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# ONE ARGYLE

**EXCLUSIVE  
EDITION ;  
GD5  
INVESTIGATES**

**SPORT MAGAZINE**

## **Inside the life of pioneering footballer, Jack Leslie**

Step into the inspiring life of Jack Leslie, a Plymouth Argyle footballing sensation who, despite huge racial challenges, rose above them and became one of Argyle's most iconic inspirations.

# **JACK LESLIE**



***Story told by  
George Davison***

# Jack Leslie Spotlight

John Francis Leslie, known as "Jack" Leslie, was a legendary Plymouth Argyle player and pioneering black footballer who was notoriously denied an England cap due to racism in 1925.

Born in Canning Town, London, to a Jamaican boilermaker father and English seamstress mother, Leslie began his footballing career with Barking Town, where he scored over 250 goals and helped win the Essex Senior Cup in 1920, and the London League Premier Division title in 1921.

## **Leslie's background**

Leslie's mixed-heritage background—Jamaican paternal lineage combined with English maternal roots—placed the family within the working-class socioeconomic group of early 20th-century Canning Town, a hub of dock work, gasworks, and immigrant communities amid prevalent poverty and family hardships.



**Leslie attended Hermit Road School, excelling as a champion swimmer and cricketer before leaving at age 14 to become an apprentice boilermaker at the Beckton Gasworks.**

# Jack Leslie

## Footballer

### From East London to the South West

In June 1921, at age 19, Leslie signed with Plymouth Argyle, making his debut later that year. Leslie's position was left mid but after scoring some great goals, he naturally moved to a more attacking position: left forward. After many consistent elite performances and leadership, Leslie was appointed captain of the squad in 1930. As the only black professional player in England at the time, his appointment as captain was a landmark moment in football history.

Moreover, Leslie went on to appear in 400 matches while scoring 137 goals; he established himself as the club's fourth-highest scorer and one of its most accomplished players during a 14-year tenure that ended in 1935.

### Leslie's denial of England glory

In 1925, Plymouth Argyle's Jack Leslie was selected to play for England, which would have made him the national team's first Black player. However, the Football Association (FA) took back the call-up days later after selectors reportedly discovered his heritage; they replaced Leslie with a white player. This racial injustice denied Leslie his place in history for nearly a century until the FA posthumously awarded him an honorary cap in 2023 to acknowledge the "historical wrong."

Due to Jack Leslie's inspiring story, there are campaigns about him, a statue of him outside of Home Park and even books about him!

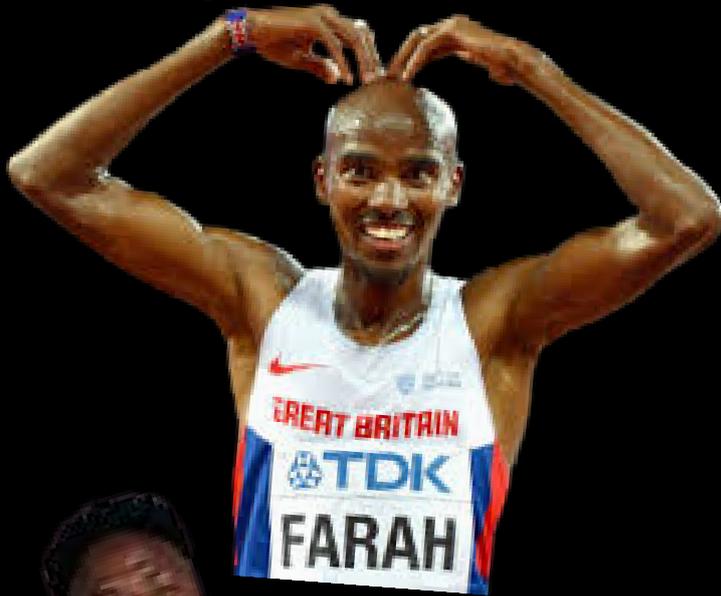


## Other iconic sporting stories of racism / overcoming prejudice:



### 1) Muhammad Ali, the champion boxer.

Growing up in Lexington, Kentucky, Cassius Clay faced discrimination as a Black man living in the segregated South. As the heavyweight boxing champion later known as Muhammad Ali, he was stripped of his title and faced a five-year prison sentence for his refusal to be drafted during the Vietnam War.



### 2) Sir Mo Farah, former British long-distance runner.

Farah faced significant discrimination throughout his life, both in the form of severe human rights abuses and specific incidents of alleged racial harassment. Mo Farah has reported experiencing "shocking" online racist abuse, airport racial profiling, and harassment, stating abuse against black athletes is increasing.



### 3) Vinícius Júnior, Brazilian footballer.

He was targeted with racist abuse figures in Spain, prompting stadium bans and fines. Vini Jr has faced repeated, systematic racist abuse in La Liga, including monkey chants and threats. In 2024, there were prison sentences for perpetrators who racially abused Vini Jr.

All three of these sporting phenomena have faced extreme racial abuse in their lifetime. But they haven't let that stop them - they have become some of the most highly regarded athletes on the planet.

**Although Leslie's story was a long time ago, people like Vini Jr are still facing racism and discrimination today.**

# What the FA Website Says:

## Kick It Out- Campaign

Report to the nearest steward or officer

## The FA equality, diversity and inclusion strategy from 2024-2028

### 3 ways to do this:

- 1) Boosting representation by increasing diversity from everyone.
- 2) Driving inclusion by making everyone involved.
- 3) Tackling discrimination by creating a culture where it is not tolerated.



## The PAFC Website:

Support the 'Kick it Out' campaign

Support Hate Crime Awareness campaigns

Support use of Athletia - an online monitoring tool

Have the ethos 'One Club. One Community. Together against Racism'

Encourage 'See It, Hear it Report it'

Follow the 'On your Side' campaign.



**PAFC recognises that Racism and discrimination still exists in modern football and society. PAFC's response to this - Show racism the red card.**





# What Can You Do?

In our football community, if you feel you are experiencing discrimination, there are lots of things you can do to get support. Firstly, there are places you can go and people you can see – face to face, by telephone or by email – and online websites you can visit.

If you face discrimination of any kind, do not tolerate it. It is NOT okay. But it is okay to speak up and share your feelings with the people you trust. Everyone will listen to you if you speak up.

## **Discrimination is NOT okay!**

If your friend or someone you know is facing discrimination, don't be a bystander. You should speak up for them if they are unable to do so themselves. If you feel uncomfortable talking about what has happened or are unsure what to do, the best thing you can do is to ask someone for help. This may be your coaches, your parents or simply someone you trust.

## **Five Things You Can Do:**

**-Be positive, enthusiastic and passionate**

**-Be welcoming, inclusive and encouraging**

**-Celebrate differences**

**-Don't bystand; encourage reporting**

**-Make football fun for everyone!**

## **Where can you go for...**

### **Information**

- The Plymouth Argyle website
- The FA website
- Jack Leslie books
- BBC Sport

### **Advice / Support**

- NSPCC
- True Vision
- Stop Hate UK
- Kick It Out
- Show Racism the Red Card