

In the centre of this photograph, England footballer Chloe Kelly is in the penalty area, around three yards from goal. Wearing the all-white strip, she is leaning back, her blonde ponytail in the air, prodding the ball with her right foot towards the goal.

The scene, captured during the UEFA Women's European Championship final in 2022, is crowded. To the left of Kelly, her team-mate Lucy Bronze watches hopefully. To the right of the ball, a Germany defender, standing in front of the goal, scrambles to get something, anything, in her way. In the background, you can make out some of the 87,192 fans – a record attendance for a women's international fixture. Wearing reds and whites, they stand, expectantly.

This image, capturing the split-seconds before the ball rolled into the net, isn't just a photograph of a goal. It symbolises so much more. It's a *decisive moment*, one that reverberated far beyond Wembley Stadium; that tore up the rulebook and changed the landscape of women's sport forever.

My name is Marc Aspland, the Chief Sports Photographer for The Times & Sunday Times, and I took this photograph of Kelly in July 2022, who, minutes later, would be celebrating winning a major trophy for her country, and sparking a sporting revolution for women and girls all over the country.

Photographs like this make me think of Henri Cartier-Bresson, regarded as the father of modern photojournalism. His book, published in 1952 was titled, *Images a la Sauvette* (The Decisive Moment), and this phrase alone has had a lasting effect on generations of photographers, me included.

The decisive moment can be attributed to almost every genre of photography; from acclaimed landscape photographer Ansel Adams, Moonrise Hernandez to Neil Liefer's iconic picture showing Muhammad Ali taunting the fallen Sonny Liston and shouting, "get up and fight, sucker".

Every day, I am expected by my Sports Editor to capture a moment which tells the whole story of a sports event. Of course, he wants me to capture the winning goals and key talking points, but he also demands that I sum up the 90 minutes of a match in a single image: by capturing the decisive moment that I believe perfectly reflects an entire game. Or even a whole tournament.

Cartier-Bresson wished to remain silent, and even be an unseen observer of the world around him. Armed now with our mirrorless and silent Canon EOS R3 cameras we too capture the world silently, yet the advances in modern camera technology could not be more far removed from those SLR 35mm black and white, single-shot days of Cartier-Bresson. While our technologies are worlds apart, our objectives remain the same: to capture a decisive moment.

Sports photography encapsulates the essence of a picture being able to paint a thousand words. My writing colleagues at The Times can watch replays and compose their beautifully written prose long before deadlines – but a photographer has 1/2000th of a second - a blink of an eye is usually 1/10th of a second - to capture a moment which defines a sporting event.

There are no action replays for sports photographers, and when you miss the vital moment, it's gone forever. Capturing these decisive moments also define us as photographers.

When looking at the best photographers' work, you'll often see that the timing has captured perfectly a decisive moment. Whether a fleeting smile from the bride to her new

husband, the cloud formation at dawn over a vast landscape, a bird of prey eyeing its next meal, or the swagger captured of a model on a catwalk – they're all decisive moments.

Photography lets us freeze a moment in history which is so personal and timeless. We all have photographs of our children when they were young which immediately take us back to a time and place, these too are decisive moments, suspended in time.

Which leads me to this balmy summer afternoon on 31 July 2022, when the final of the UEFA Women's European Championship between England and Germany took place at Wembley.

The Lionesses met eight-time winners Germany in what would become a watershed moment for women's sport. A 79th-minute equaliser for Germany forced the game into extra time with the word every England fan dreads – 'penalties' – looming large.

The atmosphere and emotion among the record crowd was remarkable, and in the 110th minute a toe-poke from Kelly, her first international tournament goal, banished 56 years of hurt, bringing football home.

A toe-poke can be a decisive moment too. It shows Kelly stretching every sinew in her right leg to nudge the ball over the line to win a tournament on home soil and change the game forever.

I've lost count of the number of football matches I've covered over the years, and goal pictures can look very similar.

In fact, I am not a great fan of the term or pictures of, 'person-kicks-ball' but in an instant, they tell a story of the victors and the vanquished. I only have one football picture on the walls at home. It is the classic frame as Geoff Hurst completed his hat-trick in extra time with his thunderous left-footed winner to seal England's memorable victory in 1966... against West Germany. A classic 'decisive moment'!

Another I have is from The Times archives taken in 1954 showing Roger Bannister as his chest touches the ribbon to run the first sub-four-minute mile. Taken by staff photographer William Horton who was standing in the middle of the cinder track using a 5'x4" glass plate camera. It defines a moment in history which has become iconic.

I would not dream of classing my work alongside Cartier-Bresson, but Kelly's simple toe-poke became a decisive moment, one 1,600th of a second that changed everything, and revolutionised women's sport for an entire nation.

This moment doesn't just represent a win. It shows a triumph. For Chloe Kelly, for her team-mates, for England, and for women and girls everywhere.