

## Playing At Home



'Big Open Discussion' - Barnsley, 2014  
(SRC)

**SRC:** The idea of home for me, is of an immovable object: it's a material thing of course, but it is also an identity and a sense of place. Home is where most of us want to be at Xmas - with our families - and home in a football sense is just an extension of this. A site where your forefathers and mothers also trod. It has a history. It's yours to decorate.

**JW:** Home has a very special meaning in football, of course: we speak a lot about 'playing at home' and being 'drawn at home' and 'home advantage.' It certainly seems to make a major difference to results. The statistics say that, on average, home teams win more than half their games whilst away teams only win one quarter. That's quite a split. Referees can be swayed by a home crowd. And clubs can have problems switching homes - check out the recent West Ham situation. How is it that a stadium and its fans can mean so much?

**SRC:** It doesn't add up. Even if you play a match at home with no fans (behind closed doors) it's still an advantage.

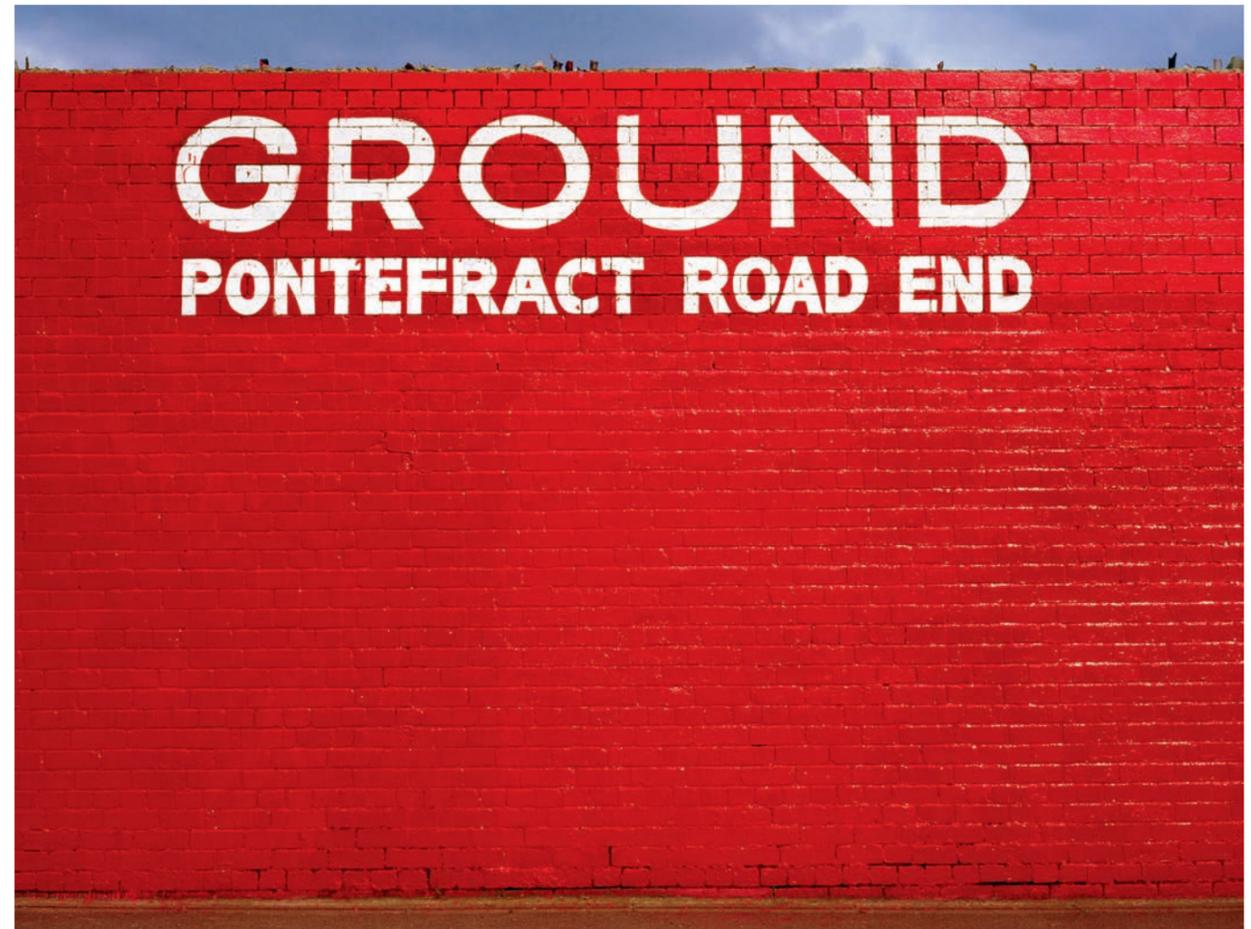
Maybe the ghosts of home supporters are cheering you on?

Most football fans have a central message. No matter how shambolic you might think our ground is, we really LOVE this place. Most football grounds were not set up to be especially beautiful palaces, but they were always a safe space for locals. A spiritual place. A place of pilgrimage. An altar, of sorts.

We won't go on here about football as a substitute for religion, but a stadium *is* a kind of sacred gathering ground, a destination, an Oz at the end of the rainbow. Just as Glastonbury has come to signify much more than an ancient religious centre, a football ground is active and earthquakes of the human spirit regularly happen there.

**JW:** 'Earthquakes of the human spirit' is a wonderful phrase. The home football ground is not just about bricks and concrete, that's clear. It is much more about what the stadium *means* to local people: a beautifully painted wall, or some familiar and friendly girders can carry all kinds of messages and comfort, missed by most of us. But it is also about how aspects of that meaning can make it an oppressive and threatening place for visitors, the enemy. Being an away fan is enjoyable - the trip and all that invasive singing and chanting - but it's also a kind of intrusion. Sometimes, you can feel like an unwelcome and a very unappreciated guest in the away end. And each football club has its own message for visitors, encoded in its stadium. There is a kind of siege mentality thing which goes on around 'our' home patch. Only when something huge that affects us all occurs - like a Hillsborough, for example - can football fans easily pull together and share a truly collective identity and the associated pain.

**SRC:** Hillsborough was obviously a key moment, a time when we had to reflect on what we valued about our



'Blood Red Road End' - Barnsley, 1993  
(SRC)

existing homes and what urgently needed to change. Some of those favourite nooks and crannies, which defined our homes - which made them ours - would now have to go. Could we hold on to the soul of our football grounds?

**JW:** We could all see, I think, that Lord Justice Taylor's pronouncements in 1990 after Hillsborough were going to produce a new football stadium experience; a much bigger shift than the impact of player transfers, or even the new TV deals. They were going to change our very homes. Some of us might have complained in the past

about poor facilities, terrible toilets or even difficulties in seeing the match in some grounds. We may have wanted to wash our hands of some of the old eyesores, but we were still pretty clear-eyed about keeping all existing Football League clubs and defending their homes. Non-fans must have wondered why.

**SRC:** What distinguishes this country is that there are SO MANY clubs and identities cheek by jowl with the next. We value them all as part of the national football story. Germans and Scandinavians and others look on in amazement (and envy) at this. A dozen





'Maine Road Was Where It Was At' - Manchester City, 2011  
(SRC)

Norwegians arrive at Grimsby Town's Blundell Park from across the North Sea (not in Viking boats, I might add) and they are soon taking group selfies against the plain old terraced houses neighbouring the ground.

Visitors are fascinated by all this historic detail we have around our football places. Not everything is perfectly arranged in the national football grid, of course, it's all a bit higgledy-piggledy. It's like a mad jigsaw - where is the plan? There may not have been one; football just sort of happened in this way, it took root around the nation. The locals in Cleethorpes feel honoured, of course, that visiting Norwegians want to photograph their old houses - they even sweep the front step.

I am sure stadiums - our homes - that were sited in densely peopled areas, rather than plonked like a business unit in an industrial estate, speak to us much more as fans. When Manchester City moved across the city to the Etihad in 2003 the club instinctively knew that they had to take

something of the old ground, their old home, with them. The Maine Road stone is a memorial to the former place and its people. It's repositioned today outside one of the posh entrances at the Etihad and is possibly the single-most photographed bit of the new ground.

I must say I am cheered by the fact that the British were shown at this moment to care very deeply about its football culture.

**JW:** Collectively we cried at Hillsborough and the events of 1989 and collectively we responded to what Lord Justice Taylor said in his report and with some spirit of togetherness we rolled out the red carpet for the game's return, possibly to a new golden period. We prioritised it and got the thing rebuilt not quite overnight but over a few years and moreover - *with some care and with some love.*

## CHAPTER 6

# Fans Needed



West Ham fans queue at Upton Park, as tickets for their FA Cup match against Fulham go on sale. February 1958  
(Mirrorpix)

# Final Score (Well Almost)



'Holding Back Time' - Clydebank, 1995 (SRC)

**JW:** We are over half-way through our conversations. It feels right that we have a chapter at this point, about the ritual of time itself, and its interruption. Times have changed, we say, as if we are heading towards something else. Something better? Something later? After half-time? A reckoning time?

**SRC:** What is it about half-time at a football match? The commentators often say about managers that they can 'hardly wait' to get their players in the dressing-room, as if something magical can happen there. More importantly, it's as if half-time can actually stop time in its tracks. A chance to reset the clock, put things right.

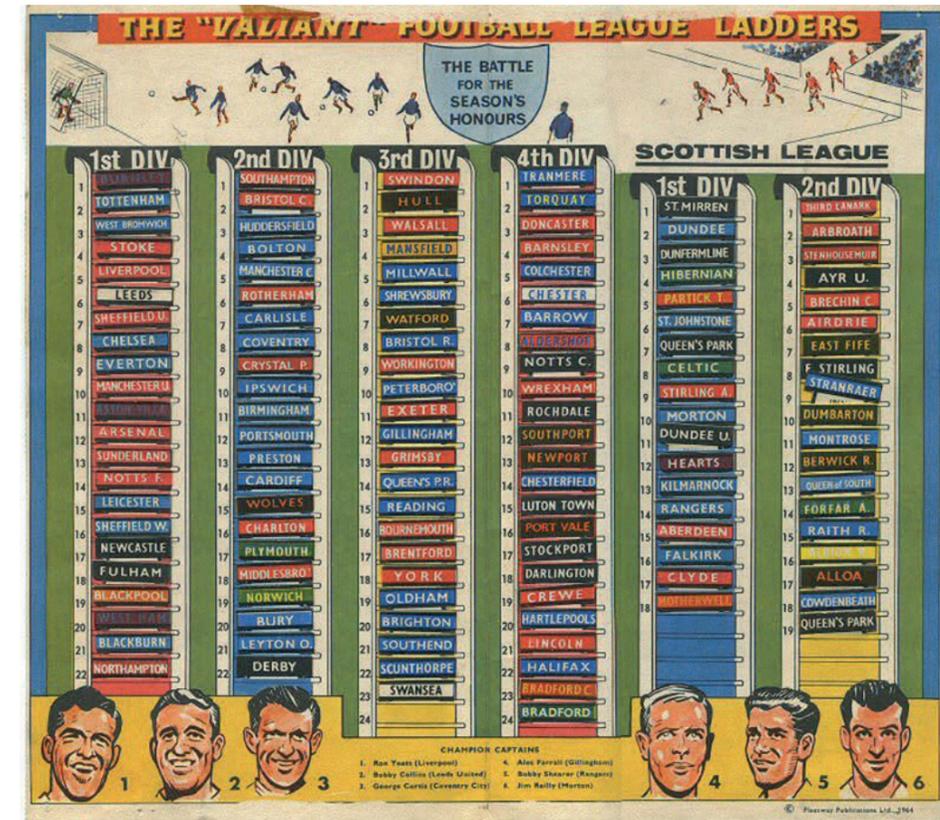
**JW:** For the players and coaches it is a chance to recalibrate. Where is it going wrong? What do we need to do to hold on? Managers can later use the half-time message to keep their own mystique alive. For fans, it's time for a leg-stretch and maybe a pee and a pie. For

broadcasters, an opportunity to dissect the match so far - and cram in the requisite adverts. One way the game has certainly changed at the top level is the computer-aided half-time expert analysis, but also the messing about with kick-off times. It was so much simpler when everyone kicked off at the same time, on the same day. In the days when all matches kicked off at 3pm on Saturdays and finished around ten-to-five, sports newspaper men lived on their nerves. Most football grounds didn't even have a clock back then, so it was almost complete guesswork for fans (and editors) when games would end.



'Scoreboard's Winter Cheer' - Shrewsbury Town, 1991 (SRC)

**SRC:** At Clydebank there was something really novel: a guy whose role was no less than to 'hold back time' with a big stick until the referee started the game. Earlier, the same guy had been organizing the car park, directing traffic, a jack of all trades. Holding back time was just one of his many matchday jobs.



The Valiant Football League Ladders, 1965-66

**JW:** That is quite a talent. At half-time, before mobile phones intervened and when every match kicked off at three o'clock, there would also be round-ups of all the scores around the grounds. The men inside their strange old ABCDEF huts had one eye on the pitch and their ear to BBC radio. How quickly can we get the half-times out? Or else you watched stewards walk slowly around the pitch carrying the score numbers to pin next to the half-time letters listed only in the match programme. 'Is he carrying a five? Who can be five down at half-time?' 'Which match is D?' You could hear the crowd gasp as an outlier score went up: 'Shrewsbury beating Watford 4-1! At half-time!' The buzz would go around all the grounds.

**SRC:** Scoreboards really only grabbed you for a few minutes around half time. Once you got tuned into

the important national developments the scoreboard attendants could get back to watching their own match, and with a grandstand view. I think this connecting up of all these local skirmishes to the national football battle was part of the enjoyment of everyone playing at the same time. Afterwards, the *Evening Pink* or *Football Green* newspapers were printed all around the country with match reports, results on the front page and late scores in the *Stop Press*. All this within 30 minutes of matches ending. How did they do it?

**JW:** My dad used to send me out to get the pink *Football Echo* on Saturday evenings in Liverpool. Queues of working men outside local newsagents and sweet shops. If Everton had been at home they would get the front-page story, Liverpool the back. Blazing headlines were routinely

in play: 'Reds/Blues see off Gunners/Hammers.' Our smaller regional neighbours, Tranmere Rovers, Southport, Wrexham and Chester would all have their own short match reports. A bit of rugby league - Liverpool City, St. Helens and Wigan - was on the back page. You could tell what had happened in the big local games because there was always a little drawing of a Kopite (Liverpool) and a Toffee Lady (Everton) at the top of the front page. They would dance wildly if their team had won, be downcast in defeat, or hold a point on a flat hand for a draw. A little bit of cartoon magic for the kids.



'Reporters On Laptops And Urn Of Tea' - Sunderland, 1991  
(SRC)

**SRC:** For those supporters not walking to the game, but who instead had legged it back to the car to tune into the radio, another matchday tradition awaited. Bang on 5pm on Saturday - and it's still happening now, complete with same piece of music that has accompanied it for generations - is the reading on the BBC of the Classified Football Results. (There was something very definitive about that word 'classified'). For 40 years, the results were read by James Alexander Gordon, with his lovely Scottish brogue. Now, (revolution is here) a woman, Charlotte Green is in charge on BBC radio, who has an equally soothing, but authoritative, voice. Voice pitch up for a winning score, down for a defeat. Level it out for the spoils shared. Charlotte's nailed it. Despite the Sky and BT alternatives, this ritual still tells us about places in Britain that we have never visited or ever imagined.

How could we know anything about them if it wasn't

for the national football scores, read out every Saturday at 5pm? Every senior club's name is still in there, fed into and spewed out by the BBC teleprinter using what seemed at the time like amazing and puzzling technology.

Recently, just when you think the scores have finally ended at some exotic and mysterious location in Scotland, a Stenhousemuir or a Stranraer, the Welsh Premier League scores pop up. Devolution times. There is that feeling, especially in winter, that the whole nation was wrapped up in the same itchy, but warming, woolly blanket - of football.

**JW:** Look, things have moved on and complainers about change usually also love all the additional live football on TV today. So, let's try to rein in some of this nostalgia, because that's what it is. But you definitely did feel part of something which was widely shared back then - a nation's Saturday heartbeat - something that was being replicated, in real time, all over the country. As kids, we messed about with those 'high tech' card football table ladders, which were given away free in comics. I dare say all this is done much better online now. And people also knew, back then, that you had your weekends clearly laid out. Saturdays for football; Sundays free for family time: walk the car, wash the dog, sell the kids. No internet or mobiles meant that match reporters were vital for most people's basic football information - yet they worked to punitive deadlines and in pretty primitive conditions.

**SRC:** The photograph of these press men at Sunderland was taken in the early 90s, when we were on the very cusp of major change. They have early laptops, but not the internet. It was still called 'the wire' back then, a form of telegram service. It's a homely image - check the carpet - even though the match was in fact a big one, Sunderland v Arsenal. The photograph from the press box at Kilmarnock I especially like because this reporter looks like a spy phoning in his latest findings.

Today, of course, everyone is a reporter, fans tweeting out comments as the game goes on, later ringing in the phone-in shows, usually enraged. You can see every goal online and some supporters even run their own little TV stations. But before the 2000s we all hung on the written words of that gallant small gang of football press journalists. They probably spoke their account of games down a telephone line to a secretary, who didn't necessarily dig football, but typed it all up anyway. Today, the press pack is able to send their pictures and words



'Filing The Match Report' - Kilmarnock, 1996  
(SRC)

from a ground in a flash. We can also hear their views in seconds (if we really want to). And, whisper it, there are now even some *female* reporters.

**JW:** Spending time in the Premier League is what dictates exactly who wants to receive your message these days. How large is your prospective fan base today, how many supporters do you need to try to get your stories to? Information is money. And to some extent the clubs boss it: the British newspaper is no longer number one for club news. The clubs call the tune despite the fact that hundreds of thousands of people also want to (and do) weigh into the conversation. Some fan bloggers can have audiences reaching hundreds of thousands, and what the

TV pundits do or say is immediately part of the football story today, especially if they mess up somehow.

Top clubs churn out millions of PR stories and they and their sponsors try to control much more of what their players say. Journalists have to pick at what scraps of 'original' material they can get hold of. Everyone else has an opinion these days - and, apparently, we all have to listen to them. 'Experts' no longer hold sway and nobody tells us what has *really* happened on the field, not even VAR! We are all expected to make our own judgements - the game is 'all about opinions' as some idiotic pundits insist. It could be seen as a form of democratization, but I'm not sure we wouldn't be better back with those ABC half-time scoreboards.

# Football's Timeline

OVER 200 MOMENTOUS YEARS IN BRITISH HISTORY

WITH  
**mitre**

- 1817** Benjamin Crook opens his tannery in Huddersfield, so the oldest sports brand in the world is founded - which later becomes MITRE
- 1845** The first written 'football' rules are produced by three pupils at Rugby School
- 1848** The Cambridge rules follow, with goal kicks, throw-ins and forward passes
- 1857** Sheffield FC is formed, with claims to be the world's first football club
- 1862** Notts County FC is founded in the George Hotel in Nottingham, and are thus the oldest surviving professional football club in the world
- 1863** In London, meetings between ex-public-school men results in the world's first Football Association ('The FA') and some national laws for football
- 1866** Forward passing is accepted in the national laws.
- 1871** A split in the FA ranks produces the Rugby Football Union for a game mainly played using the hands
- 1872** Wanderers FC beat Royal Engineers in the first FA Cup final, at the Kennington Oval. Scotland play England in a 0-0 draw in the world's first international fixture
- 1875** The introduction of a crossbar to replace tape between two poles is approved
- 1876** 25th March: Wales plays its first international match, a 4-0 loss against Scotland in Partick
- 1878** Newton Heath Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway FC is established, later to become Manchester United. Everton FC are also formed and move to play at Anfield in 1884. A dispute among the club's directors in 1892 will lead to the formation of Liverpool FC - and the departure of Everton to nearby Goodison Park
- 1881** The Scot Andrew Watson becomes the world's first black football international
- 1882** The four Home associations meet in Manchester in December to try to agree an early uniform set of rules/laws for playing football across national borders
- 1883** 31st March: Blackburn Olympic become the first northern working-class club to win the FA Cup. No ex-public school club will triumph again
- 1884** The first FA Amateur Cup final is staged in response to the increasing domination of the sport by professional clubs. Old Carthusians beat Casuals 2-1 at the Athletic Ground, Richmond

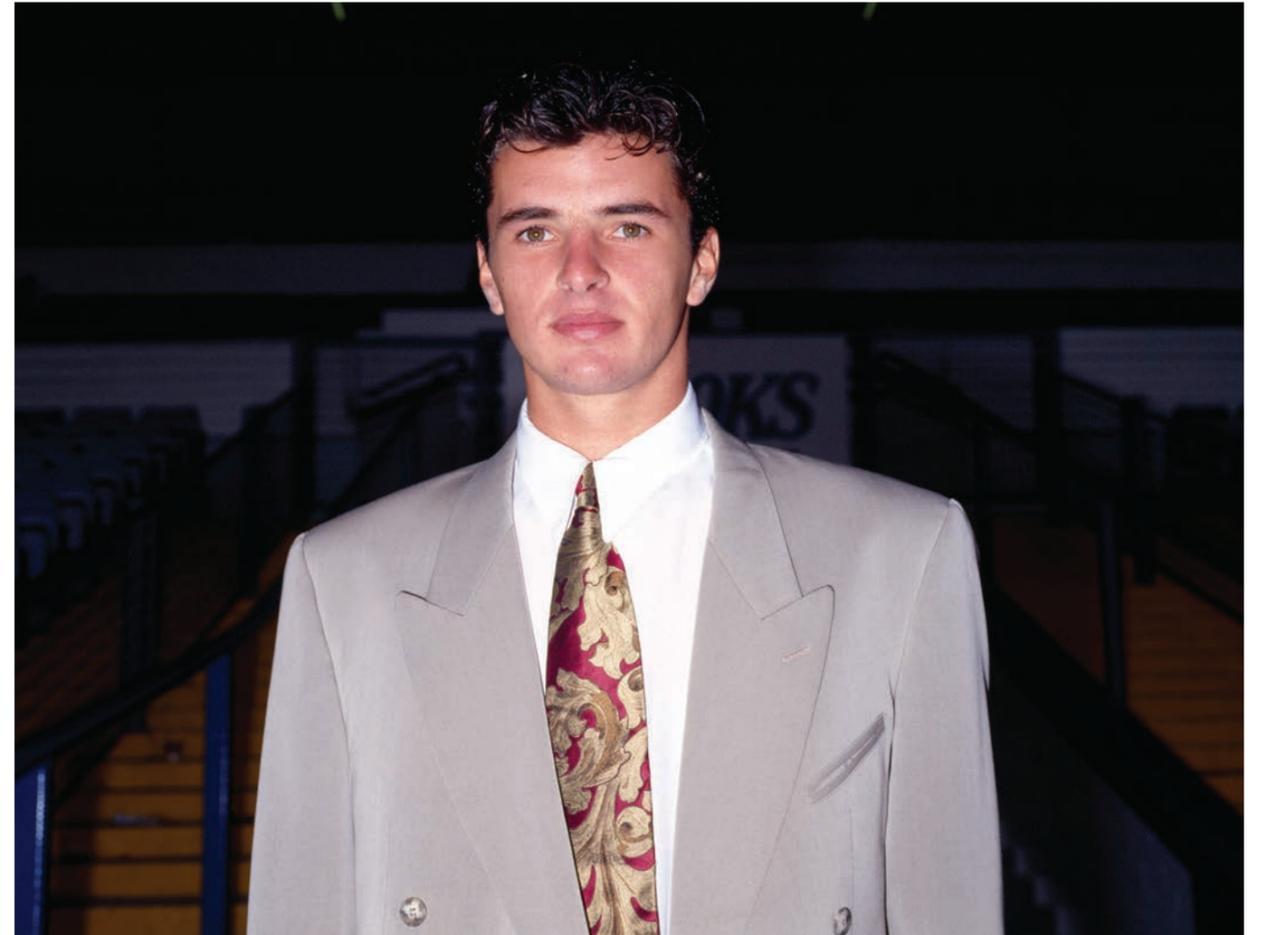
- 1885** The FA is forced to legalise professionalism after complaints from southern clubs about northern professionals in the FA Cup
- 1886** The International Football Association Board (IFAB) is established and it now guards the new international laws of the game
- 1887** The IFAB approves two major law changes. The duration of the match shall be 90 minutes and games should be played by 11 players on each side
- 1888** William McGregor, an Aston Villa director, leads on the formation of the 12-club Football League
- 1889** Preston North End, becomes the first club to win the Football League/FA Cup double
- 1890** Stoke become the first Football League club to fail to get re-elected, joining the Football Alliance, which they won and thus were re-elected to the Football League
- 1891** The goal net, referees and penalty kicks (the 'kick of death') are all introduced into the game
- 1894** Nettie Honeyball persuades 30 young women to join the first British Ladies Football Club
- 1895** 23rd March: The first officially recorded women's match takes place, at Crouch End, London
- 1898** Automatic promotion and relegation for two clubs is introduced into the two division Football League
- 1899** Darwen FC establish the league record for the most consecutive losses in a single season, 18
- 1900** Bury FC beat Southampton 4-0 in the FA Cup final at Crystal Palace. The club's directors promised players a £10 bonus for a win. Three years later Bury were back to defeat Derby County by a record 6-0 score. Two finals, two wins and a remarkable 10-0 aggregate score-line
- 1901** Under FA strictures, the Football League introduces a maximum wage for players of £4 per week into its regulations. Tottenham Hotspur become the first and only non-league club to win the FA Cup after the formation of the Football League
- 1902** 5th April: The first major stadium disaster in British football, at Ibrox Park, Glasgow, kills 25 spectators
- 1904** The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) is founded in Paris
- 1907** The PFA is convened in Manchester originally as the Association of Football Players' & Trainers' Union

- 1908** 6th June: England's first international match against foreign opposition, a 6-1 victory in Austria
- 1909** Goalkeepers must now wear a shirt (a jersey) that is distinguishable from all the other players and the match officials
- 1911** Founded only in 1903 and immediately elected into the Football League Second Division, Bradford City win the FA Cup, still the club's only major honour
- 1912** The laws prohibit goalkeepers from handling the ball outside the penalty area; previously, they could handle the ball anywhere in their own half
- 1914** The King attends the FA Cup final for the first time. As war breaks out in August, the Football League decides to play on, to official consternation
- 1915** 1st January 1915: A letter written by a doctor attached to the Rifle Brigade, is published in The Times, reporting on a football match played by British and German troops between the trenches in France. 2nd April: A Football League match between Liverpool and Manchester United is fixed by players on both sides
- 1917** The Dick Kerr's Ladies club is formed in Preston, the most important of the early women's clubs
- 1919** As football reboots, the First Division is expanded from 20 to 22 clubs. Mysteriously Tottenham Hotspur, 20th in 1915, are not re-elected. Instead, rivals Arsenal, 5th in the Second Division, are promoted, some sources allege via bribes
- 1920** Leading clubs from the Southern League join the Football League to form a new Third Division
- 1921** The wartime popularity of women's football leads The FA to ban women's clubs at its members' grounds
- 1922** From the 1922/23 league season, re-election is required of the bottom two clubs of both the Third Division North and Third Division South
- 1923** 28th April: The first Wembley FA Cup final sees chaotic scenes as the pitch is overrun by fans
- 1924** Herbert Chapman wins the First Division title for the first time, as manager of Huddersfield Town. The Town would go on to win three titles in a row, the first club to do so
- 1925** The offside law is changed from three to two players, thus producing more goals
- 1927** 23rd April: Cardiff City are the first and only non-English club to win the FA Cup, beating Arsenal 1-0. Another Welsh outfit, Aberdare Athletic, fail to get re-elected into the Football League, being replaced by Torquay United
- 1928** Everton's Dixie Dean becomes the first player to score 60 top flight league goals in one season. No one since has matched the feat
- 1930** 21st April: Leicester City and Arsenal draw 6-6, still the highest scoring draw at the top level in England
- 1933** 29th April: The FA Cup final sees numbered shirts for players for the first time

- 1934** Goalkeeper Steve Milton of Halifax Town sets an English league record by conceding 13 goals on his league debut, against Stockport County
- 1935** 4th December: England host Germany at White Hart Lane, despite public protests about Hitler's policies
- 1936** Sunderland win the First Division title for a then record sixth time. They remain the last club to win the league crown wearing striped jerseys
- 1937** A remarkable 147,365 fans watch the Scottish Cup Final, still a European record for a club match
- 1938** Stanley Rous, Secretary of the FA, re-writes and modernizes the laws of the game down to 17
- 1939** After making a speech at a match on Easter Saturday asking spectators to join up, club captain Harry Goslin and the entire Bolton Wanderers first team join the 53rd Field Regiment, Royal Artillery
- 1940** Tom Cooper of Liverpool FC, 15 England caps, is the only England international player killed in the war. By April, according to Picture Post, 629 professional footballers had joined the services
- 1941** Playing and watching regional football, including clubs using guest players, remains hugely popular on the home front. After the end of the Blitz in 1941 match attendances rise steadily
- 1942** Many of England's top clubs are depleted - Liverpool saw 76 players sign up and Wolves 91. The 1942 London Cup is won by Brentford FC. The competition only lasted two seasons, so the Bees remain the holders
- 1943** As in the First World War, women's factory teams are formed to play charity matches and aid with the war effort. Among them are aircraft factory teams, such as Fairey Aviation Company and A V Roe
- 1944** Arsenal international Ted Drake plays in an FA Services XI which visits Paris, defeating a French representative team 5-0, and then Brussels to defeat a Belgian side 3-0
- 1945** FA Cup rounds, up to and including the quarter-finals, are temporarily made into two-legged ties
- 1946** 9th March: Some 33 spectators are killed at Burndon Park due to poor facilities and overcrowding
- 1947** Severe winter weather decimates fixtures, leading to postponements and the league's longest ever season
- 1948** Ex-prisoner of war Bernhard 'Bert' Trautmann signs for St. Helens Town. Overcoming local anger, he would later play professionally for Manchester City, suffering a broken neck in a winning FA Cup final and being voted 1956 Footballer of the Year
- 1949** Portsmouth FC are league champions, the only southern club outside London to win the title
- 1950** England and Scotland play in their first World Cup finals, with England sensationally losing 1-0 to the United States



***'Back Up The Hill' – Leeds United, 1990***  
*The Yorkshire diehards are on a hard walk back to the top. It's a generation on since they were Champions.*



***'Gary Speed Professional Footballer' – Leeds United, 1991***  
*Coming in to his own as a top player.*



*'A Chicken Is Introduced To The Game' – Blackburn Rovers v Burnley, 2013*  
*Is he about to kick the chicken?*



*'Splattered Claret Leaves The Table' – Burnley, 1991*  
*It's Fourth Division football for him.*



*'Experience Surrounded By Youth' – Calver, 2014*  
*The Hope Valley Amateur League team gallantly insists on locals only*  
*- to keep it 'Calver'.*



*'Looking To Take The Corner' – Buxworth, 2014*  
*Having warmed up on the practice pitch, the players get their chance*  
*upon their green carpet of a main stage.*



**'Kitty In Her Turban Goes Thru It' – Bradford City, 2015**  
*A tense sporting service, at Valley Parade.*



**'Lone Huddersfield Town Supporter' – at Southend United, 1993**  
*His team is struggling in the League with few followers.  
And yet, because of segregation, he is made to sit on his own.*



**'The Marriage Procession' – St. Johnstone v FC Lucerne, 2014**

*It's early season, July - the team of Perth have a romantic European date on a balmy Perthshire evening.*



**'Face Down Through The Dirty Old Town' – Maidenhead United at Salford City, 2019**

*Maidenhead have stayed up in the division. And now they experience Salford up north.*



*'The Iron-Man Irony All-Yorkshire Derby'  
– Sheffield United v Leeds United, 1990*

*The tough player – Vinnie Jones - who has swapped teams and colours and home grounds and fans, gets it in the gob from new teammate and gentle-giant Brian Deane.*



*'Night Of Great Expectation' – Sheffield Wednesday, 2017*

*The Kop is full to brimming for the Huddersfield  
Play-Off encounter.*



*'City Claim The Occasion' – Manchester City v Watford, 2019*

*The FA Cup Final gives the League winners the chance to add to their honours for the season.*



*'Fan Amidst All that Colour' – Manchester City v Watford, 2019*

*Watford can't be humiliated (in the FA Cup Final) with this manner of support.*