

“They think it’s all over!” The famous words - often mistakenly attributed to David Coleman - of Kenneth Wolstenholme (DFC and bar, by the way), who was commentating the 1966 FIFA World Cup final. July will be the 50th anniversary of that English win against Germany.

As a 12-year-old, I was prime for getting excited about such things. I remember well the tension when Germany equalised with a minute of the match to go. Surely England’s victory wasn’t slipping through their fingers? Everything had gone so well... That was followed by disbelief of England’s controversial third goal; had it gone over the line or not? England’s disbelief was metaphorical - the disbelief that leads to realisation and joy. Germany’s disbelief was from the unlikelihood of a goal in the slender margin of that extraordinary volley.

Why bring it up in March, though, when we should be looking at Holy Week and Easter? The ’66 cup final has its parallels. For Jesus and his supporters, everything is going so well: triumphal entry to Jerusalem, daring action in the temple precincts, acclaimed teaching, fending off his (verbal) attackers. Yet it looks like victory in his mission will be upset at the last minute: arrest, trial, betrayal. Jesus has made his mark but an awful equalizer is scored against him; he is crucified. But nonetheless, it is only an equalizer. Extra time produces a comeback that wins the match: resurrection. Power-brokers, 2 - Jesus 4.

But, just like the disbelief of that 1966 third goal, there is disbelief in the resurrection. In both cases there has been “absolute proof” that it didn’t happen. In both cases there has been “absolute proof” that it did happen. What cannot be argued is that both produced a victor.

For the record, I believe in Jesus’ literal resurrection - and in England’s third goal, as it happens! My confidence is in the common sense of star witnesses. For example, despite everyone telling him about Jesus restored to new life, Thomas won’t believe until he has seen the evidence for himself. The next gathering, there is Jesus, holes and all. Thomas has no choice but to accept the truth of the resurrection. (The third goal parallel, incidentally? Roger Hunt stated that, being right there as follow up with Geoff Hurst, he was so clear about the third goal he didn’t bother tapping in the rebound, which he could easily have done if Hurst had missed.)

For us today we have two facts from these much argued events: England did win the football world cup in 1966; Jesus did overcome the world. There is a difference however: English football had its moment in glory; Jesus' victory continues. His followers know that God is reconciling His children. Easter was when God conferred victory on unconditional love, or as Kenneth Wolstenholme put it in his complete quote (referring to the crowd), "They think it's all over! [*bang! in goes the final goal*] It is now!!" Let's celebrate the famous victory again.