



A Game of Three Halves

The Official Kenny Swain Biography

Brian Beard

A Game of Three Halves

The Official Kenny Swain Biography

Brian Beard



Pitch Publishing Ltd
A2 Yeoman Gate
Yeoman Way
Durrington
BN13 3QZ

Email: info@pitchpublishing.co.uk

Web: www.pitchpublishing.co.uk

First published by Pitch Publishing in 2013

Text © 2012 Kenny Swain & Brian Beard

Kenny Swain & Brian Beard have asserted their rights in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to be identified as the authors of this work. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission in writing of the publisher and the copyright owners, or as expressly permitted by law, or under terms agreed with the appropriate reprographics rights organization.

Enquiries concerning reproduction outside the terms stated here should be sent to the publishers at the UK address printed on this page.

The publisher makes no representation, express or implied, with regard to the accuracy of the information contained in this book and cannot accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions that may be made.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1908051400

Cover design by Olnier Design.

Printed in Great Britain by TJ International.

CONTENTS

	<i>Foreword</i>	5
CHAPTER 1:	The Early Years	7
CHAPTER 2:	Teacher Training and Wycombe	21
CHAPTER 3:	Chelsea	29
CHAPTER 4:	The Villa	41
CHAPTER 5:	Brian Clough and Forest	68
CHAPTER 6:	Portsmouth	122
CHAPTER 7:	Crewe Alexandra	137
CHAPTER 8:	Management	149
CHAPTER 9:	The National School Lilleshall, Thomas Telford and Back to the FA	172
CHAPTER 10:	The Final Chapter	183

Foreword

It is rare in the football world that someone can remain at a level of influence in our national game for 40 years without any significant break. Kenny Swain is one of the few! With four decades of experience as a player, coach, teacher and manager he has made an enormous contribution to our national game. Arguably the custodian of the future of English football – working with the young talent that we provide – he has an enormous responsibility having to nurture and guide the young footballing talent of this nation.

Kenny has never been out of work in football which is an incredible achievement shared by very few in an industry where employment is so volatile. In between managerial posts he would turn up at my door and twice I have appointed him to the role of Director of Football at Thomas Telford School, with the aim of making us the strongest performing football school in England, which many would argue we are, thanks to Kenny's contribution.

He has worked with and for exceptional leaders often regarded amongst the best in football and they have had a potent impact upon his philosophy – Dario Gradi, Dave Sexton, Ron Saunders and the great Brian Clough to name but a few. He therefore has a story or two to tell and I have heard many of them. Sometimes they made me laugh, other times made me think as I learned from the wisdom that they shared with him.

I have lived with him, played football with him, coached with him, watched him play and employed him, and I have enjoyed every single moment. He has much to share with the football fraternity and fittingly these experiences and anecdotes can now be enjoyed by others. Football is so much richer for having Kenny Swain's contribution. You will find the read of *A Game of Three Halves* enjoyable and inspirational.

Sir Kevin Satchwell
Headmaster, Thomas Telford School

Chapter 1

The Early Years

Growing up in post-war Liverpool wasn't very different from the 1930s, according to my parents, except for the obvious alterations from air raids. Not long after the last Luftwaffe attacks there were still bomb sites dotted across the landscape for local kids to enjoy, our own adventure playground. My dad remembers seeing incendiary bombs descending like confetti, swinging beneath parachutes, and how everyone was s*****g themselves until they landed somewhere else and the relief and sadness he felt because someone else was out of luck that night. Ironically the last air-raid on the city in 1942 destroyed a house which had been home to Alois Hitler, half-brother to Adolf, and birthplace of the Fuhrer's nephew, William Patrick Hitler.

I was born in Birkenhead but only lived there for 18 months before we moved to a flat in Kirkby. Noel Blake, who works alongside me with England Youth players, keeps giving me stick about my bragging rights as a Scouser but he calls himself a Brummie despite being born in Jamaica.

When my family moved across the Mersey before we settled in Kirkby we actually lived in the Anfield area, in Everton Valley. Our house was in a tenement block and we had the upstairs part of the building (posh people would call them maisonettes). Although very

A GAME OF THREE HALVES

young I remember our time living in the city and going to Major Lester County Primary School. My maternal grandmother lived nearby so we were back where my mum had grown up though my dad originally came from Everton.

They were happy days, carefree times with plenty of bombies, bomb sites, around to play on before the programme of urban regeneration swept them away. I recall regular trips to the shop to buy a briquette, a block of compressed coal dust. It would be wrapped in a sheet of newspaper to carry home where it would keep the fire going for a while.

Life for ordinary people in Liverpool was very similar to how it had been for generations and the humour was, as it always has been, and hopefully always will be, typical. Regularly I would be sent to the butcher's to ask if he had a sheep's head and being told if he says "yes" ask him if he can leave the legs on or, and the butcher was as sharp as any of his customers, when I would ask for some lean chops he would ask, "which way do you want them to lean?"

We stayed in the city until I was five or six years old, when we moved to the vast open spaces of Kirkby New Town and a brand new council flat. Kirkby actually became renowned worldwide a few years later as the setting of the 1960s television police drama *Z Cars*. It was really THE place to be then, a kind of boom town with all kinds of building work because the government seemed to be throwing money at new towns all over the place, particularly the North West.

We were in a good spot and, despite it being a flat, we had a back garden, with enough grass to satisfy modest football requirements. And if numbers swelled beyond the capacity of "Estadio Swain" we backed on to school playing fields where there was more than enough space for our regular 50-a-side games though there was no set number of participants. If there were ten of us we played five-a-side, if 30, 15-a-side and so on. If there was an odd number we played rush back goalie, basically a sweeper who could use his hands.

Those games provided a great early learning experience which doesn't seem to be the case nowadays when there are so many indoor distractions like computer games which mean children are less attracted to playing fields or parks. You had to learn on your feet, literally, and develop skills otherwise you never achieved any self-esteem and that was pretty much how it was playing football as a kid in Liverpool

THE EARLY YEARS

where football was such a passion. We couldn't get enough. We'd play on the playground, before school, after school, at lunchtime and in PE lessons. I remember one time doing a football proficiency test, along similar lines to the cycling proficiency test. And I failed. I was devastated because I always thought I could play football. All my mates passed, which made it worse but to add insult to an already bruised ego some of the numbskulls who never got anywhere near the school team passed. It was a salutary lesson for a young Kenny Swain to watch those lads receiving their proficiency certificates at school assembly. I never retook the test.

Though not Kirkby-born I was most certainly Kirkby-bred and that's where I adopted the Scouse religion that is football and where football embraced me. I was a football nut from a very early age and when I started to play organised football at under-12 level I actually kept a detailed record of matches played. I dutifully recorded all scorers, half-time scores, even opposing teams' colours, in a book. I kept that book going until I was about 15 when all my time seemed to be taken up playing football.

By the time I left junior school for Ruffwood Secondary I was already scoring goals and being noticed and that continued when I went into Year 11. Ruffwood was a very big school at the time. If it wasn't the biggest in the country it wasn't far off with a pupil population around 2,000. If the size of the school was a shock to me I was prepared for the sports facilities as my mother had already gone through the brochure we had been sent ahead of us going there. I couldn't believe it when I saw Ruffwood had 16 tennis courts and remember thinking who the heck needs 16 tennis courts, what's this tennis lark all about. There were four football fields and two rugby pitches but I never did get my head around why there were so many tennis courts and so few football pitches.

Ruffwood was a fantastic school and the head, Alan Barnes, was an inspirational leader leading a very good staff. They were our role models, our mentors, and it was a well disciplined school which nurtured the pupils to make the best of what they had. It was a huge school site and one of the earliest comprehensives with a swimming pool and a theatre as well. Never the less it was a daunting prospect for me to move to such a massive establishment but once I arrived each morning it was straight into a game of football on the playground before lessons.

A GAME OF THREE HALVES

Football was everything to me. As I entered senior school it was still the actual playing of the game that was important. It wasn't until I reached adolescence that the tribal aspect of football allegiance manifested although I had a pretty good grounding at home because my dad and most of the family were Evertonians. He was in his element in the early 1960s, because Everton were the team of the moment and were league champions in 1962/63. Such was the quality of the football they played the club was often referred to as "The School of Science". Liverpool Football Club under Bill Shankly was only just starting to emerge from the Goodison shadow and how Evertonians revelled in that.

I was in my early teens when I got my first season ticket for Everton and had the best of both worlds as I would play for Ruffwood on a Saturday morning and, every other week, dash off to Goodison Park. If the school team was at home I usually went home to get some dinner but if we were away I would go straight to the match. If that were the case it was a diversion via the chippy and digging the middle out of a bread roll and stuffing chips inside and eating on the hoof.

I was fortunate to play in a bloody good team at Ruffwood, which was renowned in the region for its football. My particular team was assisted in no small measure by the cock of the school, Ray Deegan. He was, let's say, an early developer. He was already shaving, and muscle-bound to boot. De rigueur, for a Saturday morning, was us turning up at the away venue and he'd boot the door down to the opposing team's dressing room and fearlessly declare to the enclosed gathering of quivering young footballers: "Come on, who's the f*****g cock of this school, get him in here." Ray must have believed his own reputation. We certainly did. He was menacing and intimidating, which was quite useful for us as he was our centre-half. On the field I was scoring goals quite regularly and like everyone was football daft. Then in 1966 football daftness hit new heights due to the World Cup matches being held in a city that was football mad anyway.

Kirkby Boys' team had a formidable record and were nationally renowned for quite a long time and I managed to get into the team, or I should more accurately state I got into the squad because I rarely got into the team itself. Two of my team-mates went on to trophy-laden careers at the highest level, Terry McDermott and Dennis Mortimer, and most of the regular first team became professional footballers,

THE EARLY YEARS

which illustrates what strength in depth Kirkby Boys had. We had some “extra” players and I was one of those extra players or, as they say these days, a squad player. We were a close-knit bunch and used to get together away from the football although football was still involved. We used to assemble at our flat on Saturday evenings for our regular Subbuteo events.

In our early teens Subbuteo was all the rage so we formed a league, HQ Casa Swain, where we played the games. We had two or three teams each and each game lasted five or six minutes, because fingers get tired too. Then there were the cup competitions so there was a certain amount of fixture congestion because there was never enough time. I bumped into Terry McDermott recently and the first thing he said to me was “do you remember the Subbuteo evenings, when we were kids?” Playing football and table football satisfied teenage appetites but there was the other aspect of football in a football mad city, the one that splits Liverpool into red and blue.

These days whenever I go to Goodison with my son Tom he’s fed up with me pointing out one particular turnstile and telling him over and over how I slept under that turnstile waiting to buy my FA Cup Final ticket in 1968, on a cold April night but that’s what we did. If you’d collected enough tokens throughout the season to qualify for a ticket all you had to do was make sure you were first in the queue when they went on sale. And the only way to do that was by kipping in a sleeping bag. I wasn’t the only one doing that but because I had missed the 1966 FA Cup Final I was determined it would never happen again. In 1966 my dad only had one ticket for the final and because he hadn’t seen Everton at Wembley he used it. He promised I would be seeing them too, very soon. I may have missed out on the 1966 FA Cup Final but in the same year I was mesmerised by the World Cup and enriched by the parts of it that reached Merseyside because Goodison Park, my ground, my club, staged some of the first round matches.

In those days our family summer holiday used to be in Talacre, North Wales. We would be picked up outside our flat by taxi, a huge Humber Sceptre. It would turn up to collect us and the taxi driver would keep the engine running in case, as he put it, “I get me wheels nicked”. Mum would herd us all out to the car, laden with suitcases, and off we’d go. But in 1966 my mother decided we would go

A GAME OF THREE HALVES

somewhere different so we headed for the exotic-sounding Bognor Regis, via Lime Street Station, which wasn't.

Normally such a change of holiday location would not have presented a problem but 1966 did because of the World Cup and matches being held in Liverpool. I had already attended one game, Brazil versus Bulgaria which most people remember for two things – the free kicks, typically Brazilian, and the start of the physical assault on Pele that marred the tournament.

That night had a major impact on me, a 14-year-old football fan. There was the quality of the Brazilian play and the disgraceful treatment of the best player in the world but there was something else that emerged from a warm summer evening in Liverpool. Walking down Gwladys Street I couldn't believe the colour brought to my city by the Brazil supporters. Yellow, green, white and blue, everywhere you looked, shirts, scarves, banners, all kinds of apparel. It was carnival time and the impact of diverse cultures which was the soul of Brazilian support has never left me and I guess it galvanised my inherent love of football. It isn't the football that is the attraction of a World Cup for me, it's the colour and the spirit of the people following the tournament, following their team, from all corners of the globe, from all kinds of ethnic groups but united by football. That's what the game can do.

But back to that night outside Goodison and one of those seminal events that stay with you for life. My mate Billy Doyle and I were walking along Gwladys Street and this fellah, a huge Brazilian, slapped me, playfully, on the head. I whirled around, resisting the temptation to smack him back, as you do in Liverpool when someone cuffs you about the head. But he beamed an ear to ear grin at us, asking how we were doing and then asked if we had any tickets. Thinking he was maybe looking for some I replied we were "okay thanks".

Naturally World Cup tickets were scarce but he put his hand in his pocket and said, "here, you have these" and flashed a pair of tickets in front of our faces. We couldn't believe it because he offered us two stand tickets whereas we had terrace tickets. It was the first time I ever went into the Goodison Road Stand. Being a novelty for me I couldn't believe how steep the steps up to the top balcony were and it took my breath away but it was fine by the time we settled in our seats to watch the game.

I also saw Brazil versus Hungary but just as I was really getting

THE EARLY YEARS

into that World Cup we had to set off for Bognor so I missed the later games at Goodison, although I did watch Portugal play North Korea on television when Pak Doo Ik and his mates almost caused THE World Cup upset of all time after taking a 3-0 lead, only for Eusebio to take charge and score four of Portugal's five goals in their amazing comeback.

Of course England were making their way towards a semi-final clash with Portugal and I remember worrying that if England did reach the final I might miss it because our holiday didn't end until the day of the final.

I couldn't believe the timing. We were travelling back home on 30th July, World Cup Final day, England v West Germany. The biggest game in English football history and all I could think of was being cooped up in a railway carriage for hours. What made it worse was having to get a train into London then the Underground to Euston to catch the train to Lime Street. I remember masses of people with their Union Jacks, straw boaters and bowler hats celebrating the imminent start to the game. And there was me s*****g myself as the Swain family trekked across London, wondering if I was ever going to get home in time to watch the final. But, as luck would have it, we did make it home just in time for kick-off and the rest is history.

It was a very good year because England winning the Jules Rimet Trophy, to give it the correct name, came after Everton won the FA Cup and Liverpool the Football League title so Liverpool, my city, was the centre of the universe. And the music at the time wasn't bad either. If football was an activity we engaged in at regular intervals the music of Liverpool was a constant. It seemed to blare out everywhere; from speakers above shop doorways, transistor radios, market stalls, fairgrounds and, of course, from the PA system at Goodison, and Anfield (not that I was a regular frequenter, only for Everton away). If you were fortunate enough to own a record player, a Dansette being the most popular, you were a bit special and a favoured member of your peer group, as was my sister Jennifer, because she had one.

The Liverpool sound conquered the world in those days and it was a twin force, synonymous with football, to hear the Beatles, Gerry and the Pacemakers, the Searchers, the Merseybeats et al, on our way to football, on our way back and at a stadium. We Liverpoolians are fiercely proud of our musical heritage. I know that music spread

A GAME OF THREE HALVES

nationwide and worldwide but it was a bit more special to us because it was part of our social fabric. We saw ordinary blokes like the Beatles, Billy J Kramer, Gerry Marsden, and they were just like us, working class kids who had grown up in the city and for me, in my early teens, those lads were only a few years older, showing what could be achieved with drive and ambition and, of course, talent.

Lily, who was to become my wife, actually worked for the official Beatles fan club which was a natural progression from when she and her mates, as did many others, used to miss lunch and run off to watch the lunchtime sessions the Beatles played at the Cavern.

Growing up in 1960s Liverpool was fantastic. As I entered my teens there was so much to do and as I grew older my interests widened. Going to the pub for an underage pint and noticing girls were added to the list of teenage leisure pursuits but it was still football, music, drinking and girls, in that order. But also in the process of growing up I became aware of an increasing level of expectation, not from me but from others, including teachers. What was I going to do with my life, what were my work prospects, what were we going to do for a living? And as those questions were bandied about the usual answer from most of my peers was, "I'm gonna go where you go", with a few "me too" confirmations thrown in for good measure. I had no idea where I was going to go. I applied for a couple of engineering apprenticeships because it was something I was quite good at so seemed the obvious thing to do and a few of my mates were similarly inclined so I decided I would get the necessary grades and go to college. However, if I didn't get a job or didn't like anything I was offered, I would stay on at school and do a couple of years in the sixth form. I needed some kind of familiarity because of the feelings of insecurity I had at that stage of my life and it was easier to stay at school among my social group.

Most of my friends decided upon college or university and naturally we sought advice from those teachers who had guided us through school. There was one particular member of staff who figured prominently, Dave Withey, who was the craft and technology teacher but he also took the football team. Dave was always a source of inspiration for all of us. He was very enthusiastic and used to regale us with tales from his college days and a lot of his pupils were inspired to follow in his footsteps and study design technology and PE.

It seemed the obvious course of action for me as I had already

THE EARLY YEARS

sampled the alternative of trying to pursue a career in football. When I was 15 I had a spell at Bolton Wanderers. This chap came round to our house and told us he had seen me play for Kirkby Boys and as they already had Jimmy Redfern and Chris Duffy on their books Bolton wanted me to join them. I used to travel up to Burnden Park twice a week, Tuesdays and Thursdays, by car, which the club sent to pick the three of us up. I think Bill Ridding was the manager at the time and a young Francis Lee was making all the headlines.

There were a lot of good players at Bolton then and I always felt a little overawed, insecure, and never really felt I was good enough. After a while they decided not to offer me an apprenticeship, as it was in those days, and that was upsetting, particularly for my father, who thought I was heading for a career in professional football. And yet, for my mother it had the opposite effect because she wanted me to go to college and have an education. That failed attempt to become a professional footballer reinforced my decision to stay on at school and do my O Levels and A Levels.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time in the sixth form, studying and playing football for the senior school team. There was a new kind of freedom for me once I knew I wasn't joining Bolton and that enhanced my enjoyment of the game. And because I felt less pressure I was able to concentrate on my examinations and achieved eight O Levels and two A Levels, technical drawing and design technology, exactly what I needed to get into college. The same college Dave Withey had attended, Shoreditch. Dave told me there were three or four colleges I could go to but as soon as he mentioned Shoreditch was the best that was good enough for me and a few others in our group.

We were lucky we had someone like that shaping our future, someone we respected enough to seek advice from. There are so many children out there who are insecure, unsure of what to do and with low self-esteem. They need the belief and confidence of elders, teachers, parents and relatives especially when they reach various crossroads in life.

Football was the epicentre of my teens and I was fortunate to fill a gap in my watching experience when Everton returned to Wembley for the FA Cup Final of 1968. After missing out on Wembley in 1966 I was determined to endure no repeat. Me and my mates camped overnight at Goodison when the tickets went on sale and there was no

A GAME OF THREE HALVES

happier bunch of teenage Evertonians on Merseyside when we left, mission accomplished, with those precious pieces of paper. I can't remember who organised the next phase, travel to London, but it was probably Billy Doyle.

We travelled from Lime Street on an overnight train. In those days it wasn't the two-hour journey it is now. I'd like to say it was an overnight sleeper but that would convey an inaccurate picture of luxury travel. It was overnight and we did get some sleep but that was it.

I remember when we met up at the station there were masses of Everton supporters milling around before piling into antique Pullman coaches. It was a pouring of humanity into long narrow boxes like sardines being crammed into a tin. For me it was a novelty because it was the first time I had been away from home overnight. I had travelled with Kirkby Boys but this was the first time I had flown solo although there were four of us, a first adventure without adult supervision.

We dived into the first available carriage and unlike modern trains the carriages were divided into compartments with a narrow corridor running down one side. Each compartment had two mattress-type benches which billowed clouds of dust whenever anyone sat down and above each of those seats was a luggage rack which looked more like a hammock because of the webbing. They were quite appropriate because with a long journey ahead of us they made for comfortable sleeping. We were fortunate because there was only the four of us in one compartment so it meant two sleeping on the seats and the others cosseted in the hammocks swinging above. Not that we got much sleep, we were too busy having a laugh and speculating on how many we would beat West Brom by.

We got into Euston around 6am so it was daylight and although we were all city lads the city of London was a new experience. Next up we had to negotiate the London Underground to Wembley but that early in the morning there didn't seem to be much point so we made our way to Hyde Park Corner but we ended up in Regent's Park. All that grass and we'd brought a ball with us so what else were we going to do on Cup Final day except play football? We were spotted by someone who took a picture of us kicking around, re-enacting how Everton were going to beat West Brom. We posed for

THE EARLY YEARS

a picture and a few hours later we were splashed across the early edition of the *London Evening Standard*. Naturally a few copies of that newspaper made their way to Liverpool later that day.

When we got to Wembley the whole place was a sea of blue but the game itself wasn't a classic although there were a couple of pieces of football history on the day. Ninety minutes ended scoreless so we had extra time and Albion sent Dennis Clarke on for John Kaye to become the first FA Cup Final substitute. Three minutes into the first period of extra time Jeff Astle broke Everton hearts when he scored, with his weaker left foot, to snatch the trophy to add his name to the select band of players who have scored in every round of the FA Cup.

Of course that mattered little to the Everton players and fans who were totally deflated. I'm not ashamed to admit we were in tears, at least I know I was. It had been such a lovely day and for it to end as it had was totally devastating. It emphasised what football was all about, expectation is a killer. It was a wake-up call of sorts because I had played for a few years fairly successfully, without too much disappointment, and the team I followed was successful so that Cup Final defeat was immense. It was perhaps my first experience of the impact expectation can have when it is unrealised. It was my first taste of a factor that would occur many times during my playing career and something which has been integral to my work with England Youth players over recent years.

Defeat is part and parcel of sport and it's how you cope with it that moulds character. How you bounce back from reversals that inevitably crop up, particularly in football, is perhaps the greatest determinant of how you deal with life. It has been the evolution of how I have managed disappointment and the failure to realise expectation that has shaped the way I have pursued my career, as a player and as a coach. Consequently that has moulded how I approach and deal with expectation surrounding our England youngsters.

When the boys get really down I introduce a reality check. I tell them if they want to be involved in football they have to get used to setbacks. I emphasise the need to realise that what they see on the telly, edited highlights, all the good bits, isn't the reality of the game. There are more disappointments and dashed dreams in football than anything else but there is a positive side. When they do have success those moments are so sweet and intoxicating they need to be savoured because they are fleeting and infrequent.

A GAME OF THREE HALVES

You quickly realise what you have done that day, enjoying one precise moment in time which cannot last. That is why it's so important to live for that moment because, I'm sorry, the next day it is history. However wonderful the achievement, however meritorious an entry on a CV, because that's what the motivation is, getting successes, it's also important to state that success isn't always about winners. However, I feel, and what I try to impart with England is this, it's all about achievement. It is not just about winning, it cannot be, because in any contest, match, competition or whatever, there can only be one winner but the other side of that equation is the opponent or the opposition. They may be the loser but there is achievement in getting to the stage where they have a chance to be a winner but with that comes the certainty that there will also be a loser. But that must not diminish the positivity of achievement.

One of my managers at the Football Association is Ray Clemence and when his CV is considered he has got a long list of success from his career; trophies, winners' medals and caps, and when you look at people like Ryan Giggs and Paul Scholes plus a myriad others in the game you have to think that they are just the tip of the iceberg. The vast majority are achieving all the time and not necessarily winning and it's not just individuals. When clubs such as Watford climb through the divisions and reach the Premier League and don't quite survive and drop down again but start to consolidate they are actually building the foundation of a solid football club. I quote Watford but there are others I could name like Stoke City. I admire Tony Pulis and Peter Coates for what they have done there and how they maintain the club's progression, and the season after reaching the FA Cup Final they evolved even further by taking the club up another rung on the ladder of achievement and into Europe. But with that achievement comes the burden of expectation and the relevance of that was my first encounter with expectation in the 1968 FA Cup Final. Just six weeks prior to the final Everton smashed West Brom away 6-2. Alan Ball netted four so naturally my expectation at Wembley was more of the same. Although I don't remember much from the game itself I do remember an incident after the match which summed up for me, as a 16-year-old fan and throughout my life in football, the synergy of expectation and achievement.

After the Everton team had climbed the 39 steps to collect their

THE EARLY YEARS

losers' medals the crowd was thinning out as fans made their way home. We hung back so we could savour every moment because we did not know when we might be back for another FA Cup Final. As the Everton players conducted their lap of honour, applauding us as we applauded them, I witnessed Alan Ball, the player I idolised, throw something on to the pitch. On the very turf where he had won the World Cup less than two years earlier I am convinced I saw Alan Ball throw away his FA Cup medal and I wasn't the only one. I think he was such a winner he didn't want a symbol of what he obviously regarded as a reward for losing. Looking back on what I have just written something struck me, more than four decades on, which I never realised before. I referred to the Everton medals as "losers' medals", which is exactly what they were, but they were also runners-up medals. I guess my psychology, and the mindset I utilised as a professional footballer, saw my team as losers, they had lost the Cup Final. It is only on reflection I amended my definition to FA Cup runners-up. Not that bad eh?

What I am trying to say is that you can make a positive out of a negative situation, i.e. losing a contest by regarding participation as an achievement even if it doesn't seem as salubrious an achievement as winning. I suppose the Everton players, or any players on a losing team in a final or a championship, don't regard it as being runners-up, they would regard it as being losers. Professional footballers see such results in black and white terms. You are either a winner or a loser and on reflection I experienced a perfect illustration of achievement against expectation with Nottingham Forest in 1983/84.

Just a few years after back-to-back European Cup wins and a Super Cup triumph a club at which expectation had sky-rocketed sold players who had achieved most of that success but still finished third, behind Liverpool and Southampton. I thought it was a fantastic achievement and so did Cloughie given that he had sold Peter Shilton, Trevor Francis, Viv Anderson and also sold, and bought back, Garry Birtles. Then he assembled a side comprising a few old heads like myself, Ian Bowyer and Paul Hart, a few middle-term players like Birtles, Bryn Gunn and Hans van Breukelen and a sprinkling of talented young players coming through like Peter Davenport, Chris Fairclough, Steve Hodge, Colin Walsh and young Nigel. To finish third with a new team, so quickly, was a hell of an achievement, certainly for me to be chasing a league championship that late in my career. That's why I was so appreciative

A GAME OF THREE HALVES

of the opportunity after winning the title with Villa. To view what we did as an achievement and that appreciation began evolving way back in 1968 when a bunch of teenage Everton fans made the long journey back to Liverpool.

We got back to Lime Street at 11.30pm and were roused from our slumber by shouts and whistles. Good job too because we were that exhausted if we hadn't been woken we would have ended up in Carlisle because the train was just about to pull out having disgorged its complement of disappointed Evertonians. Almost certainly I was as disappointed as the rest but in hindsight it was a seminal moment for me as I started to realise that you could regard participation in something as an achievement and even if you didn't win the prize, at least you were part of the raffle. It was the start of an appreciation that continues to this day and it was something I took into every game I played, from Ruffwood School through to RSC Anderlecht, and beyond.