



The Mighty Dynamos of 1945: Soviet Athletic Skills in Spectator Sports

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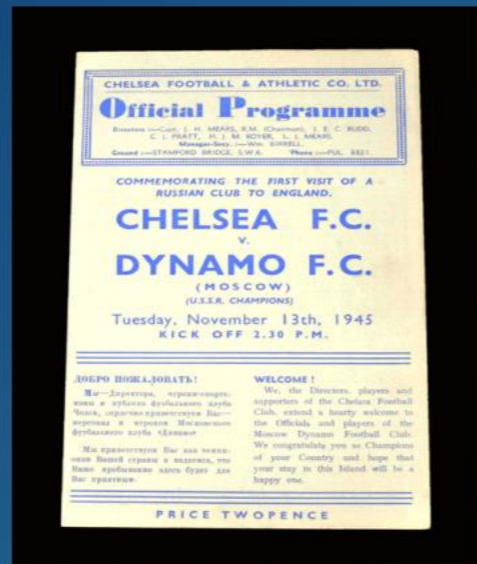
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(L-R) Dynamo keeper Alexei Khomich stops the ball from getting to Cardiff's striker, November 17, 1945.

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Spectator sports have been enjoyed by people across the world for generations, yet have also been used as a political tool by governments to strengthen their nation's soft power on the global stage. This was no different in the USSR, and despite initial doubts over "bourgeois" sporting competitions, Soviet leadership soon came to value the propaganda potential of sports. Through sports like association football (aka soccer), Soviet players proved they were able to go head to head with "professional" athletes in western nations. It is with this backdrop that in 1945 at the end of WW2, the English Football Association invited the champion of the 1945 Soviet Top League, Dynamo Moscow, to come on a tour of Britain and play against a few teams. Coming in as complete unknowns, Dynamo were largely written off by the British media, but by the time they left had won the respect of their British opponents.



Match programme from Chelsea vs Dynamo Moscow November 13, 1945

The Dynamo Sports Society was formed in 1923 in the wake of the civil war and were under the aegis of the NKVD, in the same way that most Soviet sports societies were associated with different arms of the state. Their Moscow-based football department was among the first of the departments to form as the sport was quickly gaining popularity within the USSR as working class people now had more access to sport, typically reserved for the upper classes in Tsarist times. Dynamo became among the top teams in Soviet Russia, and had some admirable performances in the 1930s against foreign opposition. However, Dynamo and other teams were still regarded as amateur by the Soviet government because propaganda promoted the idea that their players were members of the working class who played for the love of sports in accordance with socialist values, hence showing the superiority of the Soviet system. Admitting their players were professionals could've brought that narrative crashing down. Yet despite this, the Anglo-Soviet alliance in WW2 brought about the chance of a lifetime for Dynamo when upon the war's end, were invited to go to Britain to play against their clubs. For Soviet footballers who had held Britain in high regard as the home of both the game and the best players, this was an opportunity too good to refuse.

Dynamo's arrival was met with great interest from many in Britain, but also with doubters in the press, one of whom wrote "Don't expect much from Dynamo. They are only beginners, blue-collar, amateurs." Furthermore, the pre-match warm ups of Dynamo confused the British crowds as this was not commonplace at the time. Furthermore, the Soviet players giving their opponents flowers before the game was found to be embarrassing and awkward by their British hosts, though it was commonplace back in the USSR. Before the first game against Chelsea when Dynamo gifted the flowers to the Chelsea players, one fan called out "What's this, Chelsea's funeral?" The jibe would end up being prophetic. In all four games, Dynamo overwhelmed their opponents with their control of the tempo. Against Chelsea, Dynamo came back from behind to earn a 3-3 draw, which the media said could have been a win for the Soviets if their finishing was better. Against Cardiff City, renowned for their technical play, Dynamo completely annihilated their Welsh opponents 10-1 to the astonishment of the crowds. In the biggest match against Arsenal, Dynamo once more showed their prowess to defeat the Gunners (Arsenal's nickname) 4-3 despite the match being played in heavy fog. The last game was against Scottish club Rangers, where Dynamo dominated once again but ultimately were held to a 2-2 draw thanks to a spirited comeback by Rangers.

The tour was a major success for Dynamo and a propaganda victory for the Soviet Union. By the time Dynamo left, the British press had admitted their mistake as they had underestimated their opponents. The Britons for so long prided themselves on being the best in the world in the game they invented, & now questions were now being asked about how true that statement really was. For the public, despite Dynamo only winning two of the four games, the way in which they played won over many people who were in attendance for the games. Dynamo's team received a hero's welcome when they returned to Moscow, being celebrated for going undefeated in the tour, their goal ratio of 19:9, and for proving that Soviet teams could with and defeat the best teams in capitalist countries. Parallels can be drawn to the 1972 Summit Series between the Canadian and Soviet national hockey teams, where Canadian media went in predicting that the Soviet team would be no match for Canada, who would win with ease. However, the Soviets would turn out to be a match for their Canadian opponents and very well could have won the series if it wasn't for a brilliant comeback by Canada in the last three games. Ultimately, Dynamo Moscow's tour of Britain helped show the qualities of Soviet sport, and the tour also helped the sport continue to grow within the USSR, who joined FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) two years later.

Сегодня играют «Динамо» и «Арсенал»

После матча московских футболистов с «Арсеналом» и особенно с «Кардифф-Сити» интерес к игре динамовцев значительно возрос. Англическая пресса почти откровенно похвалила игру «Динамо» в Южном Уэльсе. Все лондонские газеты помещали заявления тренера команды «Кардифф-Сити» Саржи Скуйперса: «Футболисты являются самой лучшей командой, которую мне когда-либо приходилось видеть. Они достойные соперники любой команде Англии. Команда «Динамо» — это главный механизм, в ее обличии футбольная команда».

Обозреватель «Сандей Экспресс» отмечает, что команда «Динамо» додела счет забивала голки до десяти в игре против команды, которая потерела лишь один гол в течение и размерные первичства этого сезона в Англии. Обозреватель «Обсервер» Болден, указав, что одной из целей приезда динамовцев в Англию было усовершенствовать свое умение играть в футбол, добавляет: «Понимая то, что умение более важно, чем роль учителя».

Сравнительно обозреватели, которые не только имеют характерное в отношении футболистов, как «команду любителей», сейчас проявляют свою ошибку и привносят уверенность.

Большинство английских спортивных обозревателей высказывает мнение, что только английские сборные команды способны успешно справиться с динамовцами.

Сказали в Лондоне на стадионе «Тоттенхэм» команда «Динамо» встретится со старыми и похуже известными английскими футбольными клубом «Арсенал».

«Арсенал» основан 90 лет назад группой любителей футбола — рабочими Коркского арсенала в Вулвиче. Со временем в Хай-Бери (пригород Лондона) клуб построил большой стадион. Этот стадион считается одним из лучших в Лондоне. В 1941 году немецкие футболисты разобрали трибуны стадиона.

Сейчас футболисты «Арсенала» играют на стадионе «Тоттенхэм».

Руководители клубов «Арсенал» всячески стараются усилить команду для игры с московскими футболистами. По их мнению, команда «Арсенала», которая сейчас выигрывает в играх на первенство Англии, действительно сильна для того, чтобы успешно сыграть с командой «Динамо». Руководитель «Арсенала» Джордж Лансон открыто заявил об этом в своей статье, напечатанной в газете «Дейли Экспресс».

По всей видимости, в составе «Арсенала», который сегодня выступит против «Динамо», будут играть лучшие футболисты нескольких лондонских клубов. В частности, возможно выступление знаменитого правого форварда Стелла Митчелла.

Команда «Динамо» играет в своем обычном составе. Начало матча произошло в 3 ч. 15 минут.

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