**WALKING FOOTBALL: Veterans who thought playing days over back in action**

**Match of the grey time as oldies return to the pitch**

By Samuel Balls

IT WAS the legendary Liverpool manager, Bill Shankly, who famously said that football was more important than a matter of life and death. It is a quote which transcends the game itself and epitomizes the fervour with which so many play the sport.

But for one walking football player, it is a sentiment which hit home four years ago. Alan Botten, 67, suffered a heart attack in 2010 and plays the new walking football phenomenon every week as part of his recovery.

Walking Football received unprecedented interest ever since a Barclays advert about the sport hit our television screens in July, and the retired architect has been galvanized by the game since joining Chelmsford Walking Football Club two years ago.

The Spurs fan was playing in the South East Regional Finals at the Chelmsford Sports and Athletics Centre on Sunday and revealed his doctor has no qualms with his re-ignited love for the game.

**Different**

However, it could have been so different for the Great Baddow resident after his heart attack scare.

He said: "The doc says as long as you get used to the back of your neck you're fine. You don't expect it and then one Saturday morning it comes on. I couldn't get out of bed."

"I thought it was just indigestion but it wasn't. I had the pains in my arm and everything else."

"I thought this about two years ago, and it's been good - it keeps you moving."

Chelmsford WFC were competing against a Folkstone outfit and a team from Wimbledon for the inter-county title, playing each side in an afternoon filled with pensioner passion.

Despite some hard football, Folkstone emerged victorious in the Football United-organised event, winning all four of their encounters.

Chelmsford WFC were worthy runners up, having trumped Wimbledon 9-4 on aggregate over two games. The venue was paid for by the FA.

Team organiser Bob Willis said: "The weekday meetings are recreational and light-hearted, but when we play in tournaments such as this, everybody gets ultra-competitive."

The club meets for sessions on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 11am and noon at the Chelmsford Sports and Athletics Centre, and encourages new members over 50 to join them for £3.50 a go.

The rules are similar to the conventional version of the game, save for fact that running and slide tackles are not allowed.

It provides senior members of the community who may have retired from regular football, or who perhaps suffer from a mobility problem, to play again.

The slower pace of the game allows players to enjoy a less frenzied spectacle with like-minded people more accustomed to the breath-taking brilliance of Jimmy Greaves than Wayne Rooney.

"I wouldn't say I model my game on Greavesy, but he was certainly my hero as a boy," Mr Botten said. "I would probably criticise it, but it keeps both feet on the floor so he isn't technically running."

**What you say**

- **Bob Willis, 61, Broomfield, self-employed.** Defender, Spurs fan, models his game on: Alan Gilzean - "We originally only played on Tuesdays, but such was the level of interest that we now play on Thursdays, too. There's about 25 of us. The Barclays advert generated a lot of interest in the game."

- **Mick Andrews, 68, Wickford, retired engineer.** Striker, Arsenal fan, models his game on: Dennis Bergkamp - "Everybody's really keen, I love playing."

- **Phil Taylor, 67, Tiptree, retired Ford employee.** Striker, Liverpool fan, models his game on: Kevin Keegan - "It's very enjoyable and keenly competitive. It's very counter-cultural to resist the urge to run."

**SLOW MOTION:** Adam Field (yellow) walked down by Ross Winter

**DRIBBLER:** Alan Botten

**FOOT IN:** Steve Mundin goes in for a tackle

**COME ON YOU SPURS FAN:** Our reporter Sam is put through his paces by more experienced players