

The Spirit Of '66

By **Alexander Baron** - Jul 6, 2015



It has long been a standing joke that England taught the world the game of cricket, and ended up taking lessons from all and sundry. The same is true, or almost true of soccer. In 1966, England hosted the world cup, and beat West Germany in a classic final 4 goals to 2 after extra time. I was three days short of ten years old at the time, and no more enthusiastic about the misnamed beautiful game then than I am now, but there was a definite feeling of euphoria about the match and the tournament. Alas, as the man said, that was as good as it got, as good as it seemed it would ever get, because since then what has England done?

True, English football is followed worldwide, for some strange reason, but England have never played a final since then, have never really come close, indeed in 1974 and 1978, they failed to qualify. Their performance in the last world cup was, well, average. The good

news, for those who care, is that there is now a thriving ladies' game. Given a choice of 22 men dressed in shorts running up and down trying to kick a ball into the back of a net or 22 women doing the same, one would imagine most red-blooded males would choose the latter. For some strange reason that has never been the case, but this year saw the rise of the women's game. The first Women's World Cup was contested only in 1991, and surprisingly, the United States is the pre-eminent team. However, the English women's (women? Heck, ladies!) were well up for it, and qualified for the semi-final in which they played Japan, losing only by a cruel own goal in injury time.



England women's soccer team in February 2015 (Credits : joshjdss)

There was still the play-off for third place though, and England faced Germany (without the West) as in the 1966 final, while Japan went on to lose in a goal swamped final to the USA, which became the first nation to win three world titles. Please, no quips about the finish sounding like a rerun of the Second World War!

The England ladies, or the Lionesses as they are called, finished **in third place** beating Germany 1-0, restoring the pride of 1966. Hopefully as they return home we will see a bit less thuggery and a lot more glamour in what is strangely our national game, although unlike in the men's game, don't expect to see the teams change shirts at full time!



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