

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

October 14, 1985

Full Members Cup: Manchester City 6 Leeds United 1

Take one Second Division team in the middle of a decidedly mixed period of form and add a hefty sprinkling of discontent among the squad at the recent sacking of their manager. Mix in a liberal serving of indifference from partaking in a pointless cup competition and you have a prize entry in the "Most Feeble Leeds United Performance Ever" competition.

From a time when there was some pretty stiff competition, that is quite an accolade for this manager-less Leeds side. They were reeling from the sacking of their "surrogate father" Eddie Gray, and travelled over the Pennines for a midweek encounter with Manchester City in the opening group stage of the Full Members Cup.

It was a competition that simply never caught the imagination of the footballing public, despite later re-incarnations as the Simod Cup and the Zenith Data Systems Cup.

Dreamt up to fill the void left by English clubs being banned from Europe, despite that ban only actually affecting three or four teams a season, the Full Members Cup promised a visit to the Twin Towers of Wembley. However, the meagre crowds it attracted suggested most fans expected the small print to include a clause



Mervyn Day



Lyndon Simmonds

removing that dangling carrot should anyone still be interested at the final stage.

Leeds entered this game having won four and lost four of their opening 12 games, an inconsistent spell that had proved too frustrating for the Leeds board. Despite the indifferent form, the Leeds squad and fans were stunned when manager Eddie Gray was sacked and protests quickly followed. Prior to setting off for Maine Road the squad was addressed by chairman Leslie Silver but it is common knowledge that the players were somewhat less than motivated for this particular game.

In front of just 4,029 at an echoey Maine Road, Leeds capitulated from the beginning, with a Peter Lorimer penalty all they had to show for a depressing evening. Caretaker manager Peter Gunby fielded a strong side – including Mervyn Day, John Sheridan, Ian Baird and Scott Sellars – and even substitute Lyndon Simmonds (making only his second appearance) was recently quoted as saying he simply didn't want to come on.



Anyone remember... Gary Hamson?

Normally a left-back, Gary Hamson played in the number four shirt in this game, taking his place in midfield, and he was bought from Sheffield United for £140,000 in 1979, with a reputation as a promising and versatile rising star.

Like many players of the era, though, he was a victim of indifferent form and the chastening experience of playing before the baying and frequently disgruntled Elland Road crowd.

Injury also hampered Hamson's progress as he suffered a damaging knee injury in the last game of 1981/82 at West Brom which would sideline him for eight months. Ironically, he had just enjoyed his most sparkling moment in a Leeds shirt, when his rasping drive set up the famous 2-1 comeback win over Brighton. But when he returned from injury, Leeds were firmly ensconced in the Second Division, though he was loyal to the cause and eventually left in July 1986.

Nothing happened in the 1980s, apart from... **The Heysel Disaster**

Marked down as the “darkest hour in UEFA history”, the Heysel Disaster of May 29, 1985 elevated English football’s pariah status to new levels, and prompted Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher to proceed with her mission to rid the world of “the English disease”.

An hour before kick-off in the European Cup final between Liverpool and Juventus in the 55-year-old Heysel Stadium in Brussels, a section of Liverpool fans started throwing missiles and charging at Juve fans in a “neutral” enclosure to their right. Fleeing Italian and Belgian fans were crushed together against a perimeter wall which subsequently collapsed, killing 39 fans and injuring 600.

Fearing further violence if the final was postponed, UEFA proceeded with the game even though rioting was ongoing. Juventus won 1-0 with a Michel Platini penalty.

In the aftermath of the game an investigation divided the blame for the disaster between the policing, inadequate fencing and a stadium in disrepair. This was in addition to the Liverpool fans who had thrown lumps of concrete kicked loose from the crumbling terraces.

Fourteen Liverpool fans were found guilty of involuntary manslaughter and English clubs received a blanket ban from European competitions, which was eventually lifted in 1990.

In 1994 the Heysel Stadium was completely re-built and is now the King Baudouin Stadium.



How the Heysel Stadium looked in 1985.