

On This Day Legendary Goalkeeper Lev Yashin Would've Turned 90

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Lev Yashin **Igor Utkin / TASS**

Lev Yashin was born in Moscow exactly 90 years ago. He would go on to become the most recognized goalkeeper in history and the most famous Russian athlete of the 20th century. Yashin started off from humble beginnings.

Both of his parents worked in factories in Moscow when he was growing up. The family was evacuated from the capital during World War II. After the war, the family moved back to Moscow and the young Lev would also begin to work at a factory, but spent his free time playing football and hockey. After being drafted into the army at the age of 18, he was spotted by a football scout and invited to join the youth academy of Dynamo Moscow in 1949.

He would stay at the club for more than two decades until his retirement in 1971. In his first few years at Dynamo, Yashin was unable to break into the first team, so he played as a goalkeeper for the club's ice hockey team instead, going on to win a bronze medal in the U.S.S.R. championship in 1953. Soon after, he secured his place as the first-choice goalkeeper for the Dynamo football team and quickly became a club legend, winning five championships

of the U.S.S.R. and three cups in quick succession.

Together with the Soviet international football team, Yashin won the first-ever European championship in 1960 that was hosted by France. He also helped the U.S.S.R. win gold medals at the 1956 Olympics and reached the quarterfinals of the World Cup in 1958 (Sweden) and 1962 (Chile). At the 1966 World Cup in England, Yashin captained the Soviet team to a fourth-place finish — its highest achievement.

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Nicknamed “the black spider” for his all-black uniform and incredible reflexes, he quickly became known as the best goalkeeper in the world. He was commended for his skills, athleticism and innovations to the position of goalkeeper, such as organizing defenders, rising up to meet attacking forwards and launching quick counterattacks.

He played against other football legends including Pele, Bobby Charlton, Eusebio and Franz Beckenbauer, and stopped 151 penalty kicks in his career — more than any other goalkeeper in FIFA history. Yashin died in Moscow on March 20, 1990, two days after receiving the prestigious Hero of Socialist Labor award.

He is the only goalkeeper to have ever been awarded the prestigious Ballon D’Or prize (in 1963) for best footballer. He is widely recognized as the best goalkeeper of the 20th century.

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