



Mondays with DAVID ALLAN



Liverpool fans on the Spion Kop.

Liverpool - and why are we fans of anything?

As a football fan in England of many decades, I am always struck by the committed fan-base of just a few football clubs in South Africa. The one that always makes me reflect on the reasons is Liverpool.

The City of Liverpool, and Merseyside as a whole, has one of the most distinctive accents of any in the British Isles. Newcastle – another football club with a cult following – is another. Liverpool's accent being "Scouse" and Newcastle's being "Geordie". Very strong, often moving into dialect, unmistakably associated with those cities.

How – in my mind-set formed so long ago going to watch mostly the London area teams in the old League Divisions 1,2, and 3 South - can you be a Liverpool fan and not have a scouse accent?

Silly question of course. But in a city with a red half and a blue half (like Manchester, but a different shade of blue), no football club is more closely associated with its local accent. Many Liverpool

players were born on Merseyside.

In modern times, it all kicked off for Liverpool in the 60s. Legends such as Tommy Smith, Ian Callaghan then moving on to Terry McDermott, Robbie Fowler, Steve McManaman, Phil Thompson, Jamie Carragher, Steven Gerrard, were/are all Merseyside born and sounding like it. Ian Rush, no less a Liverpool legend for being Welsh born a little to the west, might as well have been born locally.

Most football fans are fans of their local clubs. However much TV schedules may screw around with match times, the ritual of getting to the ground by 3 on a Saturday for a home match, then listening to Sports Report on the way home is deeply ingrained. **(to page 2)**



I'm a racehorse fanatic rather than a football fanatic.

(Steve McManaman)

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Steve McManaman states his priorities.

DAVID ALLAN (..cont)

For myself, a committed fan of West Bromwich Albion since the age of 6 through thick and thin (with no association myself with the Black Country but for a small-child reason that stuck for ever like an addiction), I can understand the "from a distance" factor. Living in London, I could get to see some home matches against West Brom. At Spurs, "my London team" – including the great double winning team - very young lads could cycle several miles to White Hart Lane, park the bike, buy a ticket for the sunken area near the touch line, and cycle home.

Trips to see The Albion at home are infrequent, but important pilgrimages when they happen. Rather like being a South African fan of Liverpool and getting to Anfield.

Are South Africans fans of Liverpool, Manchester United and other top five clubs because they are (or were at the time) winning everything?

Manchester United has two clear reasons for having a global following. The first is the Munich Air Crash in 1958 that stunned the football world and beyond. For decades afterwards, a British person abroad could strike up a happy relationship with no words of understanding other than "Bobby Charlton", a surviving Busby Babe who set good examples.

The other, for the next generation, is "David Beckham" whose image conquered untold millions in China and other millions in Japan where a triple-life-size chocolate David Beckham adorned the lobby of a major Tokyo department store for many months.

For Liverpool, it may have been the twin football disasters of Heysel, where 39 people died) and Hillsborough (96 people) in the mid and late 80s, deeply shocking, and in the latter case with a lasting grievance only recently partially assuaged.

Every Liverpool fan from Bootle to Botswana feels that experience, and shares it, to his or her core.

Or is it simply something like Frankel-mania? Latching onto an astonishingly good performer, like the Liverpool teams of the 60s and 70s. The simple answer is that for whatever reason it started, it is as valid as any form of being a fan if it lasts, through thick and thin.

Before Liverpool and every other Premiership team became a multi-cultural polyglot of top line talent earning more in a week than most good annual salaries, Bobby Charlton would get the same bus home as the fans. Later, we would see "the lads" on the racecourse together having a laugh, especially Liverpool's Fowler and McManaman who went seriously into racehorse ownership because they loved it.

Their preferred racing league was jumping. Other Liverpool stalwarts Kevin Keegan and, later, Michael Owen - who both moved on - went into racing and breeding big time on the flat. It is perhaps more likely that those who have the word Liverpool running through them like a stick of seaside rock would go the jumping route. Think "Aintree".

Within the (horse) racecourse – straight on up the A59 past Anfield - was the motor racing track, sharing grandstands, and five times the venue for the Formula One British Grand Prix won by superstars Stirling Moss and Jack Brabham.

The horse racing could have gone the same route to oblivion any number of times, but was arguably saved by another Liverpool legend, Red Rum who won the Grand National three times in the 70s, capturing the imagination of a nation way above the level of Frankel. The great little horse is buried at the Aintree Winning Post.

Liverpool has a great maritime history. On the dark side, RMS Titanic was registered in Liverpool although she sailed from Southampton. But thousands of happier transAtlantic sailings took place in the 19th and 20th centuries from Liverpool's



RMS Empress of England out of Liverpool,. drops her pilot.

DAVID ALLAN (cont)

ever-busy landing stages. Through a family connection, this writer when a small boy sailed up the Mersey twice on newly commissioned liners moving from final fitting out to take on passengers, and was allowed to operate the switchboard in one of Liverpool's "Three Graces": The Royal Liver Building. With The Cunard Building and the Port of Liverpool Building, a great city skyline is formed.

Of course when Liverpool FC in the 60s with scousers and adopted sons like St John and Yeats took the football world by storm, the city was associated with something altogether bigger. The Beatles raced to unsurpassed global stardom and musical legend, making Liverpool's Cavern Club, Penny Lane and Strawberry Fields magnets for tourists.

Another "Merseybeat group", as so many were then called, was Gerry and the Pacemakers whose first three records reached No.1, a record equalled much later by another Liverpool band Frankie Goes to Hollywood.

"You'll Never Walk Alone" became the football club's anthem. When Gerry Marsden sang it at the 1989 Cup Final between Liverpool and city rivals Everton, soon after the Hillsborough Disaster, it was impossible not to crumble in the emotion of it all.

Another adopted son and perhaps greatest player, now Sir Kenneth Dalglish as of last week, received his honour for his and his wife's tireless Hillsborough and other charity work over many years.

Scouse accent or no scouse accent, anyone in South Africa or anywhere else has sound justification for being a Liverpool fan. YNWA.—*tt.*



Red Rum, a public hero, winning (above); his grave at Aintree (below).



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