He is now 28 and

Readers who watched the fabulous first leg of the Cup Final at Wembley must surely have chosen Peter Bonetti, the Chelsea goalkeeper, as their man of the match. In fact Peter Bonetti's superb game earned him a close second place next to Eddie Gray, the Leeds left winger, in the appreciation of football commentators. Peter Bonetti has Swiss blood flowing in his veins and his parents both come from Ticino. He is a kind of national hero among Swiss football fans, who are eager to claim him as one of theirs to compensate for Switzerland's rather pale football record. With this in mind I thought I'd favour the Swiss paper which receives football articles from me and decided to meet Peter Bonetti.

At the end of a splendid match between Chelsea and Tottenham Hotspurs on the week-end before the Cup Final (the same day as the Grand National) I left the main stream of the 40,000 spectators nudging towards the gates of Stamford Bridge and joined a spawn of young fans pressing against the players' entrance. I waited with this young crowd of Chelsea fans, wearing

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has been with Chelsea for 11 years. He has twelve under-23 and six international caps to his credit.

At 5ft. 10½in., Bonetti is considered to be fairly small for a goalkeeper by football writers. He contests this judgment. Whatever he may or may not lack in height he amply compensates by his prodigious ability to leap for the ball. This is why he is nicknamed "the cat".

I asked him if he could express his way of football in a motto. He told me that his only motto was to give absolutely all he'd got in a game. He humbly admits that some basic aptitudes are necessary in the making of a good goalkeeper, but says that experience is vital for the development of a sure instinct. Bonetti finds that he's still learning at every match and says that he's never played better than he does now. Millions of his admirers, I know, would support that statement a thousand and per cent. Many don't hesitate to name him the best goalkeeper in the world. A goalkeeper has to take more physical risk than any other player on the field. Bonetti told me that the guts to jump at the feet of an attacker had to be part of the 'keeper's constitution.

As he speaks none of our federal languages, Bonetti cannot keep in touch with Swiss football by reading the Swiss press. Also, Swiss football is not reported in the British press, which means that he isn't in touch with what is happening on Swiss grounds. He missed his club's trip to Switzerland in 1966, when it beat Lugano 3—2 and Chaux-de-Fonds 1—0 because he was held in the English 28 for the World Cup. His only contact with Swiss football, if it may be termed thus, was in August 1968, when he had the honour of inaugurating Sion's new stadium after descending onto the pitch in a helicopter. Mr. Edgar Bonvin, a prominent figure in our London Swiss Colony, was the chief promoter of this trip, and he

doubtless enjoyed the co-operation of his illustrious cousin, the head of the Federal Department of Transport and Communications.

Mr. Bonvin, it should be said in passing, is a fervent Chelsea supporter. He caters for the players before every home match. I'm sure that the excellent cooking and the warm atmosphere of the "Montana" must have contributed to their remarkable success this season. The team comes at noon in order to have accomplished both their meal and their digestion well before week-end matches, which start at 3 p.m. They may only take a light meal. The healthiest combination is a choice steak accompanied with fresh toasts and capped with rice pudding for sweet. Unctuous foods such as whipped cream with pastry are strictly forbidden! Bonetti prefers roast chicken to steak and he says he's the only member of the team to do so.

Need we say it, Mr. Bonvin assumes a big responsibility in feeding such an important team. Just suppose the butter used for the steak served to one of the players hadn't been fresh on that lunch before the Cup Final. The labours in his stomach might have absorbed that extra ounce of energy and caused him to make a fatal mistake! Preparing food for Chelsea must be as delicate as preparing a moon launch!

Bonetti waited patiently while I tried to decipher the crumpled piece of paper on which I had jotted my questions. I eventually found a final question, which was to ask him which other goalkeeper he most admired. He didn't hesitate to name Gordon Banks, the Stoke and England 'keeper.

The next day, Bonetti fought like a lion. He strained his shoulder during the game and was unavailable for Chelsea's match against Stoke the following Monday. Fortunately, Chelsea won. The team will meet Leeds for the Cup Final replay at Old Trafford on Wednesday 29th. With Bonetti in goal, I feel that Chelsea's victory is almost assured!

(PMB)

COMMENT

THE SWISS AND CONSERVATION

Between Saint Aubin and Vaumarcus, there used to be a delightful spot, a small creek, dry rocks where one could bask in the sun, calm and limpid waters where I spent many happy hours as a child. Later, the spot was sold and became private property. At the same time, the main road between Yverdon and Neuchatel which skirts the lake was being rebuilt and the engineers designed steps reaching down to the water and a lay-by for motorists. This became a favoured spot for a dip, but, gradually, the water became less transparent, the beach stones more

slimy, and today few people like to bathe there. A bathing spot without a shower can be considered as unhygienic on any major lake in Switzerland. Another personal experience on the Lake of Neuchatel was a brave swim from the beach at Saint Blaise to a dredger that was anchored some four hundred yards away. I had less courage for the return journey and chose the shortest route to the shore, and this led me through a dense cloud of flies and a spawn of dead fish with their silvery bellies facing the sky. As it turned out, I came ashore next to the mouth of a sewer. Lake Geneva is even worse. The stench that was wafted from the water in summer always defeated my attempts to study on the waterfront near to Geneva's famous fountain. These common experiences show how easily new buildings, new estates and the refuse of our industrial society can spoil the enjoyment of nature for anybody.

Environmental neurosis

As we all know, the problem of pollution has become a major preoccupation throughout the industrial world. The salvation of environment has been placed as a national priority by the president of the United States and this year has been christened as The European Conservation Year.

The Swiss, who are blessed with a beautiful country, are naturally most fervent campaigners for the protection of natural environment. Judging from the number of societies devoted to the protection of nature (these societies claim a membership of 250,000) one may deduce that Swiss people are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of the problem. This awareness is not only dictated from higher circles but is finding its seat in the consciousness and the behaviour of every citizen. Schoolchildren, for example, are taken out on spring afternoons by their teachers to comb out pastures and woods from the droppings of picnickers. A complete recruit school was needed to clean the Vingis forest in the Valais and enough was dredged out to fill eleven lorries. Such cases are well publicised and legislation already covers the offence of littering and polluting the environment. Nature advocates are presently pressing for a stiffer legislation, strengthened with prison sentences for the worst offences. Sometimes, the scare of environmental pollution assumes the proportion of a generalised neurosis. A chemical company wanted to build a factory near a village in Schaffhausen, but the Commune would have none of it because the plant would have produced fifteen tons of fumes a day, a comparatively small quantity. Schaffhausen appears to be particularly concerned with its own environment and the electricity industry's decision to build dams on the Rhine at Rheinau and Neuhausen was steadfastly opposed by local nature lovers. They were not only concerned with the uglification of the sites where