

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 1, 1983
Shrewsbury 5 Leeds United 1

The 1980s was a decade when Leeds fans were almost constantly re-assessing what was their nadir, and this was particularly true in the 1983/84 season.

Many expected an immediate return to the top flight, but at least the 1982/83 season had seen some encouraging signs during a respectable campaign. What followed was a litany of horror shows for those of a nervous disposition, which included almost everyone that hadn't already turned their backs on the impoverished club.

Eddie Gray's men visited Shrewsbury Town's home of Gay Meadow for game three of what turned out to be a five-match losing streak. Furthermore, if anybody felt this humiliation on the banks of the River Severn was as grim as life got in the early months of 1983/84, they were in for a rude awakening, as the following game saw Leeds lose 1-0 at home in the League Cup to Chester City, the league's 92nd-placed club.

Although able to field the experience of David Harvey, Frank Gray and Kenny Burns, Eddie Gray perhaps learnt more from this

game about recent signings such as John Donnelly and Tony Brown and youngsters Martin Dickinson and Mark Gavin.

But in truth, searching for positives was something of a futile exercise as Leeds' famous game-to-game inconsistency was extended further to include wildly contrasting halves of each game. For the third game running Leeds took the lead with an Andy Ritchie strike, but then capitulated. On this occasion the lead was taken safely to the break, but the invigorating half-time cuppa appeared to have been swapped for jam roly-poly and custard followed by a course of strong antihistamines as Leeds rolled over obligingly for the second 45 minutes.

A hat trick from midfielder Paul Petts was embellished further with strikes from Alan Brown and Colin Robinson as the Shrews ground their famous opponents into the dirt. Searching desperately for solace, Leeds fans noted that on a bizarre day in the Second Division Brighton beat Charlton 7-0, Fulham defeated Swansea 5-0 – while Carlisle, Newcastle and Sheffield Wednesday all scored four. But there was no escaping where the real headlines were made.



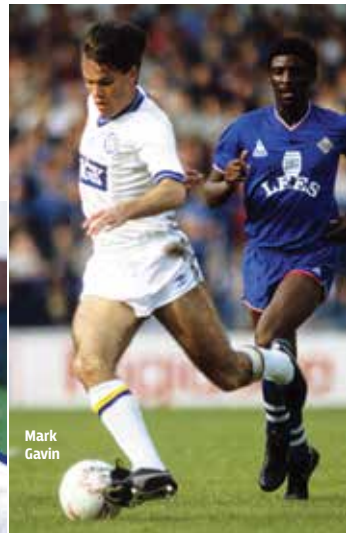
Andy
Ritchie



Kenny
Burns



Martin
Dickinson



Mark
Gavin



Anyone remember... Tony Brown?

If you do remember Tony Brown, chances are they won't be good memories. This is not necessarily down to his performances, but that they encompassed a period of little optimism for the club.

Brown was a late-starter in pro' football with Eddie Gray signing the Bradford-born centre-half from Northern Counties East League side Thackley in March 1983, demonstrating in one swift transaction how financially-stricken we were. Brown was thrust straight into the first team at the start of the 1983/84 season but was substituted for midfielder Andy Watson in the second half of the trouncing at Shrewsbury.

After that, Brown never cemented a regular place, ending with a total of 24 appearances for the club. While he went on to have a decent career at Doncaster, Scunthorpe and Rochdale, Leeds fans saw Brown replaced by the signing of Andy Linighan, and the stark realisation that life wasn't about to get better any time soon.

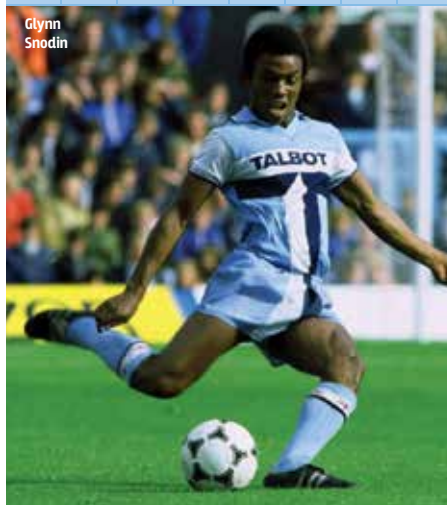
Nothing happened in the 1980s, apart from... **Evolving kit design**

The 1990s was the decade where football kit designers truly lost their minds meaning the 1980s, in comparison, was a relatively disaster-free zone. Indeed, it was marked more significantly by the rise and influence of shirt sponsorship; Coventry's home shirt design incorporating the bold 'T' of Talbot cars being a case in point.

Admiral were in decline as a kit manufacturer having dominated the previous decade, and this was demonstrated by their horrific chocolate brown Coventry away kit and the shoulder piping in which England dismally failed in the 1982 Spain World Cup.

At Leeds it was to be a decade under the governance of Umbro. It ended in brilliant Top Man white, but started with relegation in pinstripes, a lesson clearly forgotten by the time they were re-introduced in 2003/04 for the navy blue away kit. Elsewhere, kits saw the first flourishes of excess – with flashes on arms here, shadow patterns there and obscenely tight shorts pretty much everywhere.

While Brighton might have unwisely considered striped shorts the natural extension to their shirts, and Newcastle experimented with a half pinstripe/half broad stripe shirt, the 1980s did also deliver some kits considered classics, such as Crystal Palace's diagonal stripe, and Southampton's Keegan and Channon-era Rank Xerox number.



Glynn
Snodin

