Did the 1966 World Cup change England?

England's victory in the 1966 World Cup is now a part of the national legend - an almost mythical time when the nation's footballers could rightly claim to be the world's best. But the England of the 1960s was quite a different place from today. How did it change the country and what was it like to live through it?



"They think it's all over... It is now."

These famous words, uttered by the BBC's Kenneth Wolstenholme as Geoff Hurst rocketed in the fourth and final goal in the dying seconds of the World Cup final at Wembley, have become the stuff of legend. Over the past 50 years they have seeped into our national consciousness.

Fifty years ago, however, there was still an innocence about football in England. Back then it was a working- class sport where players and fans were cut from the same cloth, before the 1970s brought in hooliganism and million-pound transfers.

One of the biggest disparities between then and now is footballers' wages. Today's England team pick up more than £1m a week from playing club football, which is topped up by international appearances, not to mention sponsorship deals.



It's the kind of monopoly money that England's World Cup heroes could only dream about. Following their victory over West Germany the players received a £22,000 bonus which they unanimously agreed would be shared equally between each of the 22 members of the squad.

This may seem a bit miserly given their achievement but it's worth pointing out that the top players weren't badly paid, relatively speaking. It was Jimmy Hill who, as the Professional Football Association (PFA) chairman, finally won the battle to have the wage cap abolished, paving the way for Johnny Haynes to become the first £100-a-week player in 1961.

Five years later and this was the average footballer's wage in England – putting them on a par with doctors. It was well above the national average at the time (£20 a week) and more than seven times the average wage of a farm labourer who got paid thirteen quid. Even so, George Cohen, England's unsung right-back in the World Cup final, was earning just £80 a week when a knee injury ended his career three years later.

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If footballers' wages have gone through the roof then so, too, have transfer fees. England star Raheem Sterling joined Manchester City last summer for a reported £49m, making him the second most expensive British player of all time.

Perhaps one of the most fundamental differences today is between the players themselves. Fifty years ago footballers were overwhelmingly working class and much of the England team's character was defined by the years of hard graft many of the players had endured to get where they were. Several members of the squad, including Jimmy Armfield, Ray Wilson and Jack Charlton, had done National Service, while Sheffield-born Gordon Banks – still revered as one of the greatest goalkeepers of all time – was bagging coal at the age of 15 after leaving school.





There was little in the way of glamour. When Norman Hunter joined Leeds United as a teenager back in the early 60s he was tasked with reseeding the pitch and painting the dressing rooms at Elland Road and then, once the groundsman had finished with him, he could go and play football.

Star players weren't looked after like they are in today's world. Most lived in terrace houses or semi-detached homes and those who had their own cars couldn't afford anything flash.

Even when the World Cup was on, England's players could walk down the street without being mobbed by fans. Sir Geoff Hurst has said that on the day after England beat West Germany he was out cutting the grass and cleaning his car.

Contrast this with today's top footballers who can afford to live in mansions and penthouse suites and who probably wouldn't be seen dead mowing their own lawn.