

John Grant



WHEN THE
ETERNAL CITY
TURNED RED



The Story of
Liverpool FC's
First European
Cup Win



CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	9
Introduction: The Coal Dust Lifted.....	11
1. 1977.....	19
2. Unexpected Journeys.....	24
3. St-Étienne: Make a Difference.....	28
4. A Midfield Matador and the Semi-Final.....	46
5. They Were Happy Memories for Us.....	55
6. Introducing Borussia Mönchengladbach, 1977.....	65
7. Pilgrimage.....	73
8. In Rome.....	95
9. One Brother in the Main Stand, the Other All in Red.....	105
10. From St Patrick's Church in Toxteth to the Eternal City of Rome.....	116
11. Two Good Friends and a Hungry Welshman.....	125
12. From a Wembley Defeat to the Glory of Rome.....	142
13. Rainer Bonhof, President, Borussia Mönchengladbach.....	156
14. Liverpool Went to Rome on a Wednesday Night.....	171

15. Cometh the Hour, Cometh the 'Anfield Iron' Man	188
16. The European Cup Held High and Roman Celebrations.....	195
17. The Chalk Dust Lifted	213
Appendix 1: Travel Information.....	221
Appendix 2: Other Players.....	223
Appendix 3: Backroom Staff	225
Appendix 4: Club Honours to 1977	228
Appendix 5: Liverpool's Route to the European Cup Final 1977	229
Appendix 6: European Cup Entrants 1976/77.....	233
Appendix 7: Borussia Mönchengladbach's Route to the European Cup Final 1977	234
Appendix 8: European Cup Final 1977.....	235
Appendix 9: La Coupe d'Europe.....	236
Appendix 10: Borussia Mönchengladbach: Key Personnel.....	244
Select Bibliography	247
Index	248

Introduction

THE COAL DUST LIFTED

*'The atmosphere is electric, and the hills
of Rome are alive to the Liverpool sound.'*

—Barry Davies, BBC Commentator, 25 May 1977

IN 1977, Liverpool fans embarked on a journey to Rome. They packed a few items, a survival kit including sandwiches, meat pasties, salad cream and diluted orange cordial. Travelling across Europe in late May was a first-time adventure for some, and this unfamiliarity would be remembered fondly. The Eternal City, a place that will live forever, embraced an additional story that amplified the notion of Rome's longevity. Indeed, a tale that would endure in Liverpool fans' collective memory, and their mission was to witness their team capture the greatest prize in European club football.

They would follow others who endeavoured to enter Rome for personal gain and fulfilment. In 218 BC, the Carthaginian warlord Hannibal had a similar thought and journey. Comparable to Liverpool fans who crossed the Alps resting on overhead baggage trays, with little food and lack of free-flowing sanitation, Hannibal also crossed the Alps, with 37 elephants as a mode of transport. The Romans were eventually able to repel his forces, although not without Hannibal inflicting great losses upon the defending Roman legions.

Also, in the 70s BC, a certain rabble was organised and led by Spartacus, his fellow band of ex-gladiators and runaways intent to leave their mark on Rome. They forcefully met the challenge of the ill-trained Roman legions. Liverpool FC in AD 1977 were led by a man from the North East of England, and his name was Bob Paisley.

The prestigious European Cup Final combining with the beautiful city of Rome added to the splendour of this sporting occasion. The symbolism somehow reflected the story of Liverpool FC and the Eternal City. Bill Shankly took the reins at Anfield in December 1959 and considered the place a 'shambles'. Liverpool lay dormant in tenth place in the Second Division. A footballing resuscitation was essential, and with valuable input from established staff including Bob Paisley, Joe Fagan and Reuben Bennett, a new vision was set. The requirement to strengthen the playing staff was imperative, and this reset would culminate in Liverpool FC becoming one of the major forces across European football.

Rome was not always the Rome as we know it. SPQR, Senate and the People of Rome, is an ever-present acronym that can be traced back to Cicero, 63 BC, and conveyed the power of the Roman state. The recognisable SPQR coat of arms is proudly signalled across the city on municipal buildings and public monuments in recognition of the strong bond between government and its citizens. However, there are few accounts of how in the fourth century BC, a nondescript village developed into a place of influence within the Italian peninsula. As the centuries unfolded, Rome became governing authority over three continents. A second-rate ineffective village had conquered Europe. A remarkable comparison is apparent here, as a Second Division football team would, for the first time in the club's history, eventually become champions of Europe. Certainly, Rome was the perfect venue to highlight this rise to footballing greatness.

Bob Paisley had previously visited the Italian capital. When the Second World War began in earnest, Paisley enlisted in October 1939 to the 73rd Regiment, Royal Artillery. His military service took him to Egypt, but as the European final approached, he later reflected on his part in the liberation of Rome in June 1944. Paisley entered Rome in an army truck, and as part of the incoming forces he was presumably welcomed with hugs, waving arms and clapping hands. In 1977, there were concerns that the Italian journalists would be reminded of Benito Mussolini's pact with Nazi Germany and the atrocities inflicted on the population by Adolf Hitler. The concern was alleviated, as discussed within a later part of this story.

In fact, the Italian papers offered their warmest congratulations following Liverpool's victory. Headlines included: 'Liverpool, King of Clubs'. The sports paper *Corriere Dello Sport* highlighted: 'Liverpool are the first team of Europe. They showed it in a splendid way last night in an authentic happy display of red and white flags, shouts and chants by thousands of English fans. Liverpool, the King of English clubs, took the European Cup and set the pace for a dramatic recovery of British soccer.'

Il Messaggero, Rome's other prominent publication, ran with 'Liverpool, a joyous British Night in Rome.' Also commenting: 'Against all the predictions Liverpool dominated their German opponents, it was a victory of personality and guts.' The piece continued to highlight a wonderful achievement and that Liverpool's disappointment following the FA Cup Final provided the determination to secure the greatest club prize in European football: 'Liverpool, despite last Saturday's battle against Manchester United, were more fresh, bright and lively than Borussia. For almost the entire first half Keegan's predominance – and that of his team-mates

– was of such magnitude that Mönchengladbach seemed incapable of displaying their usual kind of play.’

Liverpool FC had triumphed over one of the most dynamic, entertaining and respected sides in European football, and the Reds were guided by their unassuming and gifted manager from County Durham, who was also proud to be a Liverpudlian.

Mr Sam Paisley was on strike in 1926. Like other miners, their fight was to benefit from improved working conditions and a shorter working week. Strike action meant hunger, cold mornings and nights for his young family, and the necessity to improvise, to survive, was at the forefront of all their lives. Survive they did. The coal dust lifted as the North Sea wind lashed the forgotten pit heaps, where Sam Paisley and his seven-year-old son would forage and unearth any solidified morsel of coal to take home to feed the low embers of their stone hearth. His son, Bob, would not miss the opportunity to take a meal, and the soup kitchen opposite his school was willing to feed all. Hughie, his younger brother, tells of the many times Bob would bring home a can of soup to share with all the family. Hunger was the great evil for this working-class community, and the Paisleys were determined to suppress this human indignity.

In later life, Bob Paisley reflected on these times with tentative nobleness, a proud notion that the individual has the intrinsic will to survive, to fight back and resist, to work hard when given the opportunity and the need to improve oneself constantly.

‘No matter what circumstances prevail, I was taught to keep going; there is a certain amount of luck but there’s perseverance, and a reluctance to give in.’

Sam Paisley did not want a life of drudgery for his sons. He saw the pit for the very thing that it was, back-breaking and dangerous work. This reluctance would become a reality for

his own life as he was badly injured following an underground accident and with it came the frightening prospect of losing an arm; his wife refused to give permission for the procedure. In determination to ensure that Bob would not follow him down the mines, he purchased a pair of football boots for the price of the weekly family budget. They would prove to be a fine and wise investment.

Bob's school, Eppleton Senior Mixed, encouraged football, he recalled. 'We were fortunate at school to be brought up on professional lines, because the teacher there had played a bit of football.' However, becoming a professional footballer proved elusive when Paisley left school at 15, as he was rejected outright by Sunderland manager Johnny Cochrane, the very club he loved and supported. Bob was crestfallen, and to rub salt into an open wound, both Tottenham and Wolverhampton cited the same reason – his height proved to be the ball and chain shackling his career. There was the need to find employment and training of some sort, and initially he took a job working for the colliery: 'I was on the bank, at the top of the pithead, sorting the stone from the coal. I've got to say I had little interest in this and often the coal got thrown in the stone bin. When the foreman came around as long as something was getting thrown off, he was happy.'

Following the pit closure, as the sports journalist John Keith has commented, a local group of builders, in gratitude for their recent winnings, offered employment. Betting on Paisley's friend and notable long-distance runner, George Oxley, proved lucrative indeed. Paisley acted as Oxley's running buddy, and the pair convinced themselves and others that victories were assured. Heavy bets were placed on three races, and substantial winnings were collected by local builders. In response to their good fortune, they offered bricklaying apprenticeships to both Oxley and Paisley, and they were gladly received.

Paisley continued to play football throughout his apprenticeship, and he was beginning to attract interest from one of the most respected and established clubs in the North East. Bishop Auckland were a semi-professional outfit, and they saw potential in the tough-tackling midfielder.

Reaching the prestigious FA Amateur Cup Final against Wellington at Roker Park would be the foundation of a glorious journey leading to the Eternal City in 1977. Bob's performance registered on Liverpool's radar, and manager George Kay was convinced that Paisley would be an important addition to his side, but the outbreak of war in 1939 brought with it the hiatus of his football career. He arrived at Exchange Station, Liverpool on 8 May 1939, and Bob Paisley did not kick a ball in anger for Liverpool FC's first team until 1946.

Thomas Valentine Williams, then club chairman of Liverpool FC, suggested to Paisley that he should consider joining the backroom staff when he finished playing. He replied, 'I was thinking about getting a market stall Mr Williams, and sell fruit and veg.' The response, 'Well, it's up to you.'

In his final season as a player, Bob took a correspondence course in physiotherapy and became the most knowledgeable man on muscles and hamstrings. John Keith described the scene at Anfield one morning, as Paisley responded to an unusual request.

'One Sunday morning he was asked to go to the door as a woman wanted to see him, she was with a greyhound. "Mr Paisley, would you have a look at my dog's paw," she said. "I don't do dogs," was Bob's response. Under Shankly if a player was injured, he wouldn't talk to them, he had a psychological fear of injuries.'

Throughout this story, aspects of Paisley's career will be remembered by those who were genuinely close, in the room

so to speak, both in private and professional circles. Certainly, his character facets and public demeanour did not mirror or gel with the expectations that come with a high-profile role. His former captain for Liverpool, Sir Matt Busby, eloquently captured the man in his tribute when *This is Your Life* was screened on 12 November 1977: 'I knew you first of all as a dedicated player, one who always put his club before himself and it didn't surprise me at all when you took over the helm of Liverpool Football Club, that you took this great club to the greatest prize in football. One might get the wrong impression that Bob is a very quiet person, yes, I would agree with that, but he has this inner steel to motivate his players to great heights, and this is a great thing in his favour regarding football. He is prepared to give everyone else the limelight, rather than himself, which is a very rare thing these days.'

Bob Paisley's European philosophy offered an intriguing deflection from the 'standard bearer' of English football, adopting an alternative vision for his continental excursions, and he considered the home crowd to be an important factor. 'We'll do the European one,' was his muted rallying cry. If a measured, less gung-ho approach to the away legs was implemented, the opposition crowd would become frustrated. This, then, would transmit to their team and unforced errors would creep into their play. Exchanging passes between defence, rolling the ball back to sweeper-keeper Ray Clemence, would decrease their chances of scoring and increase the tension in the crowd. If things went to plan, and they often did, Paisley would relish the return leg at Anfield and the opportunity for his team to express themselves more freely.

Liverpool FC coveted the European Cup, and the Reds' frustration, disappointment and injustice were the combined raw emotions within previous campaigns. One prominent effort was 12 years previous, their opponents Inter Milan,

and that defeat remains a hotly contested matter. Intriguingly, the Nerazzurri are remembered with some consternation by others later in this story, but the strange happenings played out in the San Siro semi-final second leg on 12 May 1965, as we shall see, would forever haunt Bill Shankly.

The following chapters are not a condemnation of current practices and processes within modern-day football, although they do uncover, at times, the 1970s and its wonderful simplicity. The sense of community and connectedness that existed for both players and supporters alike was a common bond that remains within many families. Fans followed Liverpool with utter devotion, but it was also a journey of personal discovery, that supporting their team would activate the human senses, experiencing new cultures, tastes, sights and sounds. It was an action-packed and indeed valuable education.