

FOOTBALL'S LOST DECADE

Contrary to what Sky might have you believe, football existed before 1992. In fact the 1980s saw cultural and political change that shaped the modern game. But while football wasn't cool, some of us still loved it. **JON HOWE** looks back with nostalgia at the decade that football forgot...

A game you might have forgotten

September 29, 1984

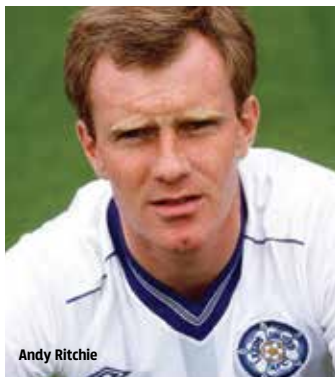
Leeds United 6 Oldham Athletic 0

In a decade that saw Leeds and Oldham lock horns more often than Del Boy and Rodney, it was unusual to see anything other than a dour contest settled by a single goal in one team's favour. But this was one of those rare occasions when there was daylight between the warring Pennines-spanning clubs.

Leeds had startled their beleaguered fan base with a four-match winning streak at the start of the 1984/85 season, with Tommy Wright in particular bagging goals for fun. Dreams of a famous return to the top flight, however, were grounded in a more believable reality a few weeks later as three straight defeats quickly followed.

Even during the hedonistic reverie of those opening four wins Elland Road crowds had failed to breach 18,000. As an indifferent public refused to be drawn from a prolonged sulk, so it was that just 14,290 witnessed a famous victory that whet the appetite for another forlorn stab at a promotion push.

Although veteran Peter Lorimer showed all his skill and nous in controlling the game – on the 22nd anniversary of his debut in 1962 – he didn't get on the scoresheet. It was Lorimer's cross that



allowed Tommy Wright to dispatch a back-post header in the fourth minute, but it was not until the hour that Leeds added a second, and duly put the game to bed with a riotous five goals in the last half-hour. John Sheridan and centre-half Andy Linighan added two of those and, in between, Andy Ritchie bagged a hat trick, graciously presented when Lorimer gave up his normal penalty-taking duties to enable Ritchie to net his third.

True to 1980s form, Leeds failed to capitalise on their early season promise and the campaign petered out in a familiar realisation of the truth.



Anyone remember... Andy Linighan?

Most people remember Andy Linighan for his FA Cup-winning header for Arsenal against Sheffield Wednesday in 1993, when he was a popular member of Arsenal's squad and George Graham's military-style back four. Sadly, for Leeds fans the memory of Linighan is of an impossibly tall Bambi-like centre-half riddled by awkwardness and flustered blunders; think of a Lubomir Michalik for the 1980s and you're halfway there.

So while other clubs later enjoyed the fruits of a more consistent performer who undoubtedly improved with age, Leeds, somewhat typically, found themselves as guinea pigs for Project Linighan.

Bought for £25,000 as a 22-year-old from Hartlepool in the summer of 1984, the six-foot-four defender was ever-present in his first season at Leeds. He carried on in a similar vein until Eddie Gray was sacked and replaced by Billy Bremner, and in January 1986 Linighan became one of many players to take the curiously well-trodden path between Elland Road and Boundary Park when he signed for Oldham.

In truth, it was a decision he is unlikely to regret as relative success there led to fruitful spells at Norwich and Arsenal culminating in European and domestic cup honours.

Nothing happened in the 1980s, apart from... **Casual Culture**

Unparalleled, as a fashion movement attached to football rather than a musical trend, the "Casual Culture" of the mid-1980s was largely unrecognised by the London fashion press. They were slow to pick up on a youth movement that, rather than being associated with football violence, actually did a lot to end it as it later evolved into dance culture.

Starting predominantly in the North West with "Scallies" from Liverpool and "Perry Boys" from Manchester, Leeds fans became known as "Dressers" as they slowly ditched their scarves and colours, and the pubs, high streets and terraces became more of a catwalk than a battleground.

Tight jeans, cords or Farahs, Pringle knitwear, tennis shirts, cagoules, pristine white trainers and a "wedge cut" haircut were more important than the football itself. Expensive brands, with cheaper alternatives or black market fakes for those on a lesser income, meant Fila, Lacoste, Tacchini and Ellesse were the only foreign names being talked about on the terraces.

The South Stand at Elland Road was a proliferation of bright turquoise Patrick cagoules as young fans flushed by camaraderie and independence revelled in the joys of football-supporting and fast-changing fashion. At a time that mainstream history records as the darkest the game has seen, football was fashionable only to the fashionable.



Photo from the book
Wish You Were Here.