

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 29, 1986

Leeds United 2 Derby County 0

The double agony endured at the end of the epic 1986/87 season was as cruel as anything this writer had experienced in his formative years, save for trapping a bee under a jam jar at school and leaving it in the baking sun, but that's another story.

FA Cup semi-final and Play-Off final defeats were yet to be stomachached when Derby came to town in November 1986, and found Leeds suffering what many forget was a mixed first half to the season. We were reeling from three consecutive defeats in November, so Derby were expecting maximum points from their trip to Elland Road (in a campaign that ultimately would see the Rams crowned as Champions).

A healthy crowd of 19,129 included a huge contingent from Derby running almost the whole length of the Lowfields Road terrace, and they were almost celebrating in the opening seconds

when the rapid Bobby Davison surged passed the Leeds defence but could only shoot straight at Mervyn Day.

After a frantic opening, however, Leeds soon settled. Captain Ian Snodin was at his imperious best and – having rattled the crossbar twice in an amazing goalmouth scramble – Leeds took the lead mid-way through the first half with one of the most memorable moments of the entire decade.

A free-kick was awarded just outside the South Stand end penalty area after Keith Edwards had been hauled down. The ball was touched back to the mercurial John Sheridan who flicked it up with his toe end before volleying the sweetly presented ball over the wall and into the top of the net with the same foot in one delicious movement. It was genius out of nothing, artistry amid a sea of mediocrity, a moment that defined the era.

Leeds largely controlled the rest of the game and confirmed a landmark victory when expert goal-hanger Edwards dissected the Derby defence and buried a late finish to make it 2-0, with the accommodating referee ignoring the linesman's offside flag.

A few weeks later Leeds would lose 7-2 at Stoke, but recovered to accelerate over the second half of the season and finish in the Play-Off places.



Ian Baird and Keith Edwards celebrating.



John Sheridan opened the scoring.



Ian Snodin



Anyone remember... Keith Edwards?

Over two spells with Sheffield United and three years with Hull City sandwiched in between, the fleet-footed Keith Edwards plundered goals galore and became known as the most lethal penalty box predator in the lower divisions. Billy Bremner offered him his big chance with a £125,000 transfer in the summer of 1986, aged 29 – but on the big stage sadly the goals dried up for the only time in his career.

He scored sporadically but lost his place when John Pearson was bought in January, but Edwards did earn an honourable mention in Leeds United folklore with a string of crucial “super sub” strikes as the season reached its soul-destroying climax.

Edwards had already netted the winner off the bench in the 1-0 win over Bradford in February, but an equaliser to take the FA Cup semi-final against Coventry into extra-time and delirium-inducing late strikes in both legs of the Play-Off semi with Oldham, contributed as much as anything else to the heroic drama of the campaign. Early in the following season, however, with Bob Taylor emerging from the youth team, Edwards was sold to Aberdeen for £60,000 and later enjoyed short spells with Hull (again), Stockport, Huddersfield and Plymouth.

Nothing happened in the 1980s, apart from... **Unlikely cup winners**

Back when the big clubs were actually bothered about domestic cup competitions and football generally was a much more level playing field, the 1980s saw a number of unlikely clubs testing the spelling prowess of the cup engravers.

QPR, Brighton and Watford all made it to the FA Cup final during the 1980s but fell to the big guns of the time. Coventry City, though, actually won it in 1987 and a year later Wimbledon provided the biggest FA Cup shock of all time (bigger even than 1973, he lied) beating Liverpool 1-0, though the ban on English clubs spared us the spectacle of seeing the Dons grapple with Europe.

The League Cup has always been a little unpredictable, but particularly in the 1980s when the likes of Norwich, Oxford and Luton Town found unforeseen glory. It was certainly a precarious time for the bookies, and hell, even Aston Villa won the league in 1981.

