

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 15, 1982
Leeds United 2 Brighton 1

Few games have encapsulated better Leeds United's nagging ability to veer uncontrollably between the highest of highs and the lowest of lows than this one – particularly as three days later the sheer madness of this thrilling victory counted for nothing.

It was clear that many fans had given up on the club as just 19,831 turned up even though an escape from relegation was still a possibility ahead of this game, and it was billed as the most important in Leeds United's recent history.

All season Leeds fans had been expecting their side to click into place and play their way out of trouble, and many of the players felt the same. But by the spring it was inescapable that the R-word was hovering like the grim reaper.

Brighton striker Michael Robinson gave the Seagulls a first-half lead, and his "thumbs-down" reaction to the stunned Leeds crowd immediately sparked some vociferous passions.

As the second half wore on Leeds were looking increasingly desperate and Elland Road felt eerie and condemned. But with 10 minutes to go, Gary Hamson, the beleaguered left-back who was only playing in place of the injured Frank



Gray, picked up the ball in midfield and from nowhere unleashed a venomous left-footed shot that arced away from the keeper and into the net.

Leeds were suddenly back in it, and with Elland Road bouncing Eddie Gray launched an attack straight from the kick-off and put a hopeful cross into the box right into the path of the onrushing Kevin Hird. Like Zico in a white shirt, Hird sidestepped a defender at full speed and from an impossible angle slid the ball through keeper Graham Moseley's legs.

Elland Road's joy was unrestrained and the crowd, still breathless from the first goal, could suddenly see salvation. The last few minutes were played out to a spine-tingling, scarves-aloft rendition



of "You'll Never Walk Alone" (yes, kids, we used to sing it regularly) followed by a pitch invasion at the final whistle.

Everyone felt we were safe, but a 2-0 defeat three days later at West Brom effectively relegated us. Over and out.

Nothing happened in the 1980s, apart from... **Cup final songs**

Deeply uncomfortable players sporting bubble perms and shell-suits, rocking from side-to-side hopelessly out of time on *The Wogan Show*? That's right – it's cup final song time! While the 1970s may have invented the dubious genre, the 1980s perfected it.

Tottenham were responsible for bringing Chas & Dave further into the public consciousness than was perhaps necessary by roping them in to write irritatingly-catchy tunes for two successive years. In 1981 "Ossie's Dream" also saw the nation delight in "charmingly" mocking a foreigner's accent as Argentine midfield hero Ossie Ardiles sang awkwardly about playing in the cup for "*Tott-ing-ham*".

In 1985, Everton injected some unforeseen lyrical dexterity to the monotonous tune of "Here We Go", which their fans have since creatively-adopted as "Everton, Everton, Everton" but Liverpool's frankly staggering "Anfield Rap" signalled the end of the genre in 1988 as it nosedived into pastiche.

Nobody can remember a single cup final song since, although I'm told clubs still produce them.

Anyone remember...
Kevin Hird?

Kevin Hird, perhaps more than any other player, summed up the dishevelled and uncultivated external appearance of Leeds United in the 1980s. He also characterises the maddening inconsistency that contributed much to the club's decade-long frustrations.

Bought from Blackburn Rovers for £357,000 in 1979, Hird was then the most expensive full-back in the British game. It is therefore predictable that Leeds would choose to ignore that and field him for much of his Elland Road career in midfield.

Hird became affectionately known as "Jasper" for his resemblance to comedian Jasper Carrot. His "unsophisticated" veneer contributed much to the crowd's almost sarcastic endearment. This was also aided by his 100 per cent effort, gung-ho attacking and occasionally sublime skills being equalled in frequency by a baffling capacity to miss-control, lose positional sense and miss the target from close range. In short, Hird was an enigma.

Hird's headline moment against Brighton (see left) perfectly personified his career. As most fans expected him to take a heavy touch and run the ball harmlessly into touch, he deftly beat a defender and slid home a priceless goal. By 1984 he was allowed to leave on a free transfer to Burnley, and despite always looking like a veteran, was still only 29.



Tottenham players recording with Chas & Dave.