



Lily Parr

(26th April 1905 – 24th May 1978)

Lily Parr was born in 1905 in St Helen's, Lancashire. She was the fourth of seven children and learned to play both football and rugby from her older brothers. As a child she rejected traditional girls' pursuits, such as cooking and sewing and focused on sport..



Her size (she was 6ft), strength and lack of fear along with her athleticism, meant that by the time she was 13, she was able to hold her own in Lily's football career began in 1919, at 14 years of age when she signed for St Helen's Ladies. In her second match, when her team played against Dick, Kerr's Ladies, a factory team from Preston, she impressed the manager Alfred Frankland so much, he invited her to join his squad. As part of her signing, she was offered a job at the factory, lodgings with a teammate in Preston and 10 shillings for every game she played.

Women's football at this time was hugely popular. During the First World War, when millions of young men had been sent to the front to fight, women's football was used to boost morale, and teams played to raise large amounts of money for charities for disabled servicemen. Dick, Kerr's Ladies were one of the earliest teams and were the first team in which women played in shorts! In her first season at Dick, Kerr's Ladies, winger Lily Parr, scored 43 goals. A local newspaper wrote of her: "There is probably no greater football prodigy in the whole country. Not only has she speed and excellent ball control, but her admirable physique enables her to brush off challenges from defenders who tackle her"

Lily played against both male and female teams and she reputedly had a harder shot than any male player. A male goalkeeper once had to be stretchered off after she'd taken a penalty against him, apparently shouting "Get me to the hospital as quick as you can, she's gone and broken me flamin' arm!"

Lily also played international football and completed tours of France and the US, where she was hailed as "the most brilliant female player in the world." in the press.

Despite the FA banning women's teams from playing on affiliated pitches until 1969, Lily carried on playing football for 32 years, from 1951 at Preston Ladies, scoring over 980 goals throughout her career.

Lily eventually stopped working in the Dick, Kerr & Co. factory and trained as a nurse, working at Whittingham Hospital and Lunatic Asylum. Whilst working at the Hospital, Lily met her partner Mary, and together they bought a house in Preston. Although it was socially unacceptable to be a lesbian at the time and many lesbian couples went to great lengths to conceal their relationships, Lily and Mary refused to hide. Lily is therefore celebrated as an LGBT+ icon as well as a footballing one.

Lily died in 1978 and is buried in St Helens. She was the first woman to feature in the National Football Museum's Hall of Fame in 2002 and in 2019 a life-size statue of her was erected outside the museum.

Lou Englefield, Football V Homophobia

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