

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

May 3, 1980:

Leeds United 2 Manchester United 0

Ask most Leeds fans if Kevin Hird, Derek Parlane or Jeff Chandler made any significant contribution to Leeds United's post-Revie travails, and you would most likely be met by a flurry of four-letter words. However, they all featured in the starting XI of this famous victory at the end of the crushingly disappointing 1979/80 season.

With Manchester United level on points with top-of-the-table Liverpool, they knew a win was essential in this final game showdown. A game with such mammoth party-sabotaging potential couldn't be ignored by the Leeds faithful. Add another opportunity to have a pop at comic-book villains Gordon McQueen and Joe Jordan and the 39,625 crowd was nearly 24,000 up on the previous home game, as a season of renewed hope ended in a sorry 11th-placed finish.

Leeds started hungrily, eager to create a party of their own, and just as news emerged that Liverpool had gone ahead at Anfield, the paper plates and sausage rolls were well and truly out as Derek Parlane dispatched a Carl Harris cross to send Elland Road wild on 12 minutes. Manchester United never coped with flying wingers Harris and Arthur Graham,



Jeff Chandler

Kevin Hird

with Brian Flynn working tirelessly and Paul Madeley, on his 700th appearance, marshalling with authority in defence.

Both sides went close in a more even second half, but the game and title race were over as a contest when Kevin Hird, in possibly his most effective game in a Leeds shirt, struck home a 70th-minute penalty after Gordon McQueen had handled another Harris cross.



Derek Parlane



Anyone remember... Derek Parlane?

It wouldn't be Leeds United in the 1980s without a big-name striker ending up being an almighty flop, and that was certainly the case with Derek Parlane.

Having racked up an impressive tally of league titles, European trophies, domestic cups and Scottish international caps while at Glasgow Rangers, not to mention over 100 goals in all competitions, the 27-year-old arrived at Elland Road in a £160,000 deal in March 1980 as Jimmy Adamson aimed to reign in a faltering season that had started with a European campaign. Although Parlane scored on his debut in a 2-0 win at home to Southampton, injury and form led to a largely unsuccessful spell at Elland Road. He chalked up just 10 goals in 53 appearances, and featured only once after relegation in 1982. Parlane eventually undertook a nine-month loan deal at a club in Hong Kong – a move that does not traditionally herald a development in a professional footballer's career.

That said, free of the suffocating spectre of expectation at Elland Road, Parlane recaptured some form when he was eventually given a free transfer to Manchester City in July 1983, scoring 20 goals in 48 appearances, before playing out a much-travelled career without any further significant moves.

Nothing happened in the 1980s, apart from... **Plastic Pitches**

In the 21st century artificial grass has entered the public domain as a means of disguising the work-shy tendencies of the country's lesser gardeners as a form of maintenance-free landscaping that saves water.

Back in the 1980s, however, artificial grass was known as a "plastic pitch", a largely derogative term for the hellish playing surfaces adopted by four Football League clubs.

Like most things that are synthetic and a simulated form of the real thing, artificial grass originated in America. There it was developed for sports such as baseball and American football, where skill requirements of any kind are limited, but particularly so on the floor. Nevertheless in 1981 Queens Park Rangers, under manager Terry Venables, installed an Omniturf pitch that was widely derided for providing bad-quality tentative football and inviting impact and abrasion injuries on its unforgiving surface.

Opponents claimed it gave QPR an unfair advantage, with the Londoners reaching the FA Cup final and being crowned Second Division Champions within two years, and qualifying for the UEFA Cup two years after that. QPR returned to a grass pitch in 1988, but by that time Luton, Oldham and Preston (pictured) all had similar pitches.

Luton and Oldham enjoyed their most successful periods of the modern era while playing home matches on a plastic pitch, but by 1991 new rules demanded they were replaced in the top division. Preston were the last club to relent, finally removing theirs in 1994.

So another oddity of the 1980s vanished, and knee-sliding goal celebrations that didn't result in gaping wounds and third-degree carpet burns soon returned.

