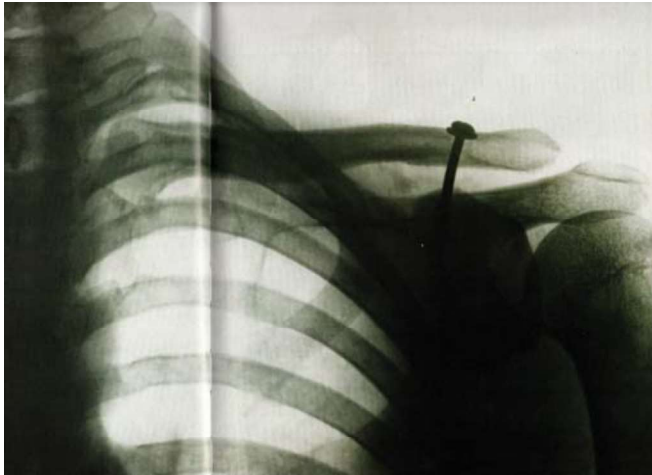


# 'Lion of Vienna' (and Bolton)

Terry Ainsworth, Football Historian & Hospital Volunteer

This story goes back to 1958 and features a man who was known on the green rectangle as the 'Lion of Vienna' Nat Lofthouse, centre forward for Bolton Wanderers and England. On March 12th 1958, Bolton Wanderers were playing a Football League Division One game at White Hart Lane, north London, against Tottenham Hotspur. Tottenham won the game 4-1 with a goal from Johnny Brooks and three from Bobby Smith in front of 22,978 spectators. During the game, Nat Lofthouse suffered a serious injury to his left shoulder, making his appearance against Manchester United at the Wembley Stadium on May 3rd extremely unlikely.



The x-ray of Lofthouses' left shoulder.

I sent this image to a surgeon friend at the RLI, and asked him for his professional opinion and to explain what the huge 'nail' that appears on the x-ray was.

This was his very interesting reply:

Hi Terry,

Thanks for sending this x-ray. The pin is actually a screw with a washer. It is known as a Bosworth screw – I think because it was described by David Bosworth. The screw was used for many years for injuries, which involved a dislocation of the acromio clavicular joint i.e. the joint at the outer end of the collarbone. The aim of the screw (which fixes the collarbone to the coracoid process on the scapula) is to stabilise the collarbone, which has a tendency to rise upwards if the ligaments are damaged in an injury. This is a common injury in rugby players but can happen in anyone where the person falls heavily onto the side of the shoulder.

This method of treatment is a bit old fashioned nowadays – we tend to use flexible materials to stabilise the collarbone now.

I think that the screw was usually left in permanently but it was prone to breaking

Regards

"Take it from me, Ralph Gubbins certainly won't let the side down," said the still injured captain Lofthouse on the morning of Bolton's FA Cup semi-final against Blackburn Rovers at Maine Road, Manchester, on March 22nd 1958. Nat was correct as Ralph scored twice in a scrappy game to beat Rovers, but he would not get a winner's medal even though Bolton pleaded a strong case with the Football Association.

The FA Cup final on May 3rd, 1958 in front of 99,756 spectators was always going to be either a Manchester United fairytale ending, or the match Manchester United lost. Bolton could not win, even though they did, with two goals from England's lion-hearted centre forward, Lofthouse. After the Munich disaster, United had struggled to finish their season, slumping to ninth in the League, but in the FA Cup, a tidal wave of emotion carried them to the final. Manager Matt Busby had somehow managed to survive the Munich crash and the doctors felt he was fit enough to attend the final. The mantle had passed to his assistant, Jimmy Murphy, who had managed to put together a scratch side made up of four of the Busby Babes who had survived Bobby Charlton, Dennis Viollet, Harry Gregg and Bill Foulkes, reserve players and experienced players who he had brought into the club.

Despite the weight of emotion hanging over the final, United were never really in it, especially after Lofthouse scored his first goal in the third minute. His second, in the 55th minute, was highly controversial as Lofthouse bundled goalkeeper Gregg over the line with a hefty shoulder charge. The referee awarded a goal and there was no fairytale ending. Lofthouse, incidentally, hit Gregg with his left shoulder and I often wondered if he felt any pain from his recent injury.

In September 2019, Bolton Wanderers narrowly escaped going into liquidation and being kicked out of the English Football League, a tragedy that people like Nat Lofthouse and Bill Ridding would have found difficult to swallow. Let us all hope that lessons have been learned.



In the dressing room after winning the FA Cup, Bolton Wanderers manager Bill Ridding helps Nat Lofthouse to drink from the cup and the ten stitches in Nat's left shoulder are clearly visible.

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