

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

November 21, 1987

Leeds United 4 Swindon Town 2

Another stuttering promotion campaign was given a much-needed boost in this landmark game, which was significant for a number of players who would prove pivotal to the club over the next few years.

Widespread indifference among Leeds fans was reflected in a crowd of only 15,457 despite the expected debut of Bobby Davison, signed for £350,000 in midweek. Bremner's side was desperate for goals and Davison delivered with a debut strike within 25 minutes – following a David Rennie opener after just two minutes.

Leeds then raced into a three-goal lead – before half-time – through Bob Taylor, but it would not be Leeds United in the 1980s (nor, indeed, in most decades) without the habitual ability to invite the opposition back into the game.

Swindon's Bobby Barnes scored twice, and at 3-2 with 13 minutes left the familiar rumbles of discontent enveloped the mostly empty terraces of Elland Road like a poisonous fog. The precarious doom was only lifted in the 84th minute from an unlikely source.

Registering his first goal for Leeds, Peter Haddock executed it with skills



we were hitherto unaware he had in his locker. Indeed we had barely even seen his locker. Haddock exchanged passes with John Stiles before shimmying passed two defenders and slotting coolly beyond the keeper.

It was widely reported that the chief architect of this watershed victory was the 18-year-old midfield debutant who had replaced the hugely influential and suspended John Sheridan. His name was David Batty and, finally, one foot was on the ladder out of the 1980s.



Anyone remember... Peter Haddock?

Younger fans may indelibly link the name of Peter Haddock to the struggle of the 1980s, but I would argue that he was one of our most underrated performers in the latter part of the decade.

Costing only £45,000 from Newcastle United, "Fish" proved to be one of Bremner's more canny signings, although much of his time at Leeds was blighted by injuries. Fleet of foot, versatile and a great reader of the game, Haddock was a beacon of consistency when there was little else at Elland Road that was the same from one day to the next.

In an era when you heard nothing from players other than an occasional five second snippet on *Calendar*, it was somehow widely known that Fish was one of the more quietly-spoken players in the squad, who simply did his job on the pitch and didn't seek the glory.

It was perhaps this characteristic that meant he survived Howard Wilkinson's cull of Bremner's old guard in 1988 and went on to play a critical, but typically understated, role in our promotion of 1989/90, missing just two games at centre-half. An ankle injury suffered in the League Cup semi-final defeat to Manchester United in 1991 effectively ended his career.

Nothing happened in the 1980s, apart from... **Saint & Greavsie**

Long before Baddiel and Skinner embraced the "lad" culture of the mid-1990s, the football comedy pundits crown was unarguably the possession of Messrs Saint and Greavsie.

Football's answer to *The Muppets*' Statler and Waldorf, Ian St John and Jimmy Greaves came together like Leiber and Stoller, Lennon and McCartney or Morrissey and Marr – a happy accident that theoretically should never have worked. While they each played to some distinction at club and international level in the same era, they had no connection until ITV Sport threw them together as a duo on the lunchtime *On The Ball* show, which St John presented with Greaves becoming a regular guest.

Greaves (the ex-Spurs, Chelsea, West Ham and England striker) was a recovering alcoholic and played the wise-cracking and unpredictable funny-man to the straight-man professionalism of ex-Liverpool legend and Scotland international "The Saint". The pair soon progressed to their own show *Saint & Greavsie* in 1985 and traded heavily on Greaves' bloke-in-the-pub wit, with unrelenting gags about the ineptitude of Scottish goalkeepers which would have the switchboards in meltdown today. Throughout each programme, St John would be red-faced in barely contained laughter, grimly trying to maintain order, while Greaves – knowing exactly which buttons to press – ensured few programmes ran smoothly.

By 1992, what had appeared somewhat anarchic in 1985 had become formulaic, summed up by the tired cliché that "It's a funny old game, Saint". When ITV lost the rights to live football to Sky, the programme was immediately axed.

