

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 2, 1985

Leeds United 2 Portsmouth 1

The early months of the 1985/86 season saw a period of considerable change for Leeds United. The initial signs of promise from Eddie Gray's young and talented side had failed to gather momentum and the board lost patience with Gray, controversially sacking him in October 1985.

In appointing Billy Bremner as the new manager, the board had opted for a third consecutive Revie legend. Immediately Bremner stamped his authority on the club and caught many fans off-guard by releasing his ex-teammate Peter Lorimer.

November 1985 saw Portsmouth at the top of the league table, and their visit to Elland Road would be Bremner's first home game in charge after he had overseen a 3-0 defeat at Barnsley the previous week. (Yes, we lost at Oakwell quite often in the 1980s, too.) Bremner had brought in Liverpool centre-half

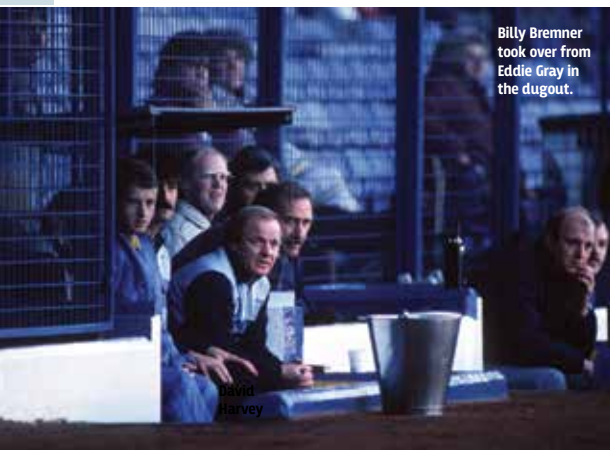
John McGregor on loan during the week, and he lined up for his debut against Portsmouth, while striker Lyndon Simmonds also made his first league start in a white shirt, after George McCluskey failed a fitness test.

It would prove to be a dream afternoon for the Welshman Simmonds, as he continued his astonishing youth team scoring spree by netting both goals in a landmark home win. Simmonds bundled the ball over the line for the first goal and captain and regular penalty-taker John Sheridan handed the 18-year-old the ball to dispatch a spot-kick for his second, a risky strategy given the nip-and-tuck nature of the scoreline.

The result and performance had Leeds fans once again wondering if the corner had been turned. The Kop sang "United are back!" in one of many acts of defiance in the 1980s

that quickly became soul-destroying in their ultimate prematurity. Bremner discarded many of Eddie Gray's youngsters (including Irwin, Sellars and Wright), preferring his own experienced heads such as Brian Caswell, John Stiles, David Rennie and Brendan Ormsby – but results barely improved.

With crowds at Elland Road regularly slipping below 10,000 Leeds never seriously mounted a promotion challenge and instead wallowed in mid-table, with only a flurry of three wins over Easter ensuring their own safety, eventually finishing 14th.



Billy Bremner took over from Eddie Gray in the dugout.



Brendan Ormsby



Anyone remember... **Lyndon Simmonds?**

Simmonds was a Leeds fan in his youth, and left school early to sign for Leeds in 1983. Much like Terry Connor back in 1979, he enjoyed a fairy-tale league debut against Portsmouth, having reported for duty that morning to play for the Northern Intermediate League team on Fullerton Park.

His debut had come as a sub in the infamous 6-1 defeat to Manchester City in the Full Members Cup – when the Leeds players were there in body but not in spirit, as they protested against Eddie Gray's sacking.

Despite scoring both twice on his full debut against league leaders Portsmouth (see left) and again in a 2-2 draw at Middlesbrough four months later, Simmonds never settled in the side and he never added to the 10 appearances he made in that season. He was loaned to his native Wales to play for Swansea in October 1986, and he also played for Rochdale under Eddie Gray, later signing permanently. Sadly, he was forced to retire through injury at the age of 21.

Nothing happened in the 1980s, apart from... **English clubs' European ban**

Two days after the 1985 Heysel Disaster, in which Liverpool fans caused a riot resulting in 39 deaths before the European Cup Final against Juventus, UEFA banned all English clubs from European competition.

It was an unprecedented move, fully supported by the FA and Margaret Thatcher's government, indeed the grim announcement was made by FA Chairman Bert Millichip outside the doors of Number 10.

The ban was seen as the ultimate act in addressing the continual hooligan problem which followed English clubs around Europe. Although indefinite at the time, the ban lasted for five years and was lifted after the 1990 World Cup. However, it would be a couple of years before the full quota of entries was restored. Liverpool were banned for 10 years, but this was lifted after six.

Most disgruntled by the ban were Everton (pictured), whose fine side built by Howard Kendall were twice denied the chance to compete in the European Cup, which English clubs had won seven years out of eight between 1977 and 1984. The first year of the ban also saw Manchester United denied a European Cup-Winners' Cup place, while Liverpool, Tottenham, Norwich and Southampton were prevented from entering the UEFA Cup.

