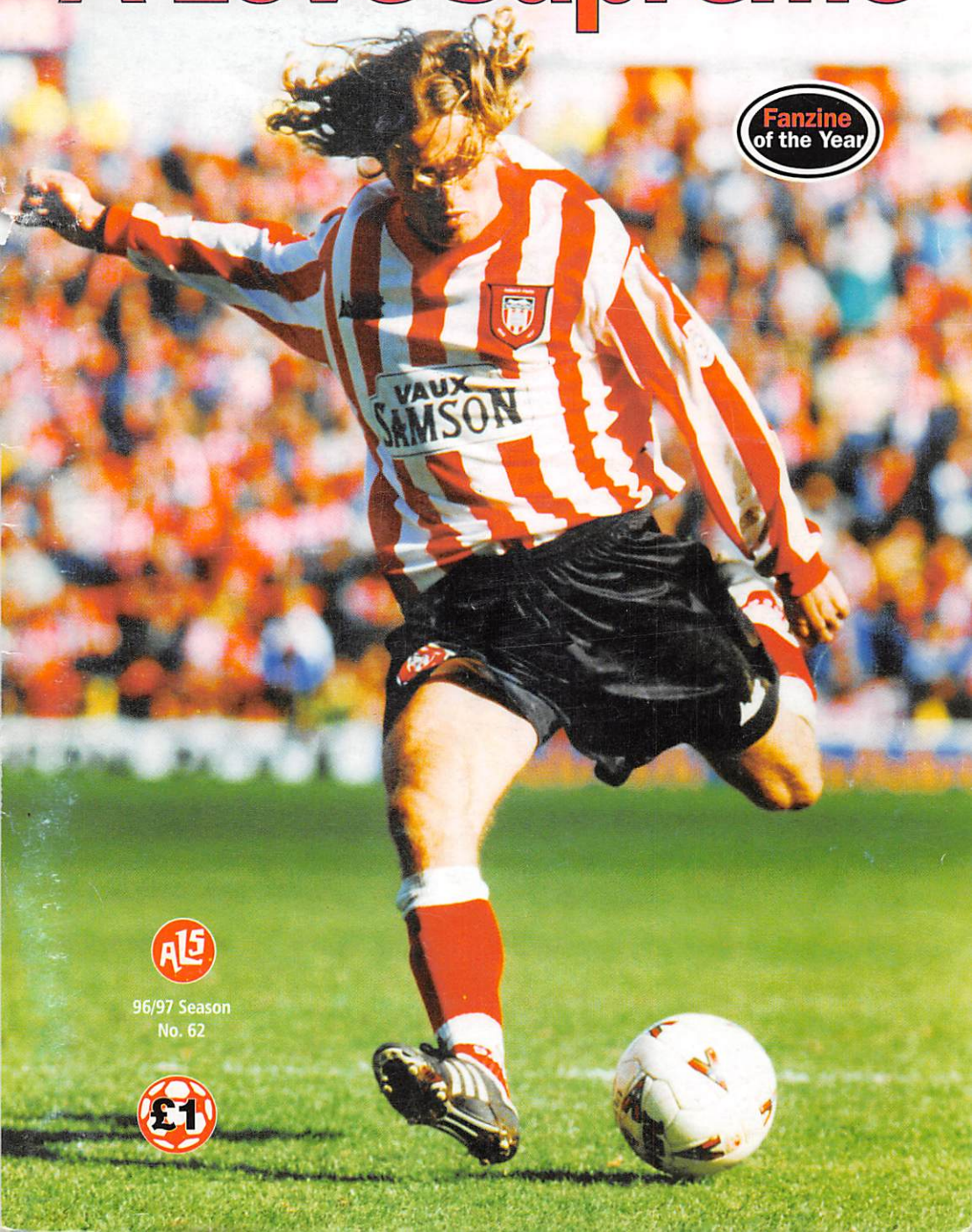


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96/97 Season
No. 62

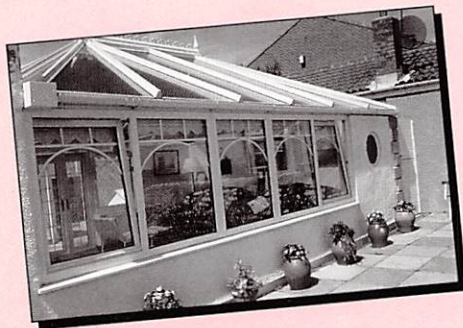


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issue no. **62**

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Gone But Not Forgotten

Jeremy Robinson,
Craig Fielding

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A Love Supreme -

The Independent Sunderland Supporters' Magazine
We worship in The Church of Football

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EDITORIAL ^{ALS}

A LOVE SUPREME, P.O. BOX 25, NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE, NE6 1QE.

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The end of an era is nigh. We have played our last cup game at Roker and are into our final half a dozen games at what is the Mecca of football. It is going to be an emotional last game at Roker Park. Let's hope by then we have achieved our aim, Premiership survival, and that we can all enjoy the final match without worrying about which league we will be playing in the following season. Although even the most sceptical amongst us would have to admit that the signs are good. The new stadium is coming along nicely and many of us have been along to Reidy's Bar to reserve our seat for next year. On the pitch our squad continues to defy the critics and when you consider the players that have been unavailable due to injury or suspension of late it is amazing how well we are coping with life in the big boys' league.

The flexibility of the squad and Peter Reid's ability to motivate are some of the major plus points. Players such as David Kelly, Dariusz Kubicki and John Mullin have played out of position and done a job for us, particularly Kelly. The loss of Captain Bally through a broken jaw was a major blow, but when his replacement Steve Agnew broke his wrist away to Arsenal many thought the worst. But the boy Darren Williams, signed from York for a measly £50,000, took his chance and covered well in the centre of midfield.

However, we all know that we cannot go on forever making do with what we have got. It is to be hoped that the signing of Swedish International Jan Eriksson will help strengthen the squad. The 29-year-old defender who cost £250,000 from Helsingborgs has 36 caps to his name. But since Reid reportedly has £7 million to spend he is hardly the big signing the fans are craving for. We need star names to help fill our new stadium, because make no mistake about it if they do not arrive we will struggle to achieve gates of over 25,000. Look at this season for instance, we have achieved only six 20,000 plus gates. People say it is cost, but a season ticket at Wearmouth will cost basically the same as the one at Roker. Supporters can see the quality of players at other Premiership



Ned Kelly



Darren Williams

particularly away, is a joyous occasion and one step closer to safety. A draw is a decent result. And if we lose, as long as it isn't to them from up the road, at least we can discuss the class players that we have seen perform.

Recent proposals from Labour to re-establish standing areas at football grounds is proving very popular with many supporters. Labour's critics have said it is nothing other than a vote winner leading up to the General Election, but it would improve the atmosphere at most big grounds. Although safety is extremely important, I believe that sitting is no safer than standing and indeed in some cases you are better off standing. For instance when the Main Stand at Valley Parade caught fire the crowd would have been able to exit the stadium quicker if there had been no seats in their way. One end behind the goal should be left unseated so that those who wish to make some real noise can do just that. Also standing is a major part of football culture, and would be welcomed back by many.

That's it for this month, enjoy your football and sing your hearts out for the lads.

clubs and can watch them in the pub for nothing. Without star billing only the hardcore will attend.

One of the differences I have noticed between this season and last is that every point is savoured and every win cherished. This time last year a win was a canny result, a draw was acceptable and a defeat was disastrous. How things have changed. A win at present,

The deadline for Issue 63 will be Monday 24th February. All contributions must be in *by* then. Thanks.

NEW STADIUM UPDATE



Late January, 1997

cigarettes & alcohol

What activity is it that Sunderland players engage in which causes so many of them to suffer a groin strain? They have too much spare time if you ask me, after all "the Devil will find work...." They ought to get out more, or at least take up a different hobby. On a more general note the recent injury crisis illustrates what I have known for years: sport is bad for you, and football's so-called hard men are a bunch of pampered softies. I have no backing for this opinion from empirical evidence or official statistics, my view is supported by that infallible source of information: prejudice based upon personal experience.

In 1987 I was a student in a damp hovel on a diet of Liebfraumilch, Silk Cut and baked beans made fashionably exotic by the addition of chilli powder (on Sundays I would cook them with a beef Oxo cube, for that traditional Sunday dinner experience). I decided to take up jogging so that I would be fit enough to walk to the Job Centre after I had graduated; I got a pair of trainers and some tracky bottoms off my mam for Xmas and set off on a run around the local park. And did I fancy myself or what? Oh yes! I jogged around eyeballing the

pale specimens that I passed on the way - look at me, I was saying, I am a Modern Man. I am fit. I work out. I look after my body. I am aware of the spiritual strength to be gained through physical fitness. I caught a cold. I stayed in bed for a week. I gave up jogging. I have been to an accident and emergency department on four occasions, each as a result of a footballing injury. As a fifteen year old I had a knee injury similar to that suffered by Niall Quinn, but I was back in action in no time, picking my spots, masturbating, and hanging around bus shelters with the best of them. Niall however, needs a whole season off. Why? All he has to do is stand on the edge of the box and wait for the ball to bounce off him, what does he want knees for? All he needs is a spinal column and some vestige of a lower brain stem with the reflexes. Another more famous example of a footballer getting his injury out of all proportion was Mick Jones in the 1972 Cup Final. He ended up with his arm in a sling after breaking his collar bone, and my God did he suffer. He even had a limp, which is an odd reaction to a broken collar bone. His slow walk up the steps to get his medal was made almost unbearable by the pained and distraught grimace on his face.

He looked like he was on his way to be executed. But everyone thought he was a hero, the Sunday papers carried pictures of him, the commentators eulogised his bravery, we all had daydreams about coming off the bench at Wembley to score the winner, leaving our crutches on the touchline to do it. I once broke my arm playing five-a-side. A week later I sat my final exams at University with my arm in a sling. I passed but enjoyed no hero worship, I did not crawl up the steps at the degree ceremony looking like I'd been shot, I received no standing ovation. All I got by the way of recognition was my mother on the 'phone calling me a stupid bugger. The final proof in my theory that sport, and football in particular, is bad for you comes in the following experience from my childhood on the mean streets of Pennywell. I was playing football in our front room with my brother, replaying the 1973 Cup Final. The three piece was pushed back and a closed door at each end were the goals. My brother decided to copy Vic Halom's injury time shove on David Harvey and I went through a glass panel in the door ending up with six stitches below my elbow and a badly lacerated arm. A few hours later I was lying on the settee, pale and

shaken, sucking on a Joe Gerald's 99 sandwich (the one with the extra thick choccy wafer on the bottom), thankful that my injury would not prevent me from turning out for Quarry View Junior's footy team in the semi-final replay of the local schools' cup competition. On that fateful day two weeks later I turned out with my arm strapped. Almost from the kick off I got the ball and ran past at least nine of their players to reach the edge of the box where I unleashed an unstoppable peg-ender. At the same time as I hit the ball I was whacked from the side by their one remaining outfield player and hit the deck. The ball came back out off the post and I had opened up my scar. I was sitting in a lake of blood and failed to fight back the tears.

I was helped off the pitch (limping!) in a terrible state, watched by a crowd of mams and dads. I crossed the line at the point where Diane Clark and Patricia Hunter were sitting - the only girls I had ever kissed and oh how I wanted to impress them. Surely they would be moved to pity I thought, they would run over and offer to help, to soothe my pain, bathe my wounds, cradle my head and perhaps, just perhaps, shed a tear. I looked up at them through a gush of snot and tears. They were pissing themselves. I slowly dragged what was left of my dignity and self esteem back to the changing rooms and cried like a baby.

So, to conclude, football makes you suffer, and footballers are just too fit, too highly tuned. If

you have immediate access to a physiotherapist and private health care as well then you are bound to feel even the slightest niggles and complain about it, the slightest injury will have a major effect. On the other hand, if you are an average unfit person you can have a brain tumour the size of a melon hanging off your forehead and treat it with a couple of Aspro Clears. You only complain when it starts to get in the way of the telly. My advice to footballers and sports people of all levels is this: Remember if God had meant us to do sports he wouldn't have given us armchairs.

Stephen Walker



Through The Grapevine

..... **NEWS, VIEWS AND GOSSIP**

The driver of the midday train from Sunderland to Newcastle Central station on the day Kevin '10 year contract' Keegan resigned was obviously a top Mackem! Why? Because as he went over the Tyne Bridge he stopped the train and announced over the PA system "Any Newcastle fans on board who would like to jump off the bridge, please leave the train at this point!"

Young Cieran Ratton, son of Ged, was in his fathers arms on the touchline at Whitburn watching Sunderland youths play Newcastle on January 11th as you've got to bring the bairns up the right way you know! As Sunderland completed a superb comeback from 0-2 down to score the winning third goal through the potentially exciting Paul Beavers, young Cieran was taken aback at the sight of his frivolous Uncle (Tony Ratton, aged on the road to 40) running onto the pitch punching the air in delight at a victory over the Mags. A fine example I say... any victory over that lot is worth celebrating irrespective of age!

Supporters still have to learn who made the decision to refuse a 5,700 allocation of tickets for the Arsenal Cup tie in London. Only 2,900 travelled which denied many Sunderland supporters the chance to see the lads in a really big cup tie. Why does no-one from the club explain why this decision was made, why is it always "No comment" whenever controversial issues crop up? Why can they not talk to the supporters and, once again, were the Roker Liaison Group consulted?

Many fans have cynically questioned the quality of Jan Eriksson, our new Swedish international defender/midfielder as his transfer fee was a measly £250,000. Fans should ignore the fee. Often modern day players have contractual agreements regarding their sell-on value but irrespective of this, Eriksson has a top quality pedigree and many believe Reid has bought him to play in the first team and not just simply to hang around as a squad member getting the occasional run out. Eriksson, of course, scored in a 2-1 win over England in 1992 in the European Championship finals.

Patrick Haverson of the Financial Times has written an excellent and very understandable article on football clubs entering the Stock Market in the February edition of the outstanding 'When Saturday Comes' entitled 'Share and Share Alike?' Amongst his many observations is that "It remains an inescapable fact that one reason why many clubs have gone public is that it has enabled owners and directors to realise a very substantial price for their shares." Yes, it would be an interesting exercise to challenge certain individuals in the football world and say "Okay, if you are not in the game to make massive personal financial gain are you prepared to put back any profits made on the back of the flotation of the football club back into the club for transfer market sorties or to develop the clubs' training facilities, youth policies, schoolboy player facilities or even supporters facilities?" Interesting eh?!!! On the subject of football shares anyone who invested £1,000 in Celtic FC a year ago would

have seen their investment rise to £5,877 and the same sum invested in Leeds United 12 months ago is now worth £4,380. For anyone interested the NatWest Bank has issued an easy guide to investing in football clubs and they have their own stockbroking services. I know of one SAFC fan who has purchased 10 shares for £72 through a stockbroker so the opportunity is there for those who could not afford £585 on or before December 24th, 1996 to have a piece of the action now.

Sunderland. The picture which features a drawing of Roker Park taken looking from the Roker End and features legendary players and teams from 1899-1997. Players featured include Carter, Gurney, Shack, Hurley, Monty, Kerr, Todd, Rowell and Benno. It can be seen in the window of the Supporters' Association shop in Roker Baths Road and purchased directly from there too.

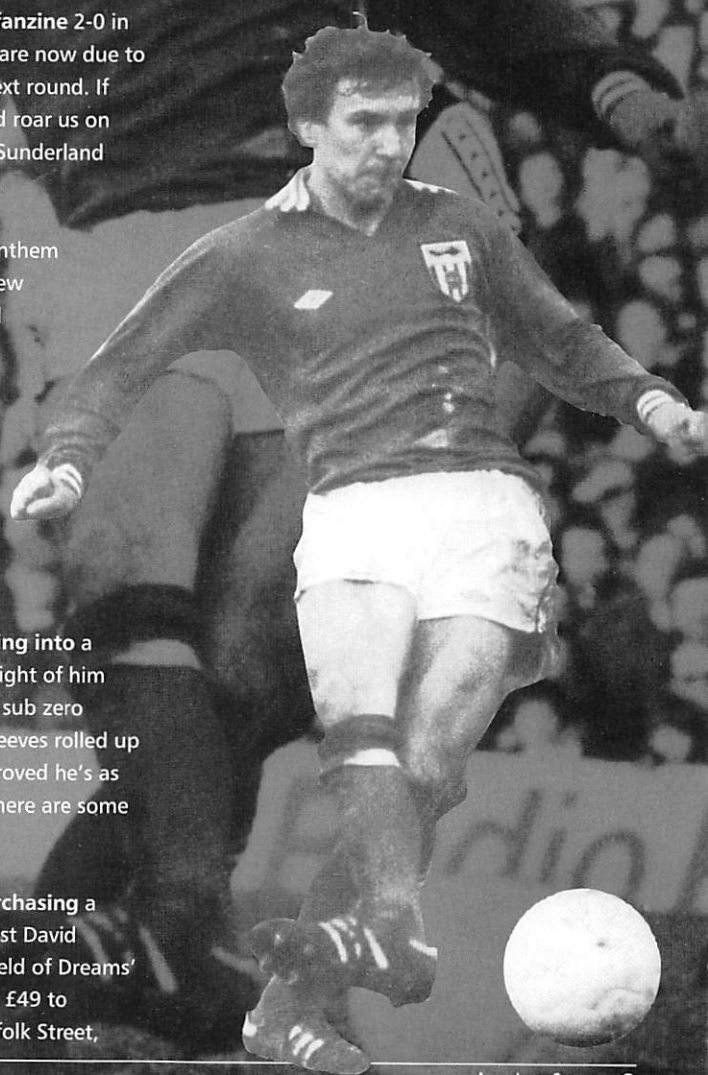
Tom Lynn

ALS beat The Gooner (Arsenal) fanzine 2-0 in a Granada Talk TV footy quiz and are now due to face Boro on 21st March in the next round. If you've got satellite TV, tune in and roar us on please. I'm sure we'll hear you in Sunderland University's satellite link-up room!

Anyone any idea about a club anthem for the lads to run out to at the new stadium. Personally I'd like the old "From the bank of the River Wear to the shores of Sicily." Fulwell terrace legend resurrected and turned into song. It's time we had our own club anthem so let's hear your views on the subject at ALS and we'll print your ideas.

Lionel Perez is certainly developing into a terrace (sorry, seat) hero and the sight of him playing a blinder in a blizzard at a sub zero Highbury in the FA Cup with his sleeves rolled up and no tracky bottoms certainly proved he's as insane as goalkeepers come and there are some mad ones around!

Any supporters interested in purchasing a superb framed picture by local artist David Henshaw of Roker Park entitled 'Field of Dreams' can do so by sending a cheque for £49 to 'Matchday Promotions' at 29, Norfolk Street,



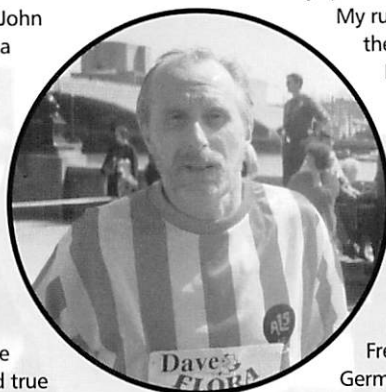
Running for

My main hobby is long distance running. Some may regard this as a tough and painful way to have fun. To a certain extent it is, but nothing like the mental and emotional self-flagellation that comes from supporting Sunderland. Occasionally, the two come together.

In April 1992, just a week after John Byrne had headed the ball into a gaping Norwich net to take Sunderland to the F.A. Cup Final I ran the London Marathon. To celebrate the win (the football, not the run) I wore a Sunderland football shirt. The marathon starts in Greenwich Park and after a few miles reaches Charlton. By coincidence Sunderland had played at home to Charlton the day before, and true to form, Sunderland had lost. Did I get some abuse! The rest of the run was great, with tremendous support for the shirt, particularly around Tower Bridge.

Later, running past the Tower of London at around the 22 mile mark I was approached by a guy in the crowd who collared me with the immortal words "Bob Wilson wants to talk to you". I then had my 30 seconds of fame as we discussed Sunderland, 1973 and all that. I had sufficient wits about me to ask my new friend about his own Wembley appearance when he left the near post unguarded for Steve Heighway to score for Liverpool. "Thanks for reminding me", he wittily said. I also ran the London Marathon this year and wore my ALS 70s style shirt. Apart from endless choruses

of "Cheer Up Peter Reid" it was fairly uneventful. It was also bloody hot. At one point in Docklands as my energy was flagging I bumped into a group of Sunderland supporters. Each insisted on shaking my hand. This did nothing for my finishing time (which was crap anyway) but it did lift my spirits.



My running ambition has been to run the New York Marathon, and last November I had the chance. The coach dumped us at the start on Staten Island over 2 hours before the start.

Unfortunately it was bitterly cold, and I tried to find a place amongst the 30,000 runners where I could both rest and shelter. I found a place to sit amongst a group of French runners and some

Germans. Huddling under my coat I was aware that the German blokes had moved on. A few minutes later, two guys sat next to me, but I took no notice and carried on hiding under my shelter.

Eventually, I looked up and noticed familiar colours. The two lads were wearing Sunderland shirts. I started chatting and discovered that one even lived a few doors away from my aunt in Killingworth Drive. I did not catch their names, but I know they read ALS. Hope you had a good run lads, and see you at London in April when we celebrate another visit to Wembley. Perhaps that is a little ambitious. OK, I will settle for a re-appearance in the Premiership next season.

Dave Kidd

Sunderland

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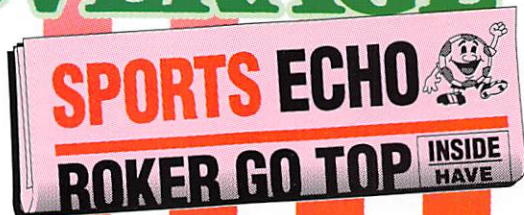
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F A R E W E L L T O

Roker Park

Roker Park and I go back a long way. My father's father was born in Roker Avenue in 1889, and thrilled me as a youngster with stirring tales of turn of the century Sunderland matches - including the 9-1 victory up the road. My mother's father also followed the lads, so my football allegiance was fairly well defined from a very early age. My dad wasn't a regular follower, although he did take my mam to Roker when she was expecting me - it obviously worked, so I did the same 26 years later. That worked as well! Living in Bishop Auckland, it wasn't that easy to get to Roker without parental assistance, so my early experiences of the lads were restricted to watching charity matches involving Charlie Hurley's All Stars, or Jim Baxter's XI at Kingsway. My first trip to Roker was in 1968, when Kerr and Tueart gave us a 2-0 victory over Wolves. We stood in the Fulwell, in front of the Clock Stand floodlight - that barrier is the souvenir I want when the ground is demolished. I had to wait another two years for my next visit - my fourteenth birthday, a 2-1 win over Norwich, viewed from the family enclosure in the Roker End. I can remember the goals as if it was yesterday. That was it - hooked, completely and utterly. I soon got together with a group of like minded school friends, and travelled on the OK bus to every home game we could manage. Three shillings bus fare, three shillings entrance, and one shilling for a programme (total of 35p). We found our spiritual home in the Fulwell, immediately behind the big gangway, and just on the Posh Stand side of the singers. We had a brief sabbatical in the Roker in 74-75, courtesy of the complimentary tickets that were the wages

of Roker Bingo agents (whatever happened to all of the money we raised for a roof on the Roker End?). We did manage to sell them at the turnstiles quite often so that we could get back in the Fulwell, but we still got wet a lot that season.

We stayed there until age and sense moved us a few yards out of the crush, towards the Posh stand, but only for a few weeks in 1982. A concentration of lunatics forced us back to my original place at the Clock Stand side, where we stayed for the next fourteen years, until last summer, with only the occasional foray into the seats or Paddock, courtesy of the odd freebie. The lack of junior prices in the Fulwell has forced us into the Main Stand paddock this season, which is a bit of a culture shock after 26 years! I remember the days when we would have a competition to see who could get the furthest up the pitch after a goal - I made the halfway line when Dave Watson scored against Carlisle, and my legs made a glorious appearance on "Shoot" the next day! We would also run onto the field at the end of each game, with the sole purpose of being ejected by the police - through the player's tunnel, and past the dressing rooms! My mate Derek managed to pat Dick Malone on the back after his legendary Orient thunderbolt, and didn't wash his hand for two days. We also toured the ground - as soon as the gates opened near the end of the match, we would run out of the Fulwell, and nip into the seats or the paddock, depending on the weather. "Heyup, peanuts, tanner a bag!" One bag to eat, one bag to throw at people! Great days indeed. The place has provided me with a 27 year rollercoaster ride of emotions - unforgettable,

tearful, times of bleakness and despair, with Gillingham in 1987 being the lowest of the low. Unforgettable nights of noise and joy - Manchester City in 1973, and Chelsea in 1992, when the crowd were so emotionally drained that extra time would probably have been intolerable. Ridiculous nights - walking from Bishop to queue for Sporting Lisbon tickets, only to find a total of ten others in front of me. I climbed the Fulwell wall that night, and slept on the bench. Crazy nights, like the all-night party before the Norwich ticket scramble in 1992. Mixed emotion nights - being locked out of the West Ham game in 1980, or being passed over the heads of the Fulwell after passing out in a crush when the winner was scored against Stoke in the Cup, 1976.

My friends and I have grown up at Roker Park - 27 years is a big part of anyone's life, and I've loved it. I still stand with some of the same people that I have shared Roker with since 1970, and we'll stay together at the new ground. I've seen nearly a quarter of all the games ever played there, but last season was something special because I was able to share the joy and triumph with my son, who has grown up a lot there in the four years he's been a regular. In a perfect world, Roker Park would have evolved gradually to be suitable for the needs of the next century of Sunderland Football Club, but it didn't and it isn't. So we've got to move, and I do so with a lot of fond memories of the old place - not all happy memories, but following the Lads is a character-building exercise if nothing else. I'm excited about the new ground, I've bought my bricks, and I hope it can give me and mine what Roker has over the years - and I'm not just talking about silverware.

Thank you Roker Park, and goodbye.

Sobs

Top Ten Matches, 1970 - 1997

(no particular order)

Man City, 3-1 FA Cup Replay, 1973

West Ham, 6-0, League, 1977

Boro, 4-0, League, 1977

Forest, 1-0, League Cup, 1984

Millwall, 6-2, League, 1992

Millwall, 6-0, League, 1995

Chelsea, 2-1 FA Cup, 1992

Man Utd, 2-1, FA Cup, 1976

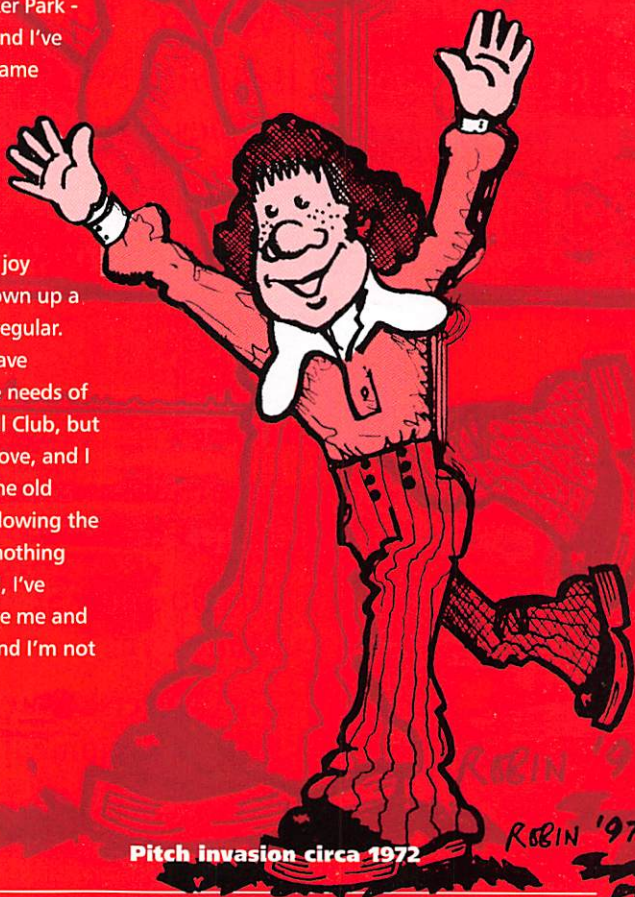
Stoke, 2-1, FA Cup, 1976

Sheffield Utd, 6-2, League, 1979

Bottom Ten Matches, 1970 - 1997

Gillingham, playoffs, 1987

(ten times over)



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Newcastle Fans' Top 10

- 1 **Walk Away Walk Away** - KC and the Sunshine Band
- 2 **Don't Leave Me This Way** - Thelma Houston
- 3 **Ticket to Ride** - The Beatles
- 4 **Every Time You Go Away** - Paul Young
- 5 **There's not a Dry Eye in the House** - Meatloaf
- 6 **It's All Over Now** - The Rolling Stones
- 7 **I Don't Want to Lose You** - Gloria Estefan
- 8 **Do You Know Where You Are Going To** - Diana Ross
- 9 **There's A Kind Of Hush (all over the Toon tonight!)** - Herman's Hermits
- 10 **Tears of a Clown** - Kevin Keegan

Clive Lee

HE'S GOING HOME (tune from 3 lions)

He's going home he's going
Keegan's going home
He's going home he's going
Keegan's going home

Everyone seems to know the score
They've seen it all before
Cause Newcastle's gonna give it away
gonna blow it away
Cause Sunderland's gonna win today
Cause Keegan's gone away
Sunderland fans are cheering
Newcastle will have 30 years of hurt
Newcastle will have to keep dreaming
Newcastle will have so many hopes but after sneers
Lots of lonesome years when they're down all in tears
and Sunderland fans remember that
tackle by Ord and when Russell scored
Howey belted the ball
But Newcastle are still dreaming
Newcastle lost again
Sunderland fans are cheering
Newcastle will have 30 years of hurt
Newcastle will have to keep dreaming

He's going home he's going
Keegan's going home
He's going home he's going
Keegan's going home

Rebecca Cummings (10 yrs)

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on the corner of the Main Stand and Roker End.

Day-by-Day Believer



Monday 16th December

Our brilliant win against Chelsea on Sky yesterday has got us a lot of (overdue) respect from the national papers, if not from the bookies who have eased us only fractionally in the relegation market. But Chelsea have been pushed right out from 14-1 dark horses to 40-1 no hopers.

Tuesday 17th

Got interviewed by Radio 5 about the badge/crest controversy. It took over half an hour to set up the satellite in a car park near Roker and then the interview was over in about three minutes. I have no memory of what I said and couldn't record it as it went out live. Much rejoicing in the town tonight as Newcastle got beat by lowly Coventry and Liverpool trounced Forest to go top.

Wednesday 18th

Another endurance test watching the reserves at sexy Ferens Park, this time against Preston. Truly vile conditions with a sharp Durham wind blowing the rain right on top of us in the seats, and God knows what it was like for the hardy souls under their umbrellas in the 'outfield'. Boggy ground prevented our flair showing through but Sammy Aiston worked hard and was rewarded with a last minute equaliser. Afterwards saw Mullin, Aggers and Stewie in the bar and it looks like old Stewie is dying his hair dark brown - or was it muck, sweat and rain?

Thursday 19th

A flash flood sent a tidal wave through Chester-le-Street, preventing Newcastle's share flotation grabbing every inch of the local front pages. Meanwhile the fans have another exotic transfer target in Senegal's Mamadou Diallo, who has apparently "impressed" during his week's training. He's certainly a fast mover if the Road Runner-style blurry photo in the Echo is any guide. Arch-mag Frank Clark quit Forest and hopefully this won't spark a City Ground revival carrying them to safety at our expense.

Friday 20th

From today's Racing Post, a pleasantly unseasonal comment: "Keegan's faltering title challenge was neatly summed up by William Hills, who reckon Newcastle is more likely to see snow on Christmas Day (4-1) than the title (5-1)." I haven't got a Man. United ticket but went down to stay with a friend in Preston anyway and I will play it by ear tomorrow.

Saturday 21st

Ticketless in Preston. I decided against making the trek to Old Trafford and had the bright idea of going to see another game instead, i.e. lower league fun. I ruled out home games at Morecambe, Oldham, Bury and Wigan in favour of the second division's glamour i.e. Blackpool vs York, who at least have some recent links with Roker. Bloomfield Road is known worldwide as one of the worst footy grounds in existence and from the main road it looks like something from a war picture, just a few sheets of corrugated iron supported by barbed wire and surrounded by a radioactive waste dump. Inside it isn't so bad but "my team" York got stuffed 3-0. They read out the Premiership scored at full time and when I heard we'd got beat 5-0, Bloomfield Road didn't seem such a bad place to be after all.

Sunday 22nd

According to the Sunday Times Lionel Perez fancies "a film career" after he finishes playing and his cult on Wearside is now threatening that of Mickey Gray. The only cult surrounding Mickey Gray is among southern journalists who have always been obsessed by him. Apparently his nickname is "Sir Lancelot" because of his flowing locks, though it's the first I've heard of it. Does anybody still call him Mickey Stitch, I wonder, which was his nickname when he was in an ALS 'Young Un' feature back in the early 90s.

Monday 23rd

We are now 6-1 to go down, the same as Boro. Back in Sunderland I was greeted with the shock news that Player of the Year Steve Brodie has gone on loan to Scarborough where I am sure John Kay will show him what's what.

Tonight Newcastle took on Liverpool live on Sky and the reds held the barcodes 1-1. Consensus: they have duffed it again.

Tuesday 24th

Before making my way down for Xmas with my brother and family in Worcester I made a kamikaze blitz on the town shops for gifts, etc. No joy at the club shop where they had sold out of the Charlie Hurley cassette. I had to go to Hills'. The SAFC shop in the Market Square had seven staff and six customers.

Wednesday 25th

Among my Christmas boxes a paperback about footy misdeeds called 'The Lad Done Bad'. Not a word about our clean-living heros, of course, not even in a chapter entitled "Always crashing the same car" which, unfortunately wasn't about the Ferguson/Melville/Phil Gray incidents at Monkwearmouth.

Thursday 26th

Derby at home, a dismal stalemate until the two goals in the second half so no complaints. Marco got a decent cheer when he came on late doors and he was even gracious enough to avoid scoring against us. More good news on getting home and seeing Teletext that we are 'closing in' on Shay Given who has apparently fallen for a Sunderland lass and is unsettled at Ewok Park.

Friday 27th

In the pub at chucking out time I bump into a mate who says I can have his place in an executive box at West Ham tomorrow. Catch is I've got to be ready in my Sunday best to be picked up at 6.00. Hurry to bed and set three alarm clocks, hope I don't have to iron any shirts.

Saturday 28th

Started the day with a bang by falling down the stairs at 5.30 and twisting my ankle so I was limping all day. Felt rough until loading up on an 'Olympian' breakfast at a pricey Little Chef somewhere in Yorkshire, the trip down enlivened by seeing crashed car after crashed car on the opposite carriageway like something from that new David Cronenberg film they're trying to get banned. Newport Pagnell services is overrun by Gloomy Wolves fans on their way to Charlton. Arrive in the grotty East End just after noon and park near a fish and chip shop selling what Manuel in Fawlty Towers called 'cockney stinking eel pie'.

The match itself seemed amazingly short up in the comfy

private box in the Bobby Moore stand. West Ham aren't much of a side but we seemed a bit too "festive" and unable to get our act together. Cheese at half time and on Channel 4 we watched a bit of "Journey to the Centre of the Earth". Long drive home, arriving 11 o'clock to read Teletext where it says "Sunderland skipper Alan Ball is to miss nine games".

Sunday 29th

The local and national press is full of some pretty savage knife twisting about our performance. And, there is discontent brewing about the club's decision to take only 2,700 instead of 5,700 for the Arsenal game.



Monday 30th

First Israel, then Senegal, now we're after the leading striker in France, though if anybody here had heard of Stephane Guivarc before today they've kept it to themselves.

Tuesday 31st

Footy highlights of the year: 1) Scotty's penalty against the Mags at Roker. 2) Winning the first division and going up. 3) Keegan's "I'd love it if we beat them" outburst. 4) Daver Suter's goals for Croatia in Euro '96. 5) Perez at Goodison.

Wednesday 1st January, 1997

Welcome to Escape from New York year. Manhattan is a top security prison and we are playing Coventry on an icy Highfield Road. The snow had been cleared and piled at the sides, just handy for the sky blues to make into snowballs and chuck at Lionel, who proved how cold it was by actually wearing leggings. A hard-fought draw at a surprisingly good stadium, and we're back up to dizzy eleventh yet again.

Thursday 2nd

The 'cold snap' continues but no worries about the Arsenal game, apparently.

Friday 3rd

Travel down to London for the Arsenal game. I've never been to Highbury but everybody says it's fantastic. I wouldn't mind if it turned out to be a pigsty as long as we aren't trounced.

Saturday 4th

Perez for prez: Sub zero windchill on pokey plastic seats detracted a bit from the majesty of Highbury and it was a bit like torture until we scored. From then on the tension built and built and the last five minutes were just hysterical. Afterwards in a nearby pub we watched the extended highlights on Sky and they kept showing the Melville 'handball' over and over and zooming in on it like the famous 'Zapruder film' of the Kennedy assassination, with Ordy lurking in the background on a grassy knoll. It gradually hits me what a fantastic result this is one of the peaks of the season.

Sunday 5th

The general mood is, for the first time this season, that we won't go down. Perez praised in all the papers but the Sunday Sun can't be serious with their 'Gazza for Sunderland'

splash. Jimmy Monty does the cup draw and of course we get Leeds (provided we beat Arsenal and they beat Palace), at home this time.

Monday 6th

Aggers broke his wrist at Highbury so we could now just about field a full team of corks, with Coton in goal, Howey and Scott at the back, Smith, Agnew, Ball and Rae in midfield and Stewie, Russell and Quinn up front. Sudden transfer news is that we're getting Swedish international Jan Eriksson for tuppence ha'penny. This proves that when we actually sign players we do it in a flash and if it rumbles on for weeks (Harazi, Diallo, etc) it is doomed never to happen.

Tuesday 7th

Eriksson flew in, looked bemused in his Echo photo with Reidy and flew out again. At the price you can't be robbed but then again they say that about pound-a-pint beers. Are they cut price because the brewery wants rid of them or because they are just watered-down piss.

Wednesday 8th

Keegan quits.

Thursday 9th

We could sign Gazza, Davor Suter, Abraham Lincoln and Fred Flintstone and it still wouldn't keep them up the road out of the headlines. Reidy is in a very long list of possible successors but Irish bookies Paddy Power sum it up quite well as they reckon Supermac McDonald is more likely to take over - he's 50-1, Reidy's 86s. My money would go on Toshack at 3/1 but apparently the wise cash is on Bobby Robson or Beardo.

Friday 10th

Watched 'Top of the Pops' tonight and a hot new Sunderland band called 'Kenickie' were on with their hit single 'In your car'. Apparently they are telling people they are named after a character out of Grease but we know they're really a tribute to Dariusz and only avoided calling themselves 'Kubickie' so as not to embarrass the bashful Pole.

Saturday 11th

Second Arsenal game. Went to the Methodist church next to the New Derby before the match and had sandwiches and tea for £1.10 - genial pensioners serving behind the counter

and by the time I left it was pretty full of home and away fans. Thanks to Adams o.g. we ended up winning which must be counted as one of the least predictable wins of the season. Another stormer from Perez and it as nice to see Seaman welcomed with applause, even if the Fulwell End chanted for him to get rid of his 'tache.

Sunday 12th

Safety at last? Buoyant confidence in the town reflected in the latest bookies' odds which rank us 7th worst and therefore not likely to go down. But we're stuck in 11th once again and Everton have a game in hand one notch above.

Monday 13th

Went across to Reidy's Bar to book our seats in the new stadium - two rows of six up in the North Stand which is sort of the same as the Fulwell. The league trophy is on a little table in the corner of the bar and we all got our photos taken with it, one by one then as a group. Reidy's Bar is like something out of a grim student union building, enlivened only by photos and cuttings of the great man (plus a weird stuffed doll) around the walls.

Tuesday 14th

Dalglish is named as Keegan's successor - bad news for us as he wins things and may tempt Shay Given north of the Tyne, which is not what we want at all, as Srnicek wants away. Arsenal are quoted 7/4 to beat us tomorrow which is pretty hard to resist as I can't believe we're going to beat the Gunners twice out of three.

Wednesday 15th

Arsenal replay. Missed the match as I had to go to London and Oxford for work meetings.

Thursday 16th

Back home and there's zero Sunderland news.

Friday 17th

Ditto Thursday, apart from the usual Shay Given speculation. Ewok caretaker Tony Parkes (the most anonymous man in soccer except Steve Gibson) says he won't let Given go to the Mags as there's no love lost between Dalglish and Blackburn.

Saturday 18th

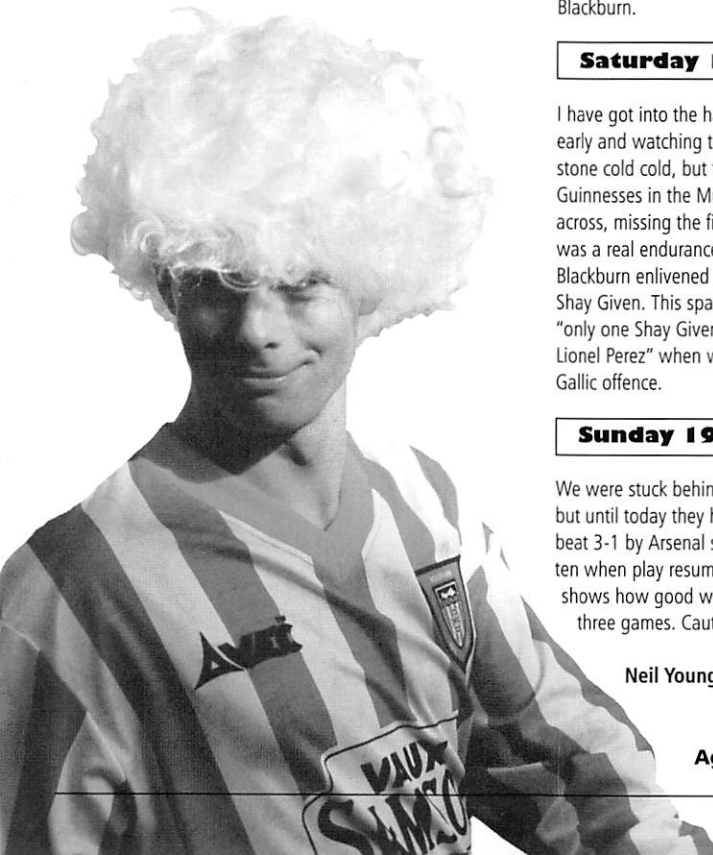
I have got into the habit of driving to Roker, getting there early and watching the match stone cold sober as well as stone cold cold, but today for a change had a few Guinneses in the Museum Vaults beforehand and got a lift across, missing the first five minutes. And the match itself was a real endurance test, as a Roker bore drew against Blackburn enlivened only by the touchline appearance of Shay Given. This sparked the Fulwell into "sign him up" and "only one Shay Given" chants, closely followed by "only one Lionel Perez" when we realised our current star might take Gallic offence.

Sunday 19th

We were stuck behind Everton on the same points as them but until today they had a game in hand. Thankfully they got beat 3-1 by Arsenal so now we may even get into the top ten when play resumes in a couple of weeks. This result also shows how good we were against the Gunners in all our three games. Cautious optimism creeping in.

Neil Young

Aggers gets a hair transplant!



snippets

I'VE GOT A COUSIN CALLED KEVIN

Apparently Kevin Keegan has resigned from Newcastle, and has been replaced by Kenny Dalglish. I know I was amazed to hear it myself. I couldn't believe what little media coverage the whole thing generated, a couple of lines in the local press and that was about it. Still, them lot from up the road are such a minor force in football why should anyone be interested.

Howard Hughes

Ticket to Ride

Many fans will want to know if there are any plans to change Sunderland's confusing, but fair ticket allocating system for away games. At the moment long term season ticket holders, known as Full Season ticket holders, have first crack followed by Key Plan and New Season Ticket holders. Any remaining tickets then go on sale to the general public. The question is when we move to the new stadium will all former Roker Season Ticket holders have the same rights. If this is the case then it seems a little unfair. On the other hand, if the club continue their present policy of seniority then in ten years there will be 14 different categories of season tickets.

Wayne Entwistle

Hey Mickey...

Interesting how easily Michael Gray adapted to playing in a five man midfield. Many fans have criticised him this season whilst playing wide on the left hand side, but it appears that a more central role suits Mickey. His non stop running has proved to his critics that there cannot be a fitter player at the club. If Martin Smith was playing just outside him we could have the ideal partnership.

Peter Perfect

Reidy's the Man

It was made up that Peter Reid won Sky Sports Football League manager of the year for 1996, at their recent awards ceremony at The Wembley Conference Centre. It was also good to see a Sunderland manager in there with the Fergusons of this world and just makes you realise how far the club has come in terms of media coverage since the dark days of Buxton and Butcher. Reidy, who has already won the Manager's Manager of the Year at the end of last season, not to mention the championship, must have a fairly impressive looking mantelpiece at home these days!

James McGrory



ALS QUIZ



By Quizmaster Wilson

WARM-UP

1. With whom did Ian Wright begin his career?
2. Against whom did Michael Bridges score his first goal for Sunderland?
3. Which English player handled to give Switzerland the penalty from which they equalised in Euro '96?
4. Which two players who played in the final of Euro'96 are currently with Premiership sides?
5. Which team did Arsene Wenger coach before moving to Arsenal?

FIRST-HALF

6. Who are the Terriers?
7. Name Oldham's ground.
8. Who scored England's first goal under Glenn Hoddle?
9. Against whom?
10. Which player committed the foul that gave Scotland the penalty they missed against England in Euro '96?

SECOND HALF

11. Which was Stuart Pearce's first league club?
12. Which former Tottenham midfielder became the first black player to play for the Republic of Ireland?
13. Which player brought down Paul Ince to give England their penalty against the Dutch in Euro'96?
14. Who beat Leeds in the final of the 1973 Cup Winners Cup?
15. With whom did Kevin Keegan win his last European Champions Cup winners medal?

EXTRA-TIME

16. Which is the only team to have won the European Champions Cup final after a replay?
17. Eight different clubs have retained the European Champions Cup. Name them.
18. Which team beat Barcelona 2-0 on penalties in the 1986 Champions Cup Final?
19. Which French side, who have never won the Champions Cup, were losing finalists twice in the first four years of the competition?
20. Who scored the winner for Paris St. Germain in last year's Cup Winners Cup final?

Answers on page 46.

DESPITE FIRST IMPRESSIONS...



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Blah, Blah, Blah!

I will be the first to admit I laughed out loud at the news of Kevin Keegan's departure. I was sent to Newcastle's training ground in Maiden Castle to cover the story and just could not keep the smile off my face. Keegan couldn't cope with the pressure any more and called it a day.

But when I sit back and think of his time on Tyneside I have to say, bizarre as it may sound, we do owe him a vote of thanks for what he did. I know he never won any silverware, which obviously kept us entertained last year as the 12-point lead disappeared, but what he did do was help put the North East on the footballing map.

When things started to take off at Newcastle the other clubs in the area were left looking at what could be as the shadow from St. James' grew. And it was the relevant success up there which helped to pull us and Boro out of the doldrums.

With the hysteria attached to Tyneside both Sunderland and Boro knew they had to act and do something. We would probably not be where we are now and football would not have such a high profile in this area if it had not been for those changes. As a manager Keegan had his strange points. He was widely known for his tantrums and outbursts but they were mainly a latterday thing.

A few years ago when it was believed Andy Cole had quit United after a row at a Wimbledon cup game I was sent along to Maiden Castle with a Sky Television cameraman to interview Keegan.

Despite going through one of the most strained periods of his managerial career he seemed remarkably fresh and easy going. He made it so simple to interview him and allayed the worries I had at carrying out one of my first

television interviews. In time his attitude towards the press was to change slightly as the pressure began to take its toll, but generally he was a nice guy. He had a certain charisma that the likes of Mick Buxton and Terry Butcher could only dream about and people should remember him for that. The down side to his departure is the arrival of Kenny Dalglish and the belief Newcastle could now go on to win things. But we'll just have to wait and see about that...

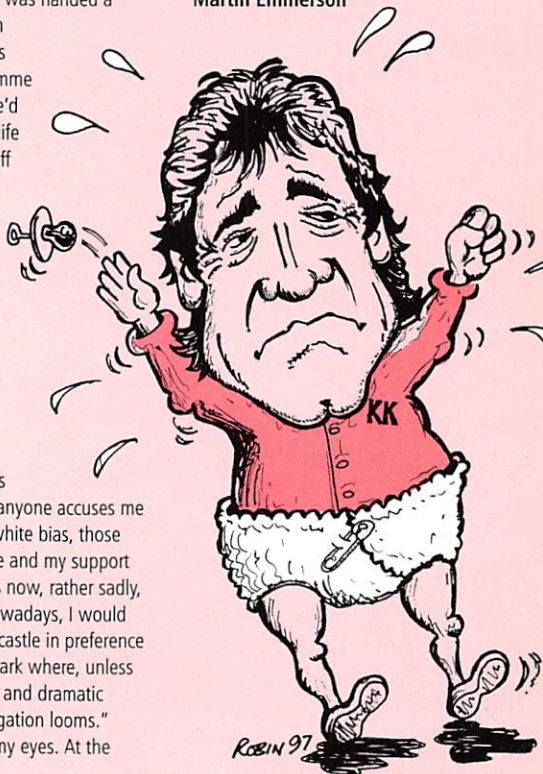
...Forgive me for being mistaken but I'm sure about two years ago I interviewed Times reporter Louise Taylor for ALS, about her passion for the Red and White cause. So imagine my dismay when I was handed a recent cutting from Newcastle United's match day programme to read a piece she'd written about her life as a fan. It starts off encouragingly enough when she tells of her fondest memory of St James' Park being when she saw Gary Rowell net a hat-trick there, but then things seem to take a dramatic nosedive. She adds after this: "Before anyone accuses me of anti black and white bias, those days are long gone and my support for Sunderland has now, rather sadly, lapsed. Indeed, nowadays, I would pay to watch Newcastle in preference to a trip to Roker Park where, unless there is immediate and dramatic improvement, relegation looms." I couldn't believe my eyes. At the

time she wrote the piece our league position was not as favourable as it is now, but what was she doing admitting her altered loyalties in Newcastle's programme?

Well when I saw here recently at the Kenny Dalglish press conference and asked her about the article, she just smiled and walked away. A no comment I think.

Another national scribe with a passion for Sunderland has also been asked to write a piece about life as a football fan, and said: "I am just going to tell them the truth. I am a Sunderland fan and that's that. There is no point lying about it or pretending it's not the truth." That's more like it!

Martin Emmerson



Lionel Perez

Not so long ago the trend was for thousands of English people to invade the coasts of France in search of a suntan, a nice beach and plenty of duty free beer on the way home. Lately however our own shores have been hit by a wave of French footballers - Cantona, Ginola, Viera, LeBoeuf and so on. Perhaps the least well known of these Gallic showmen was Lionel Perez, a 29 year old from Bagnois Cèze in the south of France, bought for a mere £250,000 from Bordeaux. Given the purchase of Tony Coton, and the constant speculation about Shay Given, it seemed Lionel's main duties would be to keep the bench warm and provide Michael Gray with some competition in the long, flowing blond hair department.

It was only due to Coton's unlucky broken leg, sustained away vs Southampton in October that Lionel got his chance, but since then he has been inspirational, most notably in tough matches away at Everton and Arsenal. With



his long hair, rolled up sleeves and methods of saving the ball with every part of his body, he has all the credentials of a typical foreign keeper, with two exceptions: his refusal to wear tracksuit bottoms even in the coldest of weather (Highbury), and the fact that he is mint. ALS caught up with him for a chat.

ALS: You came over here from Bordeaux, was that the only French team you played for or were there others?

Lionel: No, I have also played for Bagnois, Nimes (in the same team as Cantona), Bordeaux,

Laval (on loan), and now Sunderland.

ALS: What is your best moment as a professional, is there one game that stands out in which you played particularly well, or a game of special importance?

Lionel: There was one match I played for Bordeaux when we had to win to go into the UEFA Cup, we won so this was a great satisfaction for me. Also when Sunderland beat Arsenal in the Championship 1-0, this was very good as they are a very good team, very strong with a good spirit.

ALS: When you were growing up in France was there one goalkeeper or footballer who was an inspiration to you, who you looked up to?

Lionel: No - I don't have a model. But when I was younger I just liked running, doing a lot of sport, basically just playing the game, playing football. When I was young the team I supported was Marseilles, as I grew up near there. They are very much like an English team in their spirit, they are hard to play against, there is always a good atmosphere in the crowd. But now I support Sunderland.

ALS: What are the differences you have noticed between the game in England and in France ?

Lionel: One of the main differences is that in England the stadiums are always full, there is always a good atmosphere, but this is not the case in France, there are only one or two games every year when there is a big atmosphere. Also in England the game is more physical than in France, but that does not mean it is less skilful. There is a very good spirit here, and I like it.

ALS: The French have a reputation for making nice food, how does English food compare with French cuisine ?

Lionel: I like any food that has been nicely cooked. I like to be around the table with friends or family, to drink some very good wine and have some well cooked food. I like English food also.

ALS: What other things do you miss about France ?

Lionel: Of course sometimes I miss my friends and family. When I return home in the summer there will be a big party. But I am very happy to be here in England, it is a very nice and interesting experience. At the minute I am thinking about football, about my career. After this I will think more about France.

ALS: Are the French women nicer than those over here in England ?

Lionel: No, they are the same. There are beautiful girls in England, and also in France - it is the same in every country. There are nice girls in England.

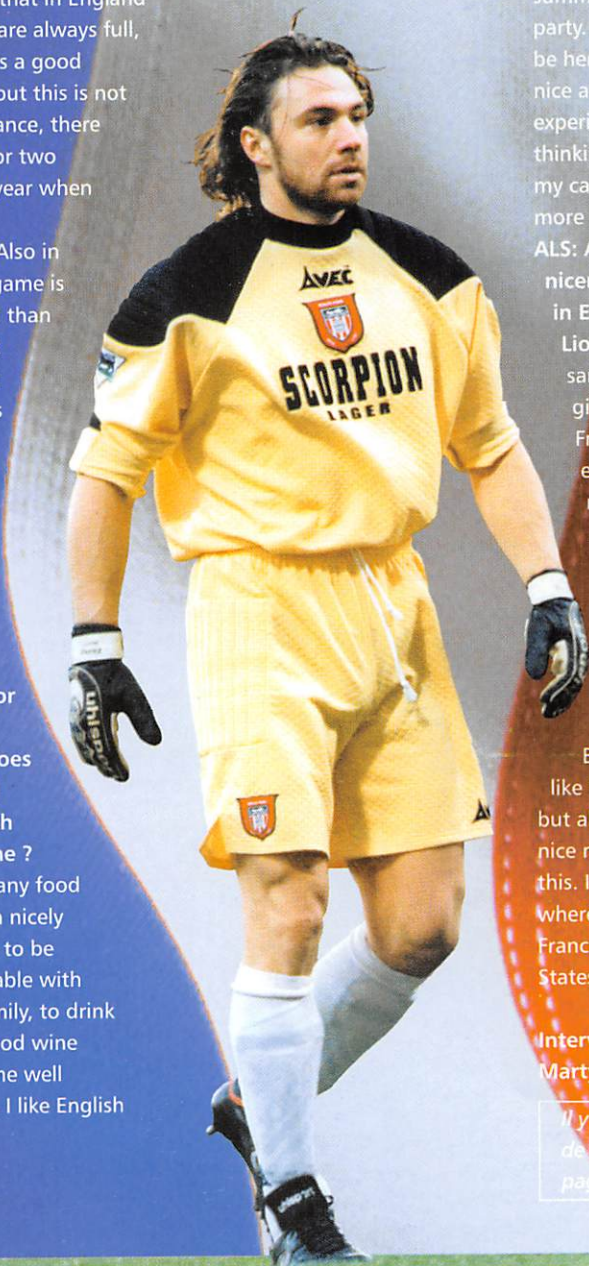
ALS: What are your favourite films, music, that kind of thing ?

Lionel: My favourite film is a French film called " La Belle Histoire " (The

Beautiful Story). In music I like French music of course, but also I like Oasis, it's very nice music and I like to listen to this. I like to go on holiday where it is sunny, the South of France, the Cote d'Azur or the States- I like the sun.

Interviewed by
Martyn McFadden

Il y a une version française de cette entrevue à la page 34.



what did you think about that then?

Manchester United, (Away)

Score: 0-5.

December 21st, 1996

“Magnificent Manchester United produced a five star performance as they inflicted on Sunderland their heaviest defeat of the season so far. United showed the breathtaking form that has made them double Premier League Champions. But if Alex Rae’s goalbound effort had not hit Russell five minutes before United’s opener it could all have been so different.”
Tony Hodgson, The Pink.

“I don’t usually talk about other teams but Man. United were magnificent today, particularly in the second half.” **Peter Reid**

ALS Observation: Not for the first away match this season Sunderland looked good for the opening half hour or so but once they had failed to capitalise on some decent scoring chances they just felt to bits. To be fair, however, Man. United were brilliant in the second half and suggested that they will be heavily involved in the title race again this season. Cantona’s second goal was world class and showed exactly why he’s Old Trafford’s top man, Ryan Giggs of not! The Red Devils proved good finishing, flair and attacking ingenuity are just as important as hard work.

Derby County, (Home)

Score: 2-0.

December 26th, 1996

“Second half goals from local lads Russell and Ord wrapped up all the points for Sunderland in a fiercely competitive match. But they were made to fight all the way by a Derby side determined not to give an inch. News that Newcastle were losing 0-1 at Blackburn was greeted as the final icing on the Christmas cake.” **Graeme Anderson, Sunderland Echo**

“We will miss Kevin Ball without a doubt. He has been the lynchpin of the side and leads by example. All the lads will be disappointed he has picked up a broken jaw.” **Steve Agnew**

“It wasn’t a classic, it was a bitty game and Derby defended well to their credit.”
Peter Reid

“We knew from coming to Roker last season it would be a battle and felt that whoever scored the first goal would win it and so it proved. We did not produce the quality to create chances.”
Derby Boss, Jim Smith

ALS Observation: The entertainment value was at a premium but as our main goal is to survive this season the three points were the greatest priority and the lads battled effectively to achieve that goal. Martin Smith’s dead ball kicks were superb and Derby could not defend his whipped-in corner for Ord’s headed goal and it was good to see the wholehearted Russell notch again to secure a valuable victory. The 22,512 attendance was the best of the season to date... more than against Newcastle or ‘Boro! Funny old game innit?

West Ham United, (Away)

Score: 0-2.

December 28th, 1996

“Sunderland had only themselves to blame for the first crucial goal when Danny Williamson’s corner flew in for Bilic to head home unmarked.”
Barry Flatman, Express Sport

“We just were not at the races at West Ham. They passed it around well and we never defended as well as we normally do. Bally was a miss because he’s an influential player. We are lacking consistency and it’s something we’ll have to look at.” **David Kelly**

“ We deserved nothing but now we must look forward. Things have gone well for me prior to this game but it just didn't happen for me. ”
Alex Rae

ALS Observation: This was obviously the most lacklustre performance under Reidy's guidance. The hallmark of the side under his stewardship has been the ability to chase, close down and pass the ball neatly. At Upton Park... in a dreadfully poor atmosphere... Sunderland seemed as flat and listless as the 24,000 plus crowd. The biggest disappointment was that the Hammers were decidedly average and there for the taking, but our recent 'win a game - lose a game' Jekyll and Hyde form continued. It was bloody freezing too!

Coventry City, (Away)
Score: 2-2.
January 1st, 1997

“ A draw was probably a fair result but on reflection Sunderland may feel that having reduced Coventry to two shots on target that they should have won the game. The ground resembled an ice rink more than a football pitch. ”
Graeme Anderson, Sunderland Echo

“ Bridges and Mullin were lively and gave us a few problems, especially in the first half. For young lads they showed good movement and Bridges is one of the best young strikers in the country who should score a few this season. ”
Coventry Defender, Liam Daish

“ We are now down to the bare bones and the players who turned out at Highfield Road did very well for us. ” **Peter Reid**

ALS Observation: Both managers wanted the game postponed as the pitch was frozen solid. Gordon Strachan commented he wouldn't have even allowed a training session on it but the referee Graham Poll decided it was playable. City, who had recently comfortably beaten Newcastle 2-0, and were bang on form with four successive wins, found Sunderland's tenacious attitude on the rock hard pitch hard to cope with and the end of the match statistics showed Roker had eight shots on target to City's two but it's goals that count and the Sky Blues 100%

success rate earned them a draw! That they lost Dublin for a foul on Bridges on 40 minutes says a lot for the fighting spirit that Coventry have found under Strachan's management. For the lads it was a good result after away setbacks at Old Trafford and Upton Park.

Arsenal, (Away)
FA Cup Round 3
Score: 1-1.
January 4th, 1997

“ Wembley legend Jim Montgomery may pull Sunderland's name out of the hat in this afternoon's fourth round FA Cup draw just like he pulled them out of the fire when they won



the trophy so famously 24 years ago. This time, Sunderland have another remarkable 'keeper to thank for still being in the competition...Lionel Perez from Bordeaux wine country... a long haired eccentric Frenchman who played with his sleeves rolled up during a blizzard... he was a symbol of defiance and courage. ”

David Barnes, Sunday Mirror

“ Taking on the aristocrats of Arsenal in their own backyard is something few teams relish. But Sunderland scrapped their way to a remarkable FA Cup result at Highbury yesterday. They showed real mettle to bounce back after going a goal behind after just ten minutes. ”

Jez Robinson, Sunday Sun

“ Sunderland competed well and in fact at the end of the game I thought they were mentally stronger than us. We thought they might be scared to concede a goal in the final five minutes but they held on and defended excellently.”

Arsenal Boss, Arsene Wenger

ALS Observation: Sunderland's noisy 2,900 red and white army outclassed the Gunners fans in the vocal stakes comprehensively as they were proud to witness a battling performance that typified the team-spirit Reid insists upon. Perez was inspirational on the day and a special word for the outstanding performances of Mickey Gray and the back four in particular. Both sides were hit by injuries and suspensions but that did not prevent a very interesting Cup tie being played out. Sunderland suggested that with a future injection of real class in key midfield and attacking areas that they could well surprise a few people sooner rather than later; this was a great result with so many key players missing from our line-up.

Arsenal, (Home)

Score: 1-0.

January 11th, 1997

“ Sunderland registered a memorable victory. After all it's not every week Newcastle's manager resigns and Peter Reid celebrates an Arsenal defeat. ”

“ It wasn't a classic for the purest but it was a great result for us. I still make Arsenal favourites

for the FA Cup replay. Anyone looking at their international packed team on paper and looking at ours, stretched to the bones right now, would have to still fancy them before us. We had nine first team squad members out today and six of them would have been in real contention for a place. ”

Peter Reid

ALS Observation: This was a fantastic result for Sunderland whose injury-suspension crisis has reached critical proportions. Six of Roker's starting line-up against the star studded Gunners began this season in the reserves and arguably this victory, above any other, emphasised the determination and organisational ability introduced into the team by Reid and his coaching staff. The inexperienced Darren Williams, bought for £50,000 from York, epitomised the spirit as he battled hard and played intelligently against all the odds in midfield. Perez made an inspirational second half save and Mickey Gray proved to be man of the match with a busy, resourceful display. Whilst some may argue one man doesn't make a team, Arsenal don't half miss Ian Wright when he's not playing. As a footnote it should be said the Londoners were disgracefully over physical and Hartson, Keown and Adams should have all joined Bergkamp for an early bath had referee Riley had any real courage.

Arsenal, (Home)

FA Cup, 3rd Round Replay

Score: 0-2.

January 15th, 1997

“ If I can take anything out of the game I was please how hard we worked. It shows you what type of game it was when I make Lionel Perez our best player. I thought John Mullin did well in midfield and it was good Martin Smith got half an hour in. ”

Peter Reid

“ It was our best performance in a long while. I loved playing up front where I haven't played for about five years. ”

Paul Merson

“ My goal was such a beautiful moment for me. It was ideal after what happened last weekend. I feel very satisfied now. ”

Dennis Bergkamp

“ We missed Bracewell - he’s our midfield general and his experience would have made a difference in a game like that. He keeps the ball well. I enjoyed a midfield role, it went all right but it’s a position I’d never filled before, playing in the centre of the park.” **John Mullin**

ALS Observation: There was something surreal about this game. You would have thought having beaten the Gunners with a depleted team five days earlier everyone would have been up for it. However, nearly every supporter remarked “I’m not bothered really, winning the league game was more important.” And a terrible 15,277 attendance reflected the apathy as well as the clubs refusal to have a widescale price reduction in a week where fans had to visit Roker three times in eight days! Okay, it was on Sky, but it was Arsenal after all and it was the FA Cup and possibly the last ever Roker Park match in that competition. Arsenal’s victory against ‘Sunderland Reserves’ as they almost seemed to be, back four apart, at least come courtesy of a classic Bergkamp strike for the first goal on 46 minutes before Hughes added a second. A forgettable, boring night unfortunately. Yes, very surreal. Everyone seems obsessed with merely surviving but the FA Cup’s worth playing for and winning breeds confidence. Doesn’t it?

**Blackburn Rovers,
(Home)**

Score: 0-0.

January 18th, 1997

“ On Saturday Sunderland looked capable of keeping

daylight between themselves and the bottom three. But it takes more than honest toil and a never say die attitude to make that great leap forward. Has a home side ever gone into a match with such woeful firepower? Of the 11 who started only three had found the net this season and two of them were central defenders! ” **Ian Murtagh, The Journal**

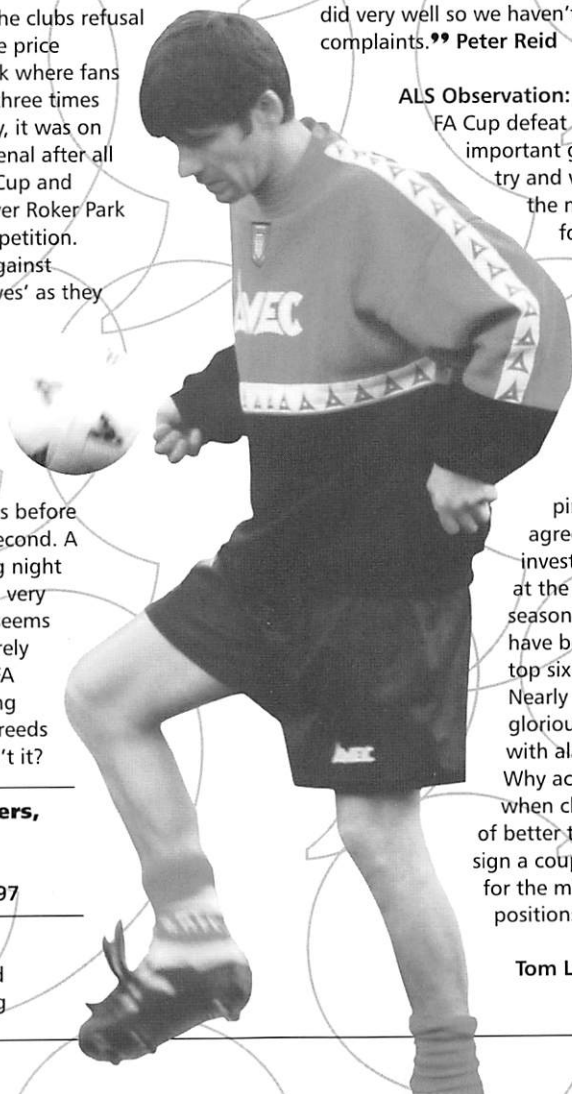
“ Coming to Roker is always hard and we happy to come away with one point to keep our recent run going. ”

Rovers Gaffer Tony Parkes.

“ They got ten men behind the ball and Flowers did very well so we haven’t too many complaints.” **Peter Reid**

ALS Observation: After the anti climatic FA Cup defeat by Arsenal this was an important game for the Jads to try and win. Rovers were in the middle of a rich vein of form and Sunderland were still ravaged by injuries but ultimately the Wearsiders could have won with ease with a decent finisher in the team. The post match crack over a pint saw everyone agreeing that if they had invested in a quality striker at the beginning of the season Sunderland would have been competing in the top six for a European place. Nearly every match sees glorious chances squandered with alarming consistency. Why accept consolidation when clearly we are capable of better things if we were to sign a couple of top class players for the midfield and striking positions?

Tom Lynn



Awaydays

THE
Echo
Feature Sponsor

Manchester United, December 21st, 1996.

Great Britain is the only place I know of where you have to buy a TV licence to be able to watch the box. And while this is somewhat annoying, having been away in Canada for 4 months I was able to benefit from one of the BBC's finer points - the World Service. Whilst admitting that programmes such as 'World Business Review' are less than thrilling, 10am every Saturday morning would see me wandering round my room, shortwave radio in hand, trying to get a decent reception, normally with a hangover (you didn't know a radio could drink, did you?). The Mags seemed to be the commentary match every week, and I can recommend as a hangover cure listening to them losing against Sheff. Wednesday, Arsenal etc.

Sport is absolutely crap over in Canada. Ice Hockey is the national sport - it resembles Scottish football quite strikingly, with its low skill but high violence content. American football is plainly one of the worst sports in the civilised world, and baseball is just stupid. Soccer hardly gets a look in.

The only similarity between this match and the last one I saw - vs Forest almost 4 months ago to the day - was that both contained 5 goals, but unfortunately today we were facing Cantona and Solskjær rather than Campbell and Saunders, Schmeichel rather than Crossley. As in our last trip to Old Trafford, the hordes from Wearside showed their hosts how to support their team, as we outstung them completely for 90 minutes - they were probably saving their voices for the long trip home to Devon. We played mint for the first 15 minutes, not looking in danger and creating chances. Russ tried to place a bender beyond Schmeichel, but it went just wide. Rae also went close, his bullet shot blocked by Russ on the way to goal. Rae was class in this opening period and if he can keep his performances going for 90 minutes (to be fair Ferguson did put Neville on him after about 20 minutes today, although not literally), I reckon he should soon be helping the Tartan Army towards France in 1998 for the World Cup. Then Nicky Arse's shot was blocked by Lionel, and Solskjær was the first to react, nodding into an empty net. Soon afterwards Nicky Bum was felled by our 'gardie' and another Frenchman scored from the spot. And that was that. The second half saw further goals from Solskjær, Nicky Backside and a special from Cantona, whose

outrageous turn was matched by a chip of such precision it even hit the post before going in to make it look even better on TV. We didn't threaten too much, although Stewart did managed to miss from about 3 yards.

Leaving Old Trafford it was hard to pick out any good points, although a mention must go to the lads/lasses, who seeing their huge Red and White flag confiscated by a steward, tried to keep the black bag flying high, by passing round the flag's carrier bag. United would have done most teams on that second half display, and I said after the game I would settle for today's result as long as we beat Derby 2-0, got a creditable draw against Coventry despite an inexperienced front line, and battled for a replay in the cup, which funny enough we did.

ALS Man of the Match: Alex Rae

Final Score: 0-5

Iain J McKay

As I was selling the nation's best fanzine before the game, Terry Christian walked past. He laughed at my cheek of selling outside the home end, despite the fact that he is definitely the worst TV presenter known to mankind.

West Ham United December 28th, 1996

Len Shackleton's autobiography famously included a blank page representing what the average director knew about football. I was considering doing something similar - heading the page "What I enjoyed about West Ham away" and then leaving it blank. But then I thought, Nah, let's make everybody else miserable as well.

To start with, the ALSmobile decided that going to London on such a nose-numbingly, feet-freezingly, finger-tinglingly cold day was just unrealistic, so it turned over and went back to bed, leaving us to travel in the diminutive ALSmobile B - a bit like losing Duncan Ferguson at the last minute and replacing him with Tony Cottee. Except that Tony Cottee could have the ALSmobile B over 100 yards any day.

Now, I know I should be grateful that our squad was big

enough to provide an extra car, but there's none of us are exactly little, and ALSmobile B isn't exactly big, and you wouldn't expect Tony Cottee to give four averagely sized people (alright, three averagely sized people and one huge one) piggy backs from Sunderland to London and back, would you? So it was cramped.

And it was cold. Like really breath-snatchingly, ear-pingingly, that-bit-of-Dr-Zhivago-when-he-staggers-into-the-railway-station-ly cold. I was wearing two T-shirts, a long-sleeved T-shirt, a jumper and two coats and I was still cold. Maybe if I'd put some trousers on.

And we were awful. You know those classic 0-0 draws you used to get in the freezing cold away at Birmingham or Bolton or Charlton, when there literally isn't a shot in the game? Well, we played like that. And, credit to them, West Ham tried to do the same, but Bilic, being one of these foreign johnnies, obviously didn't quite understand, and when left unmarked at a corner rather unsportingly headed it in. To be fair to them, West Ham had begun the better, knocking it around nicely without ever really threatening, and then, suddenly, Bilic sliced a harmless ball from the right towards his own net, forcing Miklosko into a sharp save, and things livened up a bit. Livened up in relative terms, that is, from dire to positively mediocre. We had a couple of chances, but once Russell had gone off after a collision with Miklosko, the game slumped back from soporific to wholly comotose. Then came Bilic's goal, and, just on half time, an incident that should really have got the crowd going. Porfirio broke clear from a Hall error and beat Perez, only for his shot to rebound off the post straight into the path of Danny Williamson, who contrived to hit the bar from about three yards. It should have warmed the cockles of our hearts, but the atmosphere remained as limp as a jellied eel - probably because everybody was frozen to their seats (have I mentioned how cold it was?), knew already that whatever happened we weren't going to score, and were wondering quite how

anybody but Kevin Ball, and perhaps Diana Ross, could have missed from there.

1-0 down at half-time, that could only mean one thing. We attack, create no chances, and concede more goals on the break. And so it was. Kelly looked occasionally menacing when moved up front, Bridges had a couple of efforts, and Perez made a class save from a Dicks free-kick, but that aside it was fairly tepid stuff, as our customary lack of flair was compounded by a lack of ball-winner with Bally's absence. Then on came Raducioiu, turned Melville and flicked it past Perez to put the icing on some really not very pleasant cake.

And just to make the day complete, the Mags won 7-1, and it took us about three weeks to get out of London. What a great way to end 1996.

Still, at least Steve Cram was on 6-0-6.

Not only is he not David Mellor, but he managed to mention

Sunderland on all but about four phone calls in the entire programme. For example:

"Hi, Steve, I'm a Coventry fan."

"Well, you're going to get stuffed on Wednesday then..."

or: "Hi, Steve, I'm a Rochdale fan" - "Didn't we thrash you in 1954?"

But it was still a miserable day. And cold.

ALS Man of the Match:

Lionel Perez

Final score: 0-2.

J.M.Wilson

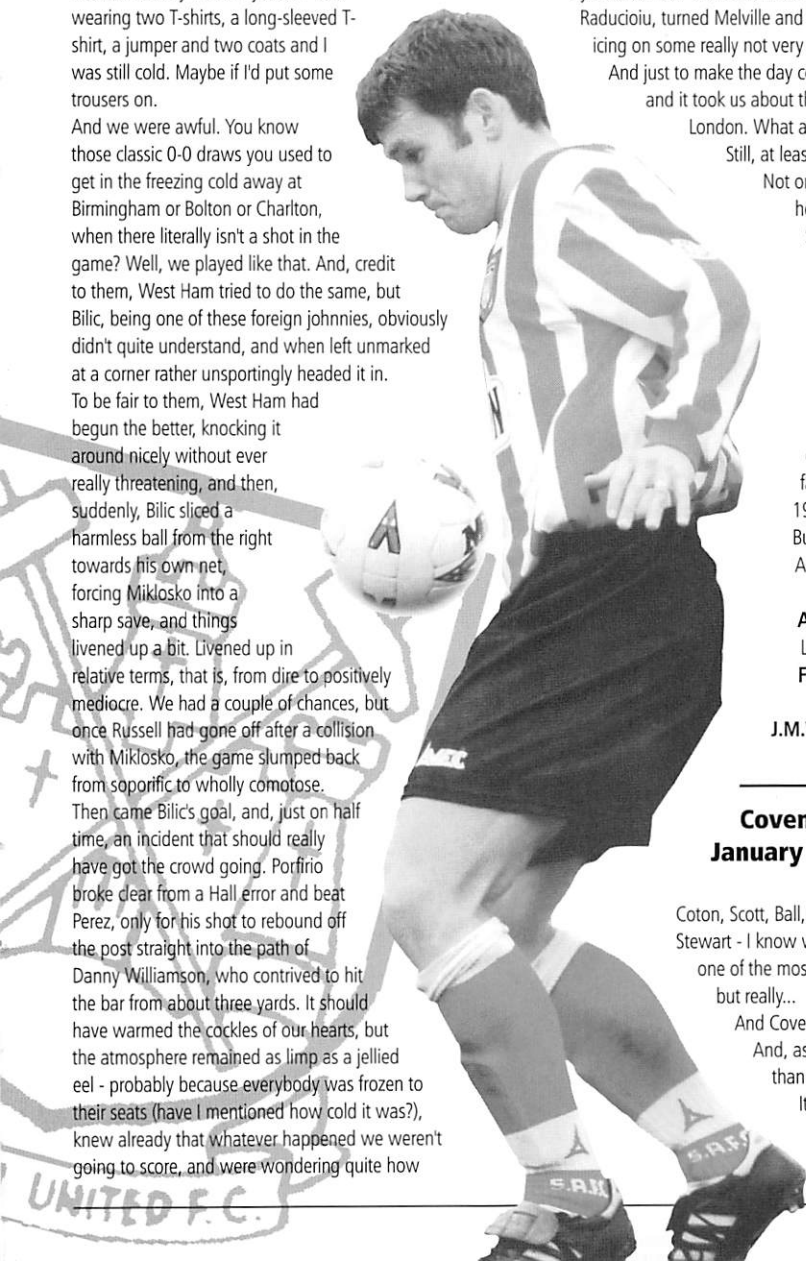
Coventry City January 1st, 1997

Coton, Scott, Ball, Smith, Rae, Russell, Quinn, Stewart - I know whinging about injuries is one of the most irritating things you can do, but really...

And Coventry on four straight victories.

And, astonishingly, a day even colder than West Ham.

It really didn't look that hopeful, and especially when every game round Coventry



had been postponed. So we spent the whole journey down listening to Radio 5 waiting to hear if our game was called off. Now, I don't know if you've ever listened to Radio 5 on a weekday morning, but it's pretty weird fare. First off a phone-in thing about whether they should make a film about Fred West. Fair enough, but then after ten, everything went completely mad. They started interviewing the world's least talkative kids about a panto they'd been to. Then discussing whether seeing pantomime dames encourages transvestism at a later age. Then that finished and there was a whole half hour devoted to fishing in Egypt. And yet the most bizarre thing was that our game was still on.

The pitch was clearly dangerous. No doubt at all - players were moving at walking pace in the middle, and still sliding all over, and the ball was regularly bouncing absurdly high. Passing seemed virtually impossible, so both sides opted for the hump it long and hope it bounces funny approach.

Strangely, with Mullin and Bridges up front, this worked quite well, as their willingness to chase everything consistently put the Coventry defence under pressure. We'd already had a couple of chances when Bridges won the ball from Richard Shaw, Kelly crossed, and as the ball broke loose from Mullin's challenge, Bridges lashed it off a defensive thigh and past Ogrizovic.

Straight down the other end, though, and Dublin beat Perez to a corner to equalise. A pretty soft goal, and I fully expected us to capitulate. Credit to Mullin and Bridges, though, they kept running, and, when Daish tripped Mullin in the corner of the box, we were left with that classic awayday nightmare - a penalty. No Scott, no Rae, but Agnew stepped up, and fired it confidently over the diving Ogrizovic.

Still the first half action wasn't over, though, as our defence, clearly well into the festive spirit, gifted Coventry another equaliser, allowing Liam Daish to rise unchallenged at the back post from McAllister's quick free kick.

There wasn't much festive spirit elsewhere on the pitch however, as a series of little niggles broke out, most notably between Agnew and Whelan. Then, just before half-time, it all came to a head as Dublin clattered into Bridges as the two leapt for yet another high ball. Bridges clearly did have a little dig at Dublin as the pair lay on the ground, but nothing can excuse his retaliation, especially given the unsubtlety of standing over a prostrate player and trying to boot him into Nuneaton. Unsurprisingly, Dublin walked; very surprisingly, all the home bench seemed genuinely appalled by the decision, although I suppose they are managed by Gordon Strachan, the archetypal whinging ginger git, and perhaps they thought trying to whack somebody out of Coventry was actually doing him a favour.

Match of the Day described the game as "incident-packed", so they obviously didn't watch much of the second half, which was almost as dull as an interview with Alan Shearer. Bridges

and Mullin tired, Agnew vanished, Mickey Gray had a bit of a mare, while Gareth Hall continued to exist. At the same time, Williams, dropping back from midfield, proved more than adequate cover for Dublin, and, indeed, the best chance of the half fell to Salako, but he headed straight at Perez.

In the end, then, it was all a bit disappointing, particularly our sudden vulnerability to the crossed ball, but that said, if you'd offered me a point at three o'clock, well, I wouldn't have bitten your hand off because I'm not that kind of bloke, but I'd certainly have been happy enough to accept.

ALS Man of the Match: Paul Bracewell

Final score: 2-2

J.M.Wilson

Awaydays

ExtraExtraExtraExtra

It was generally agreed that the game should not have gone ahead. Two pitch inspections took place on the morning of the game. Those of us who travelled with New Years Day hangers to Highfield Road would have been pissed off on arrival to find, a la Swindon two seasons ago, that the match had been called off at short notice. However we would have been even more disappointed if one of our players had been badly injured due to the conditions. After the game Le Brace said "it was a disgrace really. I've never played on a surface that bad, beforehand the gaffer said that he'd received an injury on a similar surface that kept him out for a year." Coventry boss Gordon Strachan said "if it had been a training session I wouldn't have held it."

Victor VooS

Arsenal

FA Cup, 3rd Round,

January 4th, 1997

If, like us, you are one of those people who believe that a relationship exists between the ordinary, common fan and the Gods of football, that a pair of skenky, red, lucky underpants can alter the result of a game, that the inopportune ejection of a single stick of chewing gum can be responsible for the lads conceding a goal, that by stopping at an 'unlucky' service station on the way to an away game you can be solely responsible for a defeat (and, let's face it, we've all had our

lucky Polos/scarf/socks at one stage or another) then you would have been avoiding the cracks in the pavement all the way home from this match. Sunderland were 37th out of the hat for the FA Cup Third Round draw. Midway through the second half the attendance at Highbury was quoted as being 37,573. This figure was later revised as 37,793. Any way you look at it there were far too many sevens and threes floating around to defend the tired argument of the football omen atheists. Could this be our year for the cup?

We were returning to Highbury for the second time this season and, to be honest, nobody was really looking forward to the game after the previous debacle. It was 800 degrees below freezing, the lass I'd lent my hat to had bugged off to America and I had one of those itches inside your ear that's just too far in to be properly satiated.

Half of the team were injured and the other half were twelve years old. Some feared lambs to the slaughter at the butcher's knife of Merson, Vieira, Bergkamp and Co., and, indeed, after just ten minutes we were a goal down. I don't know what it is lately, but Dickie Ord and Andy Melville seem to have completely forgotten how to defend crosses. Merson provided it from the byline and Hartson buried it off the underside of the bar... the only thing I noticed him to do all game.

But this was the cup and, uncharacteristically, we still had eleven players on the Highbury pitch. We battled and we fought, we went after them a bit and ten minutes later were level. Peter Reid left the stand for the bench to make a tactical switch: Dariusz, playing on the left in the absence of Martin Scott, was to push up into midfield to crowd out attacks down that flank. When we broke, almost immediately, down the left ourselves, there looked far too many red shirts behind the ball. The passing, however, was neat, John Mullin turned well in the box, laid it off to Mickey Gray - who, by the way, was tarding about having one of his bad halves - and Gray scuttled a curious shot past the aged John Lukic... more stationary than the WH Smiths pencil counter. Delirium, relief and, just for a second, you forgot you were cold.

Finding our voice now, it was a different game. Mickey Gray came out for the second half a different player. He ran like a man possessed and generally made mockery of the previous forty-five minutes of mincing ponce. But oh for Kevin Ball back in the centre of midfield. In his absence, Vieira was having a stormer; this lad's got it all, pace, strength, skill, height and the shiny lycra cycling pants that seem the modern day equivalent to playing with your shirt untucked. Yet out of the sparks and flames of a gritty battle, punctuated as it was with the occasional nice piece of skill, a curious hero arose. In 1973 it was Jimmy Montgomery, in 1997 could it be the stand-in Sunderland comedy keeper, the man with velcro hands and a rocket up his bum, Lionel Perez, that brings FA Cup glory to Wearside? He made stunning saves and brave challenges. His sleeves were short and his hair was long. Best of all, he

flooned around his penalty area like he owned all of London. The man's a legend.

Arsenal created most of the chances, but found no answer to the greased ringlets of Lionel 'Ritchie' Perez. The temperature dropped to absolute zero and we bounced around in the stands. We sang to the whistle, beyond the whistle and all the way home. Surely we would turn them over at Roker?

ALS Man of the Match: Lionel Perez

Score: 1-1

Peter Daykin



Lionel Perez

Autrefois, des milliers de vacanciers anglais voyaient à la France, pour chercher du soleil, des plages et de la bière hors-taxe. Mais récemment une vague de footballeurs français est arrivée en Angleterre - Cantona, Ginola, Viera, LeBoeuf etc. Peut-être le joueur le moins bien-connu parmi cette bande de français était Lionel Perez, un homme de 29 ans qui vient de Bagnois Cèze, dans le sud de la France, acheté de Bordeaux pour seulement £250,000. Vu que nous avons aussi acheté Tony Coton, et aussi la spéculation en ce qui concerne Shay Given, il semblait que Lionel aurait dû rester sur le banc et être en concurrence avec Michael Gray à propos des cheveux longs, flottants et blonds (et vu que Mickey maintenant a les cheveux courts, Lionel a gagné cette compétition).

C'était seulement après Coton s'était cassé la jambe, dans le match contre Southampton à l'extérieur, que Lionel a eu l'occasion de devenir titulaire, mais il a joué d'une manière magnifique, surtout dans les matches difficiles contre Everton et Arsenal. Avec ses cheveux longs, ses manches qui sont toujours retroussées et son habileté d'arrêter le ballon avec chaque part du son corps, il est comme un gardien étranger typique, mais avec deux exceptions - il ne porte pas les pantalons quand il joue, et il est fantastique.

ALS: Vous êtes devenu ici de Bordeaux, est-ce que c'est la seule équipe française pour laquelle vous avez joué?

Lionel: Non, j'ai joué aussi pour

Bagnois, Nîmes (dans la même équipe de Cantona), Bordeaux, Laval et Sunderland.

ALS: Est-ce que vous vous rappelez un match dans lequel vous avez très bien joué, ou un match d'une importance majeure?

Lionel: Il y avait un match que j'ai joué pour Bordeaux quand nous avons dû gagner pour qualifier pour la Coupe D'UEFA - nous avons gagné, alors c'était très satisfaisant pour moi. Aussi quand Sunderland a gagné contre Arsenal 1-0 dans le championnat, c'était excellent parce que Arsenal est une équipe très forte, très difficile de battre.

ALS: Quand vous étiez jeune en France, est-ce qu'il y avait un joueur que vous admiriez?

Lionel: Non, je n'ai pas un modèle à émuler. Mais quand j'étais jeune j'aimais courir, faire du sport, jouer au football. L'équipe que j'aimais autrefois était Olympique de Marseille, parce que je vivais près de Marseille. L'équipe est très similaire à une équipe anglaise, très forte et difficile de battre, il y a toujours une belle ambiance dans la stade. Mais maintenant j'aime Sunderland.

ALS: Quelles sont les différences entre football ici et en France que vous avez remarquées?

Lionel: En Angleterre les stades sont presque toujours pleines, il y a toujours une belle ambiance, mais ce n'est pas la cas en France, les stades sont pleines seulement une ou deux fois par saison. Aussi ici les matches sont plus physiques qu'en France, mais cela ne veut pas dire qu'elles sont moins techniques. Ici il y a une grande ambiance, et je l'aime.

ALS: Les français possèdent une bonne réputation à propos la

nourriture, est-ce que c'est mieux que la nourriture anglaise?

Lionel: J'aime la nourriture qu'on a très bien préparée. C'est bon de manger avec ma famille et mes amis, de boire un bon vin et de manger la bouffe bien préparée. Mais j'aime la nourriture anglaise.

ALS: Quels sont les autres aspects de la vie en France qui vous manquent?

Lionel: Bien sur de temps en temps mes amis et ma famille me manquent. Quand je retourne en France pendant l'été, il y aura des célébrations. Mais je suis content d'être ici en Angleterre, c'est une expérience très belle et intéressante. En ce moment je pense de football, de ma carrière. Après ça je penserai plus de la France.

ALS: Est-ce que les filles françaises sont plus belles que les nôtres en Angleterre?

Lionel: Non, elles sont égales. Il existe des belles filles en Angleterre, et aussi en France. Les filles ici sont belles.

ALS: Est-ce que vous avez un film préféré, la musique à laquelle vous aimez écouter?

Lionel: Mon film préféré, c'est "La Belle Histoire", un film français. Quand il s'agit de la musique, j'aime la musique française, mais aussi j'aime Oasis - c'est de la musique d'une très bonne qualité. Pour mes vacances j'aime aller au Sud de la France, au Cote d'Azur et aux Etats-Unis, les endroits où le temps fait beau.

Interviewé par Martyn McFadden

Traduit par Iain McKay

There is an English version of this interview on page 24.



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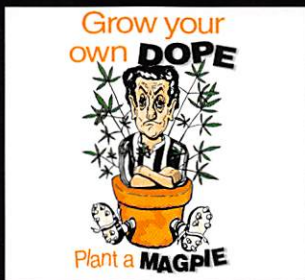
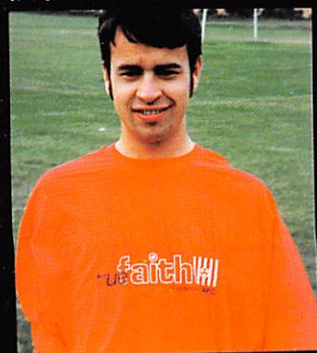
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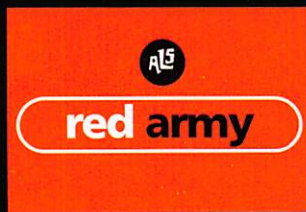
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Letters

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Write to ALS, PO Box 25, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 1QE

Dear **ALS**

I am writing as the wife of an avid Sunderland fan. We live in Wales and when I managed to get a scarf in the local sports shop I was told that this was the only one that they had sold. (No football sense in the valleys!) Anyway, the point of my letter is that my husband Richard managed to get tickets for the match at Old Trafford on 21st December 1996. He was ecstatic. I was 37 weeks pregnant. Yes you've guessed it, I had to page him at 11am and tell him to come home. The two men in the garage that he gave his tickets to were happy.

He was convinced the baby would be a girl as it had come 3 weeks early and stopped him seeing the match. When the result came through we knew it would be a boy as it prevented Richard seeing us lose 5-0. We called our son who was born at 8.11pm Lewis 'Richard' Jerrett (obviously after Richard Ord not his dad!!)

Many Thanks, Howay the Lads

A Jerrett (football widow)

Pontypool

Dear **ALS**

I can't get to the match because of disablement, so I've written a poem.

R.I.P. Roker

To us all the Mags and the Boro are our main rivals,
It means even more that we keep Premiership survival.
Because in '97 Roker Park will be no more,
But the Lads will go on marching, like an army going to war.
To a 42,000 seater the likes not seen before,

Teams will come and go like many times before,
They might have left Roker behind,
But not that famous roar.

They tell us we need millions to buy ourselves a team,
But Reidy's got the spirit to carry on our dream.
We don't need all those millions, odd though that may seem,
Who wants a few Brazilians or DalGLISH's crap football team?

Alan Robinson

Horden Branch

Dear **ALS**

I have always watched a lot of football, but now I watch it to the point of madness. Since hearing that S.A.F.C. were to receive funds for new players and seeing so much Teletext speculation about signings I have become obsessed by who we could sign.

I now watch every possible bit of football in the hope of "scouting" talent. (Premiership North and South of the border, Nationwide, Italian, Spanish, Futbol Mondial for World wide search etc.) This has resulted in flashbacks of 20 yard strikes into the top corner or speculative volleys bulging the net, which can cause havoc when I'm driving! I also find myself having delusions that after I make my armchair scouting missions that I can phone up Reidy and inform him of my ideas.

So far I have targeted Savio the young Brazilian forward (imagine a quicker, stronger McManaman who can score at will but will have his career, and possibly his legs, cut short by criminal tackling, unless we save him and put him in a Sunderland shirt so that we may worship at his feet!) Then there is Leonardo, another Brazilian playing for PSG in France, imagine a Leonardo-Bally one-two cutting through opposition defences. Probably wise to give it to Leonardo to shoot though. *Perhaps more realistically though, how about Marc Fish the South African quality centre back who could*

move into midfield with consummate ease but is at present wasted at a lowly Italian Serie A side.

I would not mind if the entire money was spent on just three top class players, but maybe slightly cheaper, from British leagues - we could look at Tony Thorpe at Luton, Richard Rufus at Charlton or Brian Laudrup and Charlie Miller at Glasgow Rangers.

The real root of my madness though, does not come from watching quality football, but from the strain of having to scout, at times, to the commentary of Archie MacPherson on Eurosport. (Enigmatic in the style of our former "Uncle Comatose" - Tom Lynch). Archie has been known to mutter lines such as: "Yes, it's a goal... there... scored for Barcelona by... the Spanish fellow!" (entertaining yet informative).

Ali Todd

Tring, Herts.

P.S. has anyone else noticed Alex Rae looking more like Bally every time he plays. If he can perfect the vertebrae crushing tackle we may have found Baby Bally!

Dear **ALS**

I was interested to read Victor Voos's encounter with a certain Superintendent Ted Greenwell at the recent Everton game and thought you might like to know of another serving police officer with red/white blood.

I am a mounted police officer in London and have followed the lads since the age of 6 when I lived in Featherstone Street, Roker. My father and his father were both shipwrights working for J.L. Thompson, and were regulars to Roker Park, so it was natural that I would follow them. Now 48 years later that passion and fanaticism has rubbed off on both my sons. We are season ticket holders and work permitting we travel to as many away games as possible.

My support for the lads is well known at my work place and I proudly wear the club's tie pin on my uniform. When travelling to games and watching the matches on TV., I put on the latest club shirt (my wife thinks I'm mad) so no one is in doubt where my support lies.

One of the first players I remember seeing play was Trevor Ford and my all time favourite has to be King Charlie.

The job that I do brings me into contact with many other teams and their supporters. I would like to think that I am fair and have an understanding of how supporters feel, and how they would like to be treated.

I regularly perform duty at Arsenal, Norwich, Ipswich, Luton

and was one of 7 mounted officers that were used at Bournemouth when Leeds fans went on the rampage. I have had bricks and bottles thrown at me, been spat at and have experienced many tense situations more than once. I'm in no doubt that I support the best club and know that the good times that we have all been hoping for are not too far away.

R.S. Mills

Surrey

Dear **ALS**

A passing comment on the attitude of some Sunderland fans. As you can see I don't live in the North East. I get to see the Lads whenever I can when they play in the London area. I was travelling by train from Liverpool Street Station to see the Spurs league cup game with some friends who also live in this part of the world and who also follow the Lads. Two of us were wearing the famous stripes. None of us have Mackem accents. We overheard a conversation obviously directed at us taking place between a group of "true" followers, the gist of which was "Southern wankers",



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"Jumping on the bandwagon" (what band wagon?), "wrong accents to be following the Lads", "no right to wear Sunderland colours" etc.

This parochial attitude does no credit to supporters of any club, let alone a club with the traditions of Sunderland. We are a big club with potentially a great future and it should not be surprising that the club attracts support from anywhere in the country or the world. There is no exclusive right for people who live within a certain radius of Roker Park to follow the Lads.

Great, quality magazine, keep the flag flying high.

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Allison
Kent

Dear **ALS**

I don't usually moan but something is going wrong at Sunderland. If what has been said is true, Reid should have £7 million to spend and even more after the shares. I know we've spent a lot of money on the new stadium, but it's going to be no good if we haven't got a team to play in it. As I don't live in the North East I rely on teletext to tell me what's happening at the club. Every day we've got some lad on trial, but after a couple of days the deal is off. Is it that no one wants to join us or that we have no money to buy them? My second point is that I know we've got a lot of injuries, but when they've gone, Reid has got to have a clear out of about 5 or 6 players. I know some of these players have played their heart out for the lads but the time has come for Messrs Agnew, Kubicki, Howey, (Bracewell who will then just be Reid's second man) and Hall. Then there's Stewart who should have gone ages ago - I rate him as another Hauser. A couple of players for Reid to consider: Given, Curcic are now available as well as Rob Jones, Leonardsen and Whelan. Let's just hope we can stay up this season which I'm sure we will.

Sunderland Forever FTM

Dear **ALS**

I've been attending every game 'pay on the turnstile' until last season when my dad and I decided it would be a good idea to buy Key Plan tickets. This season we have paid full

price for the season, but are still considered Key Plan holders. Surely people who buy part season tickets this year are Key Plan holders for this year? The main problem is something else however as you may be wondering - "If he gets to every game why complain?" Well that is true but in getting away and cup tickets we are second in line to getting them and so I have had to spend 90 minutes of a 5-0 defeat in the new huge stand at Old Trafford as I did last year (what a relief my cousin works down there as I would not be back to the place!) The away allocation was a bit thin anyway (clever bit of psychology there, Fergie). As I only pick and choose away games as it is fair enough that other fans who may attend them more often get first pick, but I wonder how many fans who hadn't witnessed Southend and Grimsby over the last five years were in that corner?

Mr Murray claims we will handle supporters' access to games better than our friends in the North and I'm glad to see I may be allowed in at student rates next season (results permitting!) but the words Scheme and Bonds still are in the back of my mind - don't do it Bob!

Before I finish I must say how friendly the Manc supporters were this year and last year. There were a few incidents further along from where we were last season but we were congratulated by the supporters around us and they admitted we should have won. Obviously it was the other way round this year as they were fantastic but we were received in a nice way and felt as comfortable as we could be. Lou Macari's fish and chips are crap though!

Yours sincerely

John 'Key Plan' Watson

Dear **ALS**

I write to report on a farcical incident which took place at Highfield Road during the recent game with Coventry. I am a member of the Roker Liaison Group, but write with a personal point of view. The incident took place midway through the first half. A couple of our fans in the back row decided to view the game from a standing position, a fairly obvious common practice when you have a seat in the back row as you will obviously not affect anyone's view. Anyway, one of the stewards took exception to this and approached one of the lads and told him to sit down. Our supporters told the steward in a reasonable enough manner that he'd prefer to stand for a while. He also directed the steward's attention towards numerous Coventry fans in the

back row of the stand opposite who had the same idea. The steward became somewhat agitated and began giving it the old "I'm only doing my job" routine. An argument followed which eventually resulted in the steward radioing for police assistance. We then witnessed the near comical scene of six police officers trudging up to the back row of the stand to speak to a guy who only wanted to stretch his legs. Now I know that ground regulations are there for a reason and must be obeyed, (unless that is you are a home fan at Coventry, when you can stand up in the back row for as long as you want) but a tiny amount of common sense displayed by the steward and the whole scene would have been avoided.

In view of this steward's total dedication to his "job", I must say it did come as bit of a surprise to see what appeared to be the same steward just prior to the kick off for the second half, standing with a couple of his mates looking on in amusement whilst Coventry fans threw snowballs at Lionel Perez.

Now I don't really want to get involved in, or appear to be too critical of Coventry City AFC's selection process, but it does not seem to me to be a particularly sensible idea to give a club coat and a two way radio to an idiot and expect him to carry out crowd liaison duties effectively.

The greater danger in this case was that if the argument had escalated and crowd trouble had ensued we all know who would have been blamed.

All the best

Michael Scullion

Dear **ALS**

I can understand the disillusionment of scribes MT of Aldershot and Chris Noton of Ryton in the last edition of ALS about the massive changes in football and the movement of the sport away from its working class grassroots to a more business, money orientated and market driven environment. Let's face it, football has changed beyond recognition since the 1980s, some of it good, but a lot of it bad: the dramatic increase in the cost for the average football fan to support their club; a new breed of "supporter" who have emerged from nowhere to give their "support" to the likes of Man Utd and Newcastle, displacing many of the real working class fans in the process; bond schemes; talk of European "Super-Leagues" which apart from sounding incredibly boring to me (you can't beat the tradition and passion of domestic league

fixtures) will only involve two of three clubs, making them even richer and sod the rest; pay per view; nursery clubs on the horizon; the incredible volume of appalling and over priced merchandise that clubs now release in the name or "marketing". When the history of the 20th century is written, the Manchester Utd megastore deserves a mention as one of the greatest ever monuments to tackiness. The gullibility of supporters (or should that be consumers?) who feel that their lives are enriched and that they are "supporting" their club by buying a Manchester Utd duvet cover, wallpaper, toiletry set and God knows what other over priced tat is sad to behold.

However, let us not be too cynical! Change is always difficult to accept at first, and there is always a downside, but in the wake of the Hillsborough disaster it was inevitable that radical change would follow. All seater stadia were unthinkable to the average supporter ten years ago, but we now accept them. OK, the atmosphere has suffered, the spiritual homes of generations of supporters i.e. the Kops, Stretford Ends, North Banks etc of the footballing world have all gone, but Hillsborough only accelerated a process that I believe would have eventually happened anyway. The safety and comfort of supporters is now paramount. And let's be honest, there has only been the odd game in recent years where the Roker Roar has lived up to its name, although for the big matches, such as the Newcastle and Middlesbrough games this season, the atmosphere has been something special and will be difficult to replicate in an all-seater environment. However, Sunderland are swapping a crumbling ground for a magnificent new stadium, which more importantly could catapult Sunderland into the upper echelons of the footballing world for the first time since the 1950s.

Some things are more important than money though, which is why Murray's insistence that the name of the new stadium and each of the stands is up for grabs to the highest bidder is unacceptable. And as for that monstrosity which is set to become the new club badge, I can't believe the club could actually think up such a design, and not even consult the fans in the first place. Murray and the Board should show some sensitivity for once and back down on this issue, as it is clear that 99% of Sunderland fans want to keep the present club badge.

Anyway, here's to a successful season and a derby victory over the Mags (please God!)

Mark Jennings
Leeds

Dear **ALS**

Great, we have signed a new player, Swedish International - Jan Eriksson. Lionel Perez has proved to be a snip at £200,000. Bad news about Steve Agnew's broken wrist. But all is not bad with the outlandish news of Paul Gascoigne supposedly leaving Rangers to come to Sunderland. Bad news on Mr. Murray's part, the ex-Mag would never give his best for the lads.

1. He is black and white through and through.
2. The whole of Tyneside would turn against him.
3. It was reported on national TV a few years ago that the only football team he would not play for is S.A.F.C.
4. He's too ambitious (making S.A.F.C a no go area for Gazza).

Moving on to God Given. We've got Perez but we certainly need another keeper, and Shay would be our No. 1 without a doubt.

What about our 4-1 win over N.U.F.C. in 1979? Just thought I'd mention it!

The second point of my letter, the release of a farewell to Roker video, it would go down a bomb with our devoted supporters. Classic matches of wins over N.U.F.C. and 'Boro, big Cup games from our past at Roker, all in a 3 or 4 box set. A limited edition of about 40,000. What a treasured item of Sunderland's history.

ALS is the best footy magazine going. I have read a lot, but when it comes down to it, ALS is the best.

ALS top mag ever!

George Dalglish

Gateshead

Dear **ALS**

Being an exiled supporter I hadn't heard a thing about this 'marvellous' new Brick in the Wall scheme set up by the board. I assume the scheme was started in late Autumn so that people would think "Ah, Christmas presents". And that's just what my mam thought, because she always buys cracking presents does my mam. So, while I'm slogging my guts out at Leeds Uni, an A4 envelope arrives at my parents' house addressed to me but with SAFC on it. 'Aha', my mam thinks, 'that looks like Katy's Brick in the Wall certificate'. So she opens it, and lo and behold it is, so she sends it off to

Santa, ready for the 25th, and everything is hunky dory. Picture this: December 19th and I've just arrived back in the sunny North East after 12 weeks away. An A4 envelope, plain white and addressed to me arrived the very same morning. So I opened and found certificate no. 2. One ruined Christmas present, one very disappointed mam (one very happy Katy, though). Didn't anyone at the 'Caring Club' realise that most people who were buying certificates were buying them as presents? And what did they send two for - one printed and one handwritten? Did anyone else have the same problem?

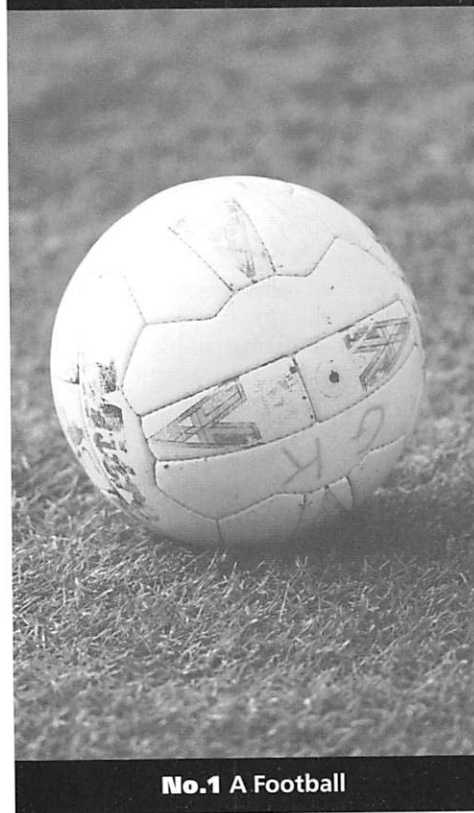
While we're on the subject, is there a Leeds branch of the supporters association? If not, I'll happily start one, especially if there are any Leeds Uni SAFC supporters.

My address: Katy, Flat D435, Clarence Dock Flats, Clarence Road, Leeds LS10 1LU.

Cheers

Katy

Football As an Artform



No.1 A Football

Dear **ALS**

I'm sitting here Jan 10th (Eric Gates, eat your heart out), curly perm has resigned from the Scum and I'm sitting here, thinking let's make a poem about the horrible little curly haired one.

So I'm sitting here thinking this:-

The lads and lasses from the Toon,
Are crying into their Broom,
The Skunks are all glummy,
cause Keegan's spat his dummy.

Come back King Kev, says big nosed Hall,
No way says Kev, I'm off cause we're going to win F**k all,
But please Kev, come back the Skunksters beg,
We're still in the UEFA Cup, and we'll be 4-0 down from the first leg.

Tyneside is in mourning, the place is all glum,
but the truth of the matter is,
he didn't want to manage the Scum.

Simon Skulduggery

Simonside

Dear **ALS**

I am writing for a number of reasons, and I have to say that most of them are complaints in some form or another. Firstly, I want to write something in reply to the fourth point in Graham Johnson's letter (issue 61) concerning season ticket priorities. The point he was making was basically that priorities should be given to regular season ticket holders and not to new ones. Although he says that he is not implying that new ticket holders are not true supporters, from the way he wrote I am sure this is what he believes. I have to strongly disagree with this. I love Sunderland with all my heart - Sunderland is my life - what I live for - yet I have never had a season ticket in my life. This is because I live in Barnsley - miles and miles away from Roker and I am only 16 so do not have money for rail fares or season tickets.

My next point is about the new crest - I have to agree with the other supporters about this. We must do everything we can to keep our crest as it always has been. I know that I will always wear the original badge and no other.

My third point is about Mickey Gray. Why does everyone seem to be getting on at him lately? Sure, Martin Smith is good, but

so is Mickey. He works his guts out for the club, anyone can see that - he obviously loves everything about it. He is a promising and talented player - I say, give him a break. Finally, I want to say that I am very proud of the lads this season. We've had so many injuries, but the lads have played more passionately than all the other 'big' clubs. Everyone talks about buying classy players, but we should be happy with the way things are. Everyone tipped us to go straight back down, but look at the way we played against Liverpool, Chelsea, Everton etc. Enthusiasm and team spirit, and most of all, our support is more important than all the millions of pounds that Newcastle scum spent on smarmy gits like Shearer. So come on Sunderland supporters everywhere, get behind the lads and be proud of them all - show our love for them and our support always.

From Sunderland through and through forever,

Joe
Barnsley

Dear **ALS**

Wednesday mornings at work are never very exciting but every once in a while something comes along to lift the boredom.

Being the only Sunderland fan in an office full of magpies (albeit mainly bandwagon jumpers) was never going to be easy. But 5 years, £60m spent and the trophy polisher looking in the employment section of his local paper has has even the most ardent Toon Army fan looking a bit worried. Then the bombshell was dropped... Keegan had resigned. The big kid had picked up his ball and buggered off home. Small clusters started gathering to discuss the fateful news. Opinions ranged from sympathy for multi millionaire "dummy spitter" Keegan, to the more informed "Well, I always thought he was tactically naive." The fact that this piece of wisdom only comes to light now smacks of shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted.

A Radio Newcastle phone-in prompted a call from a woman proclaiming to be speaking for "The true Sunderland supporters", saying she was "devastated" by the news. Who these people are, I do not know as I would also call myself a true Sunderland supporter but I have very little sympathy for the bereaved Geordies.

For years now we have been told how the sun only shines when Keegan drops his shorts but these same people are now starting to realise that his resignation could be the best thing that could have happened to them. Keegan was

P.S. I think the present crest should be kept and the suggested new one that resembles the Tyneside crest should be scrapped.

Dear **ALS**

In ALS No. 61, MT of Aldershot bemoans the increasing influence of money in the game. Rightly so, but he uses an invalid and unfair example to make his point. Firstly, the London Branch has no member with these initials in Aldershot so we cannot check the source of his suspicions. But it is completely untrue that the team have refused to attend a Branch event without payment. There is an inference that previous such occasions have been common. In fact only once in our 30 years of existence has a team "called in" on the way home and, with a 5-hour journey ahead of them, the briefness of the stay then was understandable and perfectly acceptable to the members present.

A similar invitation, with equally minimal expectation, was extended for the evening of the Spurs game this season, it proved impractical however, because they were booked on the 1900 train from Kings Cross.

We remain hopeful that a meeting can be arranged at a mutually convenient future date.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Todd

Branch Enrolment Officer and Founder
SAFCSA London Branch

Dear **ALS**

I write as someone who witnessed Sunderland's F.A.Cup Third Round tie with Arsenal at Highbury. Nothing very strange in that you may think. Except that I was supporter of neither club. I am a Southend fan, with a passion for football and idle on the day when our tie at Leicester was postponed the previous day.

Southend apart, this wasn't the first Sunderland away game I'd ever seen. Alongside my good friend and Sunderland fanatic, Martin Cain, I have enjoyed many a happy afternoon in the company of Sunderland fans. Although not able to sit with the away fans at Highbury, the support from the terraces was, as ever, tremendous and I salute all supporters as a credit to your team.

I do not believe paths will cross between our two clubs in

the foreseeable future. Sunderland are about to join the 'haves', already with Premiership status and new Stadium looming. My club, Southend, are the perpetual 'have nots'. Our supporters regularly have to put up with the 'sh** ground/no fans' chant and we can see the like of us and Grimsby being squeezed out of the 'Greed League' even if results were to prove otherwise - which they're not at the moment.

For all of that I don't begrudge Sunderland a place among football's elite but I'll miss going to Roker. Despite my first visit with Southend ending in a seven goal thrashing, I'll always have fond memories of the place. For me, I'll regard it as one of the game's great traditional soccer venues. I hope I will be welcome to visit your new ground, if not with my own club - unlikely let's be honest! - then at the first suitable opportunity. I'm not a groundhopper with expensive tastes - to which Mick James' refers in his letter (ALS 61) - my passion for the game goes much further than that. Finally, and as a regular contributor to the Southend fanzine (The Roots Hall Roar), I'd like to congratulate you on the continuing excellence of the fanzine. You set the standards for all of us to follow. Keep up the good work and best of luck to SAFC for this season and in the future.

Russ Ralph

Canvey Island.

Dear **ALS**

I felt I had to put pen to paper to do my bit to counter what I see as the creeping negativity of a growing number of letters appearing in the magazine. Having just watched a patched up team dominate the game against Blackburn Rovers (one of the form teams of recent weeks), win three of the last four home games without conceding a goal and give Arsenal two of the hardest games of their season, I wanted to register my feeling in support of Peter Reid and all the players.

Some people have short memories. I watched this club under Buxton and saw it heading for oblivion. What Peter Reid and the players have achieved since then is nothing short of a miracle! We are poised on the threshold of the club actually realising the potential so long talked about.

It is clear to me that Peter Reid has got things right. We have only to look at the likes of Middlesbrough, Coventry, West Ham et al to see that simply throwing money at 'the problem' bring no guarantee of a solution. We have a manager who not only gets the best out of what he's got, but will add to the squad when players who will make it better become available.

Let's stay behind Peter, Brace and the players. Let's have faith in those who have brought us this far. I, for one, feel we have never been better placed for long term success. Keep the faith

Russell Bruce
Billingham

Dear **ALS**

Okay we played Arsenal 4 times, 3 matches in quick succession. On the way to the home league game, my fellow travellers decided they wouldn't be going to the cup replay. "Fine" I thought, "I'll take the oldest".

On the Sunday morning I phoned the ticket office and was told, "there are hundreds of tickets left." Prices for the childrens/family enclosure were £19 and £16. In my naivety I thought that was for two. As it turned out, it wasn't, no concessions for children, e.g full price ticket.

Who makes the decisions? When do we get some common sense from the men in charge? This would be the third match against Arsenal in about 11 days. Could the men in charge have a thought about the fan for once instead of the £ sign, and possibly have reduced the price, or at least kept the same price for match days. Reducing the price may have enticed the part-timers, after all it was a 3rd round replay! It seems not, a 15,000 gate says it all, when it should have been a sell out.

We are building a 41,500 seater stadium, we cannot even manage to fill an open space of 22,000, it's a disgrace. Have the men in charge thought about this? It seems the £ sign rules in their mentalities. What about the fan?

Anthony Lynn
Seaton Sluice

P.S. I couldn't take the oldest, I didn't have enough money.

Dear **ALS**

How many football-mad parents could bring a son into the world and never cherish the dream of seeing him perform wonders in the colours of their favourite team?

The advance of sexual equality means all is not lost even for those of us who cannot produce boys. So imagine the feeling when my younger daughter ran out, played well and scored a goal on her debut in the familiar red and white stripes.... of Brentford.

It is hardly Nathalie's fault that I have spent most of my working life away from the North East. She was born in Bristol and has lived only there or in London. Brentford is a harmless enough club, Griffin Park is the nearest league ground to our home and if my failure as a father had begun and ended with her allegiance to their under 17 girls' team, I would have had no real cause for shame.

But in common, I suppose, with many exiles who have brought up children a long way from the North East, I have had another heavier cross to bear. For as long as she can remember liking football, Nathalie has been a Liverpool fan. It is not for want of trying on my part. As far as I am concerned, when you hear people say they are always careful not to ram this or that interest down their offspring's throat, you can safely dismiss them as liars.

In theory, I believe in the Nick Hornby creed. In Fever Pitch, he makes it quite clear that while he would respect the decision of any child of his to support a team other than his beloved Arsenal, that child could expect no favours but would have to live with his or her choice. Of course I have rammed Sunderland down Nathalie's throat.

Yet after all those visits to Roker Park, and to away games anywhere within reach, her ingratitude has frankly been beyond belief, and like most fathers of daughters, I have let slip signs of weakness.

At Hillsborough in 1992, I had to suppress my euphoria long enough to offer fatherly consolation when news of



Liverpool's struggles against Portsmouth in the other semi came through on her radio, at one stage bringing tears to her eyes.

At Wembley, I had to buy her a Liverpool flag which she took merciless delight in waving in my face for the entire second half. Back at Hillsborough the next season, I swear I heard her laugh at Tony Norman's howler. And didn't she always laugh at those backward-stretching leaps Don Goodman used to make for high balls?

When I meet other exiled Sunderland fans who have succeeded where I have failed so comprehensively, I feel inadequate. Where did I go wrong? Why wasn't she whipped into a frenzy of new-found enthusiasm by all those nil-nil draws in our Division One championship season? Yes, yes, I know it could be worse. Man Utd were never contenders for her affections and she has, after all, stopped short of the ultimate betrayal (I'll say no more in case she - or, God forbid, her sister who doesn't even know what a football is for - begins plotting the mother-and-father of all teenage rebellions).

But hold on a minute. Maybe there is a chink of red and white striped light at the end of the all-red tunnel.

The evidence is flimsy, and nothing to do with football, but consider it anyway. I have a second obsession to declare, along with my 35 years of following the lads. I am also a sad old folkie, and with much better justification than she could ever claim for her footballing preferences, Nathalie has spent years mocking my record collection. But coming away from the FA Cup tie at Highbury, she not only remarked on how well Sunderland had played (a real effort on her part since it was pretty much backs-to-the-wall stuff, and she was still fuming at Martin Smith's unflattering remarks in ALS about her hero John Barnes). She also asked to borrow one of my Christy Moore CDs.

That is one heck of a long way from Snoop Doggy Dog, Tupac and the Fugees. Mark my words. After a conversation like that, come April 12, she'll be rooting for a thumping home win against Liverpool.

Colin Randall

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Sunderland supporters in Toronto, Canada have recently set up a supporters' club and are looking for members. If you are interested get in touch with **Jim Higginson** Tel/Fax **416 755 4683**.

Quiz Answers

1. Crystal Palace
2. Southend
3. Stuart Pearce
4. Poborsky and Berger
5. Grampus 8
6. Huddersfield
7. Boundary Park
8. Nick Barmby
9. Moldova
10. Tony Adams
11. Coventry City
12. Chris Hughton
13. Danny Blind
14. A.C.Milan
15. Hamburg
16. Bayern Munich
17. Benfica, Internazionale, Ajax, Bayern Munich, Liverpool, Nottingham Forest, A.C.Milan
18. Steaua Bucharest
19. Reims
20. N'Gotty

hear ye! hear ye!

THESE ARE JUST SOME OF YE HEADLINES OUR CUSTOMERS
HAVE READ DURING YE PAST FEW MONTHS.

NO ONE TO BLAME BUT MYSELF - ORD. Thinking BIG!!

WE'LL RIVAL THE BEST - REID
I'M GOING FOR GAZZA !!!

The sky's the limit - Murray. Stadium dream takes shape
I'VE GOT MIIIEIONS TO SPEND...

...IT'S BURNING A HOLE IN MY POCKET - PETER REID

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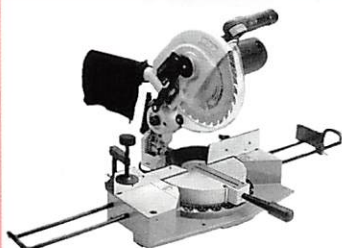


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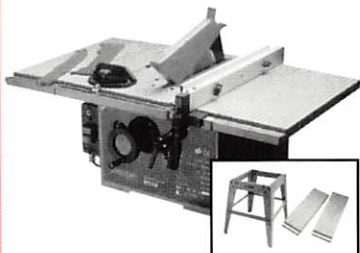
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