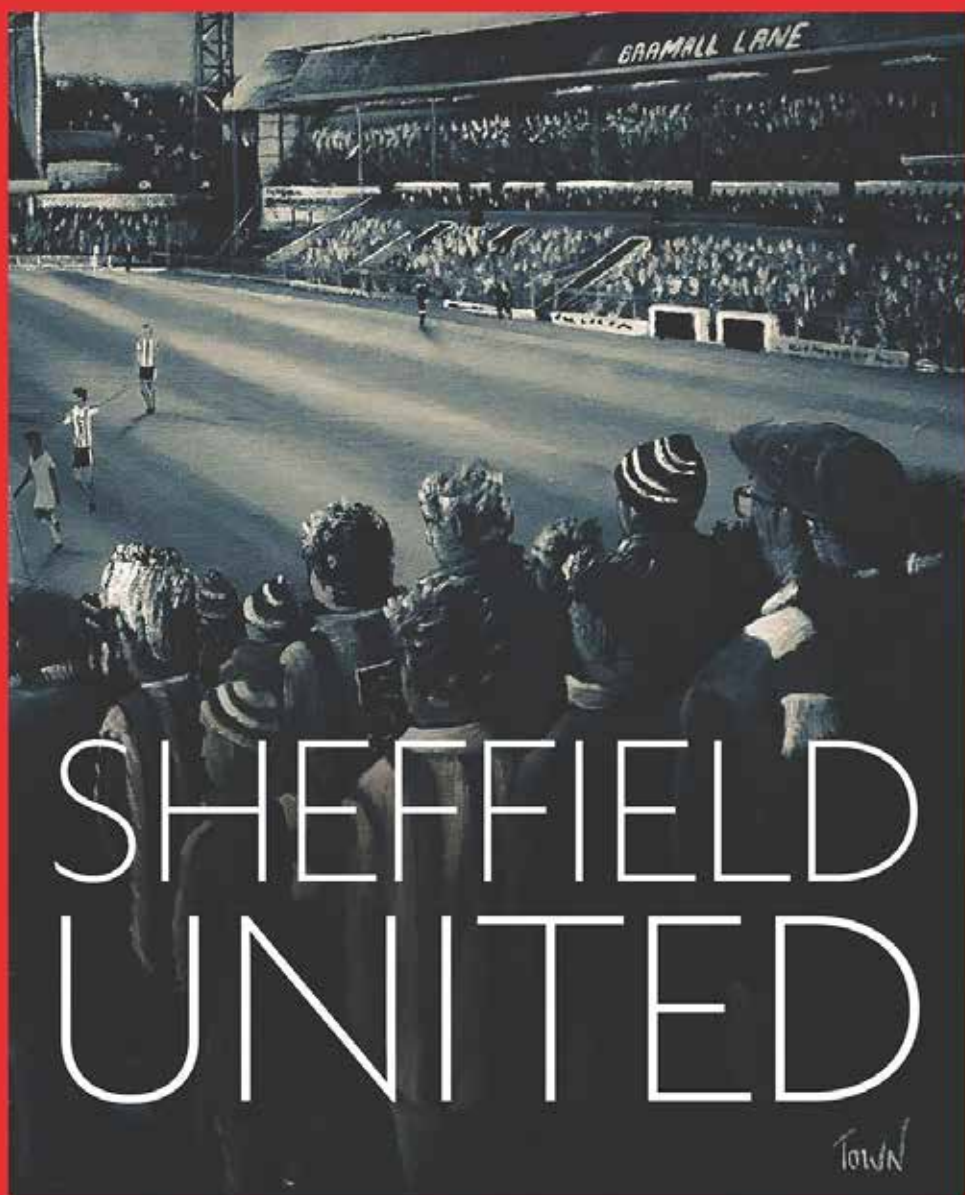


AIN'T GOT A
BARREL OF MONEY



SHEFFIELD
UNITED

TOWN

J A S O N H O L Y H E A D

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Chapter 1

BETWEEN 1955 and 1959, Joe Mercer was the manager of Sheffield United Football Club, having taken over when Reg Freeman died during the close season. Mercer had enjoyed a distinguished career as a player, starting at Everton, in a team that included the wonderful Dixie Dean, before moving to Arsenal – where he won an FA Cup winner’s medal.

He was so well thought of at Highbury, that there was a media campaign to make him the Gunners’ manager but that did not materialise. He also represented his country on five occasions as a player.

Mercer’s first shot at management was less spectacular – relegated in his first season in charge of the Blades. Mercer had little or no experience in the Second Division, and even less experience of man-management. But, after the initial disappointment, he started to put together a decent youth set-up at United and made good use of some of the many contacts he had made during his playing days.

Before his efforts could come to fruition, Mercer decided he needed to be at a bigger club, and in December 1958 he

resigned, to manage Aston Villa. He took Villa down in his first season as their manager as well.

Following relegation, Mercer built a decent young team, nicknamed 'Mercer's Minors' in the press. His talented young Aston Villa side won promotion to the First Division as champions in 1959/60 by playing bold, exciting football.

In the 1960/61 season his side lifted the League Cup. He was extremely busy, not only in team affairs but also being involved in the development of the ground. The workload took its toll and in 1964 Mercer suffered a stroke. Somewhat insensitively, after his recovery Aston Villa terminated his contract.

A year later, initially against doctors' orders, he moved to Manchester City. His doctors later admitted to his wife Norah, 'He may as well die doing something he loves, as sit at home and die of a broken heart.'

Fearing people doubted him due to his health problems, Mercer appointed a young and flamboyant Malcolm Allison as his assistant. Norah played a big part too. She often mothered the players, making sure they had eaten properly and were being looked after by the club.

Mercer and Allison enjoyed much success at City, and they arguably became the most entertaining team of that era. Mercer had met Allison, a larger-than-life extrovert, at an FA coaching session. He said later, 'The chance [to work with Allison] was irresistible. I knew that people had written me off. There were doubts over my health, but I had no lack of confidence in my ability. Allison was magnificent. I knew we had a chance at Manchester City. Although they were Second Division, they were a club with tradition and a ready-made public.'

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City won promotion to the First Division in 1966 and in '68 they won the league. It was a remarkably short journey from a mid-table Second Division side to league champions, in just three years.

As Allison's reputation grew, so too did his ambition, and he wanted to be in control of Manchester City. A boardroom split over ownership and who should be the manager gave fuel to this. Peter Swales wanted to run the club and Allison backed him, apparently under the promise of getting the manager's job.

Mercer sided with the existing board, and when Swales won, the end was in sight for Mercer. He wanted to carry on at the club he had achieved so much with so quickly, and the fans undoubtedly felt the same way, so the club reached a compromise – Allison would take on the manager's role and Mercer would assume the role of general manager.

Mercer, however, on finding he had lost his parking space and office at the ground, decided enough was enough. In June 1971 he resigned from the club, ending the most celebrated period in Manchester City's history.

Mercer left Maine Road as the most successful City manager of all time, and despite the treatment he had received from the board, the fans recognised his contribution and shortly after his departure they invited him to attend their annual ceremony, where they presented him with a silver tea service.

His wife Norah was so well appreciated that years later, when she died, several members of the Manchester City team and other well-known players attended her funeral.

After his resignation at City, Mercer moved to Coventry City. During his time as Coventry boss, he spent seven games as caretaker-manager of the England team, in 1974, after Sir

Alf Ramsey left following England's failure to qualify for the 1974 World Cup.

He approached the England job with much the same style as he had his club football, doing it the Joe Mercer way by picking flair players such as Frank Worthington and Stan Bowles. His record as England supremo was so good that there was talk of him getting the job permanently, but the FA opted for former Leeds United manager Don Revie instead.

Mercer received an OBE for services to football in 1976. At the old Maine Road ground of Manchester City there was a suite named after him and following their move to the Etihad, a street was named in his honour – Joe Mercer Way.

Joe Mercer OBE passed away on his 76th birthday after suffering from Alzheimer's.

At Bramall Lane, on Mercer's exit, coach Archie Clarke had been put in temporary charge of the Blades, and when John Harris arrived in the spring of 1959, he inherited a good foundation of a team that was in need of strengthening, but he also inherited a formidable defence.

Cec Coldwell, Brian Richardson, the Shaws – Graham and Joe – and Gerry Summers, in front of Alan Hodgkinson in goal, formed a solid base for Harris to build on.

United had made a poor start to the season under Mercer but had climbed to fifth by the time he quit. Archie Clarke had overseen four consecutive victories in January and into the start of February, adding two more wins following a 2-2 draw away at Arsenal in the fifth round of the FA Cup. United beat them 3-0 in the replay and a 1-0 win over Wednesday continued the run.

Norwich City put an end to United's cup run in early March – again in a replay, after a 1-1 draw in the

first game. The Canaries ran out 2-3 winners at the second attempt.

Two further defeats in a row followed the exit from the cup, before United rallied and went on a run which saw them lose just once in 13 games, before Harris was appointed. The end of the season saw a rather good third-place finish, but Wednesday were champions, nine points ahead of the Blades.

The 1959/60 campaign was to be John Harris's first full season in charge. He was hugely different to his predecessor. Glasgow-born Harris always dressed in a suit and tie and did not drink, smoke or swear, and was often referred to as Gentleman John.

He followed his father's footsteps into football. His dad was a Newcastle United centre-forward, who also managed Swindon Town and Swansea City. John Harris started playing at centre-back for Swindon Town before moving to Swansea, then to Spurs, Wolves and Southampton, before a transfer to Chelsea, where he captained the Blues to win the First Division championship in 1955. He left Chelsea to take up a player-manager role at Chester in 1956.

On his appointment at Bramall Lane, Harris retained the services of coach and chief scout, Archie Clarke, who had brought some great young talent to the club, as well as doing an admirable job of holding the reins since Mercer's departure.

The season started positively. Friendlies against Dutch clubs SC Enschede and PSV Eindhoven both ended in wins, and an opening-day league win at home to Derby County preceded a 6-0 thrashing of Hull City. Doc Pace scored twice, Willie Hamilton added another two, and Harris's Blades were off and running.

Cec Coldwell missed the Hull game through injury and would not play in the next seven games, Cliff Mason deputising. Coldwell returned for the home game against Bristol City on 19 September. United won 5-2 and Pace netted his fourth league goal of the season.

An away trip to Scunthorpe United the following week saw Pace score his fifth in a 1-1 draw. Bernard Shaw was injured in that game and Mason came back in for the next game, at home to South Yorkshire neighbours, Rotherham United (Mason had been signed to cover for Shaw while he was serving in the army). The Blades lost 2-3 but Pace was on target again.

A midweek friendly against Swiss side Lucerne saw Pace score two of United's five goals, before he scored yet again in a 1-1 draw with his previous club, Aston Villa.

Derek Pace came from a footballing family. His father, Charles, had managed Essington Villa in the 1930s, and his mother was part of a ladies' team that played games for charity.

Derek signed for Aston Villa in 1949 but was called up to carry out his national service almost straight away. He served in the medical corps, which is where the nickname 'Doc' came from. Doc, although not the biggest centre-forward, was tough and had great awareness in the penalty area and could time his runs wonderfully. He was a two-footed player and could head the ball equally as efficiently.

When Pace returned to Villa after his National Service, they had a wealth of strikers at the club and he found games hard to come by, but despite only playing in half a dozen games, he scored six goals, including one on his debut.

Mercer had fancied Pace for a while, but Villa had been reluctant to let him go. However, he finally signed for United on the morning of Boxing Day 1957.

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He made his Blades debut that very afternoon and repeated what he had done at Villa, scoring in his first game, a 4-2 win over Blackburn Rovers. United had another game two days later against Lincoln City, in which Pace scored again, making him an instant favourite with the Bramall Lane faithful.

Although he joined United halfway through the season, he netted 15 times in 19 games. In his first full season he scored an impressive 26 in the league, as well as three FA Cup goals and his tally at the end of 1958/59 was 34.

Now aged 27, Pace was in the form of his life, and two days after scoring against his former club again, he scored two against Sheffield Wednesday in a 3-1 win in the County Cup.

That week, Harold MacMillan secured a third term in office for his party, as the Tories won a General Election with a massive majority. Although he had been a member of Parliament since 1931, it was MacMillan's first election as leader and his Conservatives won 365 seats to Labour's 258.

In victory MacMillan declared, 'This election has shown that the class war is obsolete.' Defeated Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell commented, 'We have attacked and on this occasion were repulsed. We shall attack again, and again and again until we win.'

Back-to-back defeats followed the win over rivals Wednesday, but United got back to winning ways by beating Huddersfield Town 0-1 and Ipswich Town by the same margin – Billy Russell getting both goals.

Form was indifferent in November and United won two, lost one and drew one. December had a similar theme, with

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United losing to Stoke City and Cardiff City. However, the new year would see an upturn in form, and United beat Plymouth Argyle 4-0 on 2 January 1960, before losing just once in the next ten games.

Three wins in their last three league fixtures of the season saw a decent fourth-place finish behind Aston Villa, Cardiff City and Liverpool. Pace finished the season as United's top scorer on 33 goals.