

Hussein Hegazi
Dulwich Hamlet's Egyptian King
By
Jack McInroy

Hussein Hegazi was an inside forward for Dulwich Hamlet just prior to the First World War.

By way of introduction, I wrote a brief piece 20 years ago for a new publication, an occasional fanzine really, called the Hamlet Historian, put together by our dear friend Mishi Morath. I later took over from Mishi to become the editor.

My original article stated that Hegazi had died in 1958 – but due to some misinformation I received, I managed to kill him off three years too soon! I concluded the piece with a request for information about any career he might have had in Egypt. As none was forthcoming, I called up the Egyptian Embassy in London to ask them to put me in touch with the Egyptian FA in Cairo. When asked the reason why, I said it was about a little known, amateur footballer from two world wars back. When I mentioned Hegazi's name the man on the other end of the phone said, **“Hussein Hegazi is one of Egypt's greatest ever footballers”**. I nearly fell off the chair.

I am the author of a new book entitled *Hussein Hegazi – Dulwich Hamlet's Egyptian King*. The book, I trust, shows Hussein Hegazi to be just that. The greatest Egyptian player of his generation; certainly, the most popular player; the most decorated player and the most revered player.

Well, on and off over the years, I have been collecting information about this enigma and filling in the gaps myself. Some of the information has kindly been supplied by his relatives, but the majority, of the story has been pieced together by much trawling through Egyptian newspapers (Fortunately in English).

Hegazi was born in the Cairo region in the Victorian era, when Cairo was very up and coming. By the 1910s with its grand boulevards and high-class hotels, Cairo would eventually be mentioned in the same breath as Paris.

Cairo was also a place where Britain held some of its strategic military bases, with 30,000 troops filling the garrisons, and along with routine daily drills, football was played regularly. It was said during the First World War that hundreds of soldiers derived more pleasure from football than anything else in Cairo.

Hegazi's father was a rural aristocrat, a wealthy landowner producing cotton. The fertile soil along the River Nile makes Egyptian cotton the finest in the world. In one report from the mid-1920s, Hegazi was described as a plantation owner, so he clearly inherited the family business.

Hegazi came to England in 1911, to study Engineering at the University College London, and soon joined Dulwich Hamlet, one of the most popular amateur football clubs in London. The club started out as a junior team playing in the local parks, rising to a senior team that reached the semi-final of the FA Amateur Cup just two years before Hegazi showed up. Pa Wilson, the founder, established the club in Dulwich Village in 1893, with the help of some teenagers from the local school and a handful of loose change.

With his dazzling skills and technical wizardry, the young Egyptian centre forward, the first African to play for Dulwich, immediately became the idol of the Hamlet supporters.

Two months into that first season Hegazi caused a bit of a sensation when he left Dulwich to play for Fulham and then returned to Champion Hill the same week! Fulham were in the second flight of English football at the time (which is where they are likely to return at the end of this season) and Hegazi scored on his debut against Stockport County. But he never played for Fulham again, and thus left the amazing record of one game one goal. You can read a fuller account of that saga in the book.

But overnight Hussein Hegazi's name was published, republished, telephoned, wired, and syndicated to untold newspapers around the globe.

Some people have wrongfully stated that Hegazi was the first African to play in the Football League but that isn't true. That honour belongs to Arthur Wharton of Ghana who played for Rotherham and Sheffield United twenty years earlier.

In his three years at Dulwich, Hegazi received glowing reviews. I have chronicled some of them in the book. Bizarrely, despite having a footballing genius in its midst, Dulwich failed to win a single trophy in that time. Instead, in the league competition, the formidable London Caledonians were the Isthmian League champions on all three occasions.

While he was at the club, Dulwich built a new ground and enclosure on Greendale, which is next door to the current Champion Hill ground. Hegazi played in the match that opened the new ground in September 1912.

Two or three years later during the First World War, the ground was requisitioned for Army use. But it was the Hamlet's home ground right up until 1931 when the club moved to Champion Hill.

One of the most interesting games Hegazi played was during Dulwich Hamlet's Easter tour to Holland, in 1913. How about this for a scoreline – **Ajax 1 Dulwich Hamlet 4** – and our hero with two of the goals.

Hegazi continued his studies at St Catharine's College, Cambridge. His freshmen picture was taken on matriculation day, and from his combed back hair to his tip-top two-tone shoes he is ever the swaggering dandy.

He won his 'Blue', the first Egyptian to do so, in what was described as the best varsity match for years. During the 1913/14 season he juggled matches for the University side and Dulwich Hamlet. On one day he played in the morning in Cambridge against the Casuals and made it back to Tufnell Park for Dulwich Hamlet's afternoon game with London Caledonians!

Cambridge's opponents included the Corinthians, the Casuals, Brentford, Birmingham, Ipswich Town, Chelsea and Northampton Town. In the Northampton side that day was the famed Walter Tull. Before the year was out Tull enlisted in the British Army and served in the Footballers' Battalion. He became the first black military officer but was killed in action in 1918.

Hegazi also represented the Corinthians on two occasions.

His final representative games were for the English Wanderers in a tour of the Basque country, northern Spain, against Athletic Club de Bilbao and Racing Club de Irun. Alfonso, the King of Spain, was in attendance at one match, and he was so taken with the skill of the Egyptian, he said he was one of the greatest players he had ever seen, calling Hegazi ***El Rey de Foot-ball*** – The King of Football, an appellation later used for Pelé.

So, a hundred years before anyone had heard of Mo Salah there was an Egyptian King! And he made his name while he was with Dulwich Hamlet.

Hegazi returned to Egypt on the eve of the First World War and as far as I am aware did not revisit Britain's shores. And he jumped straight into the football scene. The most acclaimed Egyptian footballer of the day assembled his own team which he originally titled **Hegazi For Arts** but soon everyone referred to them as **Hegazi's XI**.

These same players also made up the National Sporting Club team. They even had the English lettering - NSC (National Sporting Club) on the shirts. The National is Al Ahly in Arabic. Today, of course, Al Ahly is the most famous football team on the African continent.

Hegazi knew Al Ahly well. He was one of the club's former players before he joined Dulwich Hamlet. Al Ahly was set up for the 'working classes' so to speak and appealed to the masses. Before long Hegazi had become the idol of the hoi polloi in the souks and bazaars of Egypt's capital.

With this ensemble Hegazi toured the provinces promoting the beautiful game across the Nile Delta. As football increased in popularity Hegazi hit the schools and colleges, playing exhibition matches against the youngsters, and attracting a cult following in Cairo. His generosity and his amiable nature also ensured him a reputation far above his peers.

Zamalek were the second most respected team in Cairo. Zamalek had a more aristocratic membership and was made up of those from the top end of society and included Egyptian royalty. So, it is quite strange that the privileged son of a wealthy cotton plantation owner chose not to throw in his lot with the 'Royals' as they are known.

The two teams tried to keep apart, but they eventually met in 1917 for the first time. Hegazi's Al Ahly side beat Zamalek 1-0. In the return a few weeks later the result was a win for Zamalek. This match was full of bad feeling. But no one could possibly have predicted the enmity that would arise between the two clubs and their sets of supporters over the next hundred years.

Throughout the duration of the First World War and beyond, the British Military teams had their own various football leagues but there was also the English-Egyptian Football Association which included native sides. This gave the opportunity for Al Ahly and Zamalek to come up against the best of the British Forces teams. One prestigious cup competition – the Sultan Cup – was set up for this purpose. The new knock-out tournament was a real booster to the servicemen and built up morale. Soon soldiers on leave from neighbouring Palestine were showing up in great numbers to swell the gates.

So, the **Hussein Hegazi XI** were, in a strange way, providing a welcome service to the boys in Port Said and Cairo, and was much akin to what was happening at the requisitioned Champion Hill two thousand miles away.

Below are just some of the Allied Forces teams that Hegazi faced between 1915 and 1930:

British Army, Royal Navy, Royal Air Force, United Services, Fusiliers, ANZAC Provost Corps, Abbassia Garrison, Citadel Garrison, Royal Army Pay Corps, Scottish Rifles, GCHQ, Royal Scots Greys, Middlesex Regiment, Royal Garrison Artillery, King's Regiment, Sherwood Foresters, 8th King's Royal Irish Hussars, Royal Ulster Rifles, 5th/6th Dragoon Guards, Engine Repair Depot-British Aviation, Dismounted Troops, Armoured Cars Coy, Pack Brigade, Hampshire Regiment, Highland Light Infantry King's Own Scottish Borderers, Leicestershire Regiment, 1st Light Brigade, 12th Lancers and Green Howards.

Many of the scores are recorded in the book. Hegazi and his band of men were ever in demand. His earliest games against his country's former occupiers dated back to when he was a young teen in the early 1900s. So many rival opponents, both players and battalions, had come and gone, many having participated in the greater game that was the Great War, some sacrificing their lives for the greater good. Yet Hegazi remained a constant.

One of his most memorable matches was the Sultan Cup Final in 1921. By this time Hegazi had switched allegiance and was now captain of his former rivals Zamalek. A tremendous cup run saw his side conquer six British military teams: **G.C.H.Q., Royal Scots Greys, Middlesex Regiment, Royal Garrison Artillery, the King's Regiment** and the **Second Battalion Sherwood Foresters.**

Cup-holders, the **Sherwood Foresters**, were unbeaten all season, but Zamalek scored twice to no reply, both goals coming from the gifted feet of Hussein Hegazi. After the final whistle, Hegazi became the first Egyptian to hold the coveted trophy aloft.

And then the same two teams contested the following year's final, which Zamalek again won, by three goals to one. Hegazi presented another master-class and scored Zamalek's all-important third goal

Prior to the World Cup Finals which began in 1930, the Olympic Games football tournament was the premier footballing event among the nations. For the Antwerp Olympics of 1920, Hussein Hegazi chose the Egyptian squad to travel to Belgium. Sadly, the competition was set up as a knockout competition and Egypt went out after just one game!

The Egyptian Football Association was established in 1921 with Hussein Hegazi as one of its seven founding members. Another addition to a remarkable curriculum vitae. Undoubtedly, one of the foremost authorities on football he was elected as the technical adviser to the Egyptian FA and to the Egyptian national team.

For the 1924 Olympic Games, player-coach Hussein Hegazi, captained Egypt in both their tournament matches. The 3-0 victory over Hungary, at the Stade de Paris, was nothing short of sensational.

Hegazi's goal made him the oldest footballer to score in the Olympic Games. A record which remained intact for 88 years, until another veteran, Ryan Giggs, scored for Great Britain in the London Olympics of 2012.

Overnight Hussein Hegazi's name was tweeted, retweeted, liked, shared and globally linked to untold websites on the internet.

Hegazi left Zamalek and spent a season with Sekka Railways, Egypt's oldest club side. Then he transferred back to Al Ahly. Amazingly all his fans went with him. Which was true throughout his career in Egypt, when he left a club to join another the fans followed him to the new club. Now, I would think this was unique in global football.

I found this quote in an Austrian newspaper after one of their top sides visited Egypt to play Hegazi's XI in 1925:

“Hussein Hegazi is the idol of the people. In the minds of the fans he is a legend of legends who cannot be defeated. After the match the most popular footballer in Egypt is surrounded by supporters waving their shawls. When Hegazi is not included in the team there is always great disappointment”.

“The idol of the people!” I'm not sure about this, but it was almost as if he'd attained a Pharaoh-like position of footballing immortality. Pharaoh Hegazi, perhaps. King of Egypt.

In 1928, there was a bit of an unsavoury incident at Al Ahly – and you can read about this in the book – which resulted in Hegazi leaving Al Ahly to return to Zamalek for a second and final time. It was there that he would see out the last couple of seasons of his long career. A career in which he won 16 major trophies.

One of Hegazi's final games, on Boxing Day 1930, turned out to be one of the most memorable clashes of his twilight years. Zamalek against his old club Al Ahly. The pulsating match ended in a 3-3 draw. Hegazi was a key figure in a tremendous second half comeback. With his side trailing 3-1 it was Hegazi's slide-rule pass which fed another old-timer Tewfik Abdallah, who forced his way through to score. Then Hegazi, his eye not dim, nor his natural force abated, levelled the score with just fifteen minutes remaining. You never lose it.

With such a vast knowledge of football and a lifetime of experience and supervision, he was given a role as a consultant in the Egyptian Government's Ministry of Social Affairs. Here he played an active role, cooperating with NGOs with vested interests in the sport. He was an adviser to the Egyptian FA and continued to influence the administration of the game in Egypt. In 1956, he was appointed Director of Sports Affairs. But to many in his homeland, Hussein Hegazi was simply the 'Father of Egyptian Football'.

In his old age he began to experience ill-health and spent some time in hospital. In 1959, he featured on the front page of the Egyptian Mail. Jostling alongside headlines of the principal statesmen of the day – President Nasser, Winston Churchill, Premier Khrushchev – is a picture of a hoary headed Hussein Hegazi. Beneath the photo the caption: ***Dulwich Hamlet Has Not Forgotten Hegazi.***

On discovering their old wizard was poorly, the famous South London Club sent their best wishes via the Cairo newspaper. Almost fifty years had passed since one of Dulwich

Hamlet's finest players first set foot on the Champion Hill turf (or mud) and he was still fondly remembered. Hegazi did reply to his old club, but the letter has sadly been lost.

A further two years passed, and as it must to all men, death came to Hussein Hegazi. He died in October 1961.

Today, to get to the current Champion Hill ground, you have to come into Edgar Kail Way. Well, the legendary Edgar Kail was not the first Hamlet great to have a street named after him. Following Hegazi's death, the road where he lived was renamed Hussein Hegazi Street in his honour.

During Hegazi's playing days, the main two Egyptian club sides he played for – Al Ahly and Zamalek – totally dominated the domestic game. And they have done so ever since. Al Ahly were officially the top African club side of the twentieth century. And Zamalek came second.

Hegazi's influence on Egyptian football is incalculable. Through his back-and-forth transfers between the two Cairo clubs, and the supporters switching clubs with him, he almost single-handedly caused the fierce rivalry and conflict that continues to this day. Hegazi is without doubt one of the key men that shaped Egyptian football.

Just to finish - In 1922, when Hegazi was at the top of his powers there was the amazing discovery at Luxor of Tutankhamen's tomb. The boy king's beautiful treasures and remains, which had been hidden for centuries, were finally unearthed for all to appreciate.

Obviously, Tutankhamen is on an entirely different level to Hussein Hegazi, but I would like to draw a parallel. For many years, Hegazi's footprints have been concealed by the drifting sands of time. And we have to admit that Dulwich Hamlet has forgotten Hegazi. I trust – with the aid of our little book published by the Hamlet Historian – that the marvellous riches of Hussein Hegazi, Dulwich Hamlet's Egyptian King, may be uncovered by a new generation to appreciate.

Biography

Jack McInroy has been following the fortunes of Dulwich Hamlet Football Club for the past four decades. He is the author of **The Story of a Season: Dulwich Hamlet 1919/20** and has written many articles on the history of the club for the **Hamlet Historian** magazine. The **bronze memorial to Lorraine 'Pa' Wilson** at Champion Hill was commissioned by Jack and paid for using funds raised from sales of the magazine. As well as playing the role of Editor Jack also published the two books on the Hamlet's war dead (by Steve Hunnisett and Roger Deason) under the Hamlet Historian banner. Read more about the history of the club at www.thehamlethistorian.blogspot.com



Dulwich Hamlet 1912



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY XI. 1914.

A. S. EDGE

H. PATERSON

J. S. F. MORRISON

F. J. FARNHAM

M. WOOSNAM

J. H. FOSDICK

D. ST. G. K. BOSWELL

R. W. R. MILLER

A. W. FOSTER

H. HEGAZI

R. H. CALLENDER

SPAREMAN:

R. G. MORRISON

ABSENT THROUGH ILLNESS:

L. GJERS

LINESMAN:

O. D. WINTERBOTTOM

REFEREE:

P. R. HARROWER