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One Club City?

Leeds United's attendances have held up respectably since relegation from the top flight, yet I still continue to run the gauntlet of rival fans' jealousy. At work in Sheffield, comments like: "Of course Leeds get big crowds, it's a one-club city, with a massive catchment area..." are de rigueur to the point of tedium. Yet my taunters miss one significant point. One-club city? What about the Leeds Rhinos? Current World Champions and back-to-back Grand Final Winners.

Here my argument receives howls of derision, stemming from the misguided belief that Rugby League cannot be taken seriously in this debate, but let's look at the facts. Leeds Rhinos averaged a healthy 17,000 attendance in the triumphant 2008 season... I steady myself for the next barrage: "But they play on different days so it's the same people that are going..." Again, incorrect.

Grand Final wins for the Rhinos in 2004 and 2007 were both achieved at Old Trafford on the same day that Leeds United attracted 30,000 crowds to Elland Road (to play Preston and Leyton Orient respectively).

Let's not forget the Rhinos - together, we're both stronger!

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Going further back than that, I recall meaningless end-of-season games against Everton and Norwich attracting 40,000 to Elland Road in 1994 and 1995, at the same time as Leeds RL (as they were then known) were losing two years running to Wigan in the Challenge Cup Final at Wembley, both of which attracted 78,000 crowds.

Leeds is a huge rugby league area, and anyone north or south of the M62 corridor often fails to appreciate that. As a Leeds citizen, I see this every day, and it could be argued that the core support for both clubs in the city is roughly the same. The difference is that Leeds United have a bigger national appeal, but the Rhinos are still one of the best-supported non-football clubs in the country.

So, in Leeds Rhinos, United fans have something to be proud of. The work ethic in rugby league is unbelievable and football could learn a thing or two from the Super League structure, too. While it is unashamedly commercialised in some areas, RL has been the pioneer for much of what football fans have craved for years;

video technology, salary caps – and an insistence that a minimum five home-grown Academy products are included in the first team squad.

This is an area in which Leeds have always excelled. Of the current team McGuire, Jones-Buchanan, Smith, Diskin, Bailey, Peacock and Burrow are all locally born.

The Grand Final wins over St Helens in the last two years, have both been tactical masterstrokes where the underdogs have hammered the media-perceived aristocrats, and that winning circumstance transcends any sporting barrier. So things are looking up for the City of Leeds; the Rhinos' empire continues to grow and Leeds United are fighting back with impressive re-development plans in keeping with our ambitions. Which other city can boast two different sporting institutions of such stature and history? Go on, name one? We're Leeds and we're proud of it. **LLL**

Jon Howe