



1982

BRAZIL

The Glorious Failure



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1

Awakening

‘That Éder can kick a ball around corners.’

– Mick Channon

TO BE able to fully tell this story, it is important to contextualise the time and era in which this Brazilian side played. Not only from the perspective of Brazil’s history and their relationship with football, but also from the place that the sport occupied in global society by 1982. Perhaps just as important is the context, which ultimately led to the personally momentous, if not foolhardy decision to write this book. Reflecting on that wonderful, carefree summer of 1982 it would appear that I was the perfect age and the perfect receptacle to absorb a month-long fiesta of football. I would like to think that Telê Santana was thinking of someone just like me when he implored the Seleção to ‘go and entertain the world’.

When I was only three months old, my mum, dad, elder sister and I relocated to Scarborough. We moved to 158 Overdale, a newly built semi-detached house on the Eastfield estate, about five miles outside of the popular amusement

arcade-laden North Bay. Scarborough was a town whose heyday had been during the Victorian era, when seaside towns had been the destination of choice for those working in the factories, helping to perpetuate the Industrial Revolution and with it extend the might of the British Empire. Day visits to inhale the clean coastal air, with the women daring to expose their ankles while paddling on the shoreline, were all long-forgotten images for a town that by the early 1970s was well past its grandeur.

The Eastfield estate was a large, sprawling amalgamation of houses, of varying styles and costs. Council houses and privately owned homes mixed incongruently with each other with no demarcation. Long streets, with multiple cul-de-sacs, were attached like capillaries to suburban arteries. Overdale was one such artery and ran for three-quarters of a mile. Number 158 sat roughly in the middle, directly opposite a small capillary called Overdale Gardens. The house was a regular three-bedroomed semi-detached house; front garden, back garden and a drive that ran adjacent to the front garden as well as along the entire side of the house. Two yellow, waist-high iron gates level with the front of the house divided the drive. A small, white fence formed a boundary between our drive and next door's drive. These may seem inconsequential details when writing about the exploits of Zico, Sócrates and Falcão, but this home and its physical location provided the perfect environment for a child of the 1970s to grow up and those yellow gates made for a perfect goal.

What made this location even more of a perfect environment was its location with respect to local primary schools. Our house was six doors down from St George's Catholic Primary School. The back garden backed on to the playing field of the aforementioned Overdale County Primary School. Bear with me while I try to explain the respective locations of both schools and their amalgamated playing fields; again the location is an

important contextualised part of the story and motivation for writing this book.

So, imagine you are looking down on a large patch of grass, roughly equivalent to the size of eight football pitches. Along the top of the square is a boundary made up of a variety of garden fences, of which number 158 sat approximately two-thirds along to the right. Top-right corner was the St George's main building and a small, fenced-off playground. The bottom-left corner was occupied by Overdale County Primary School with three additional prefabricated classrooms. The playground sat in the centre of a two-storey U-shaped building and extended out from the school straight up towards the houses. The entire left-hand side of the square was a similar collection of back garden fences which belonged to Hawthorn Avenue (part of that epic sprint home). The rest was pure grass; an emerald canvas upon which I spent more time growing up than I ever did inside the four walls of number 158. To us it was just the back field.

I have two more final landmarks to note before we leave this overhead scene. There were three football pitches marked out on the remaining grass. Two of them were adjacent to each other and ran from top to bottom of the square. One belonged to St George's and one belonged to Overdale. The final pitch was at the bottom of the square, running from left to right, into the bottom-right corner. The pitch that belonged to St George's was about 20 yards from our back garden fence. If you stepped out of the back door, you put your foot on the drive. Turn left and walk straight into the back garden, past the shed, over the fence, which was the original wood and wire structure that was put up with the house. Climb over it and there you were in what seemed like acres of grass and between the white wooden goalposts.

The goalposts were essentially three long planks, nailed together and cemented into the ground. No nets, but those

three white pieces of wood afforded me more joy, exhilaration, fun, memories and friendships than any other place on Earth. It is worth noting here that in my mind I would have put a football through those white sticks tens of thousands of times over the years, playing under the assumed identity of whichever player had crossed my conscious at the time. Kevin Keegan scored a few, Kenny Dalglish was prolific for a short period of time, as was Glenn Hoddle. I would even go so far as to say Paul Mariner got a couple. I can say for certain that Zico scored an awful lot of goals in the early-to-mid-1980s on the back field.

The second landmark sat approximately at the halfway point of the top of the square, equivalent to about four doors down from our house. Nailed to the back fence was a grey sign, similar in design to a 'for sale' sign. In large white writing were the words 'No Trespassing'. That sign stood there in the periphery of my vision for 15 years, acting as a constant reminder that as perfect as this space was, I should never have been there. It also gave additional meaning to the weekly reciting of the *Lord's Prayer* in assembly, 'Forgive us our trespasses.' I was permanently asking for forgiveness.

Overdale Primary School employed a caretaker who lived on site. His name was Mr Johnson, he was aged in his mid-to-late 50s I would say, he sported the obligatory moustache of the time and always seemed to be in a grey overall jacket that only caretakers ever seemed to wear. One of his roles was to ensure that no one was playing on the school field outside of school hours, or trespassing, if you will. We always played in the goal closest to my house, which luckily was furthest away from the prying eyes of Mr Johnson. However, we had devised a brilliant plan in our eyes, although it was probably quite farcical to witness.

'Johnno' was the watchword as soon as anyone saw the caretaker outside. Instantly we would all lay down flat,

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throwing ourselves to the floor where we stood, trying to increase the speed that gravity would take us. To us it was genius; there was no way he could see us from that distance. We would wait until he disappeared and up we sprang, like jack-in-the-boxes, ready to continue the game. There was an unwritten rule that you couldn't commando crawl yourself in to a better position if you were out of position or had been beaten by a player prior to the impromptu pause in play. What didn't ever occur to us, in fact it has only hit me now while writing this, is the fact that he probably always saw us, casually looking out of the window of the school's second storey while carrying out his caretaking duties.

I would like to think that he only came out to watch us all hit the floor. I would like to think that he was actually quite mischievous and would do it multiple times just to entertain himself by watching children hit the floor at speed, before springing back up again, all with the perfect timing of an Olympic synchronised swimming team. I would like to think that there was a Mrs Johnson and he would say to her, 'I'm just popping out to wreck those kids' game of football for a bit. I won't be long.'

I can't actually remember where my love of football came from growing up. I do know that I cannot remember a time when I didn't love it, or want to watch and play it. My mum brings out the same prophetic statement when we discuss my childhood, 'The amount of kicking that you did when I was carrying you, I knew you would want to play football.' The truth is I genuinely cannot remember a time when the game wasn't important or nestling in my conscious. Square photos with a white border, indicative of the time, often show me with a horrific home haircut and homemade clothes, but also a reference to football. Pictures of me aged three or four years old often have a ball somewhere in the foreground or background or at my feet.

This does not, however, identify who the patriarchal influence was on my love affair with the beautiful game. My father left when I was approximately three years old and despite his inconsistent visits to the house, he never played football with me on the back field. The relationship with my father was strained although in my teenage years we arguably bonded a little more over the game. In my formative years there is not a hint of recollection on my part of us sharing enjoyment through football. He didn't support a team, he didn't play the game as a young man, he didn't watch it on the television, and he certainly never took me to a match. As discussed in the introduction, my mum hated the game and still does, though I have always appreciated that feigned interest and her undying support of me ignoring that grey omnipresent 'No Trespassing' sign.

So with an absent father and a mother who was as supportive as she was disinterested in football, the next immediate person to look to was my older sister. A sister who had helped me to learn my alphabet and would teach me to read, all admirable activities and ones for which I am grateful and continue to use to this very day. Arguably she provided the very skills I am using to communicate this to you at this very moment, but football? No. My sister was very much a rebel without a cause, dying her hair as often as she dyed her clothes. Not to mention the absolute monstrosity of a bedroom that was carpeted in clothes and wet towels. I had watched her progress though the ABBA phase to the Bay City Rollers phase to the New Romantic phase and everything in between.

Other than being able to read and write, I am also grateful to her for indoctrinating me into the music of the late 1970s and early 1980s, mainly through the osmosis of sound through our bedroom walls. Even now I find myself hearing a song and the lyrics are instantly recalled without ever having sat and purposefully listened to it. 'Love Action' by The Human

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League is a case in point. However, that was not enough to stop the weekly arguments that ensued when she wanted to tape the top 40 on a Sunday evening, which cruelly clashed with *Match of the Day* for a period of time in the early 1980s. I clearly got the better of the deal brokered by our mum. I had *Match of the Day* with sound one week; my sister got the top 40 the following week. I just had to watch the football highlights with no sound during that week, which was a compromise I was more than happy to make.

Finally I look to my granddad, my mum's father. Here is perhaps the one family figure who did take a real interest in football and my love of the game. He lived in Brixham, approximately 350 miles away. He would only visit once, maybe twice a year, but when he did I always felt like I was the centre of his attention. He was an Ipswich Town fan and England fan, but cricket was his real passion. An umpire at his local cricket club and a very good hockey player for the Royal Navy, sport was a real passion in his life. All my childhood memories of him are associated with sport and when he came to stay, football was always central to our time together. He watched me play for the school team; he would buy me stickers for whichever Panini album I was collecting. He bought me numerous footballs, which was a key currency in the early 1980s and especially as I had direct access to the back field and the nearby goalposts.

However, the best, most eagerly anticipated and memorable activity was the annual purchase of my football boots. The ritual would see us catch the number 102 bus into town, walk down to Huntress Row and into Sydenhams sports shop. The wall behind the counter was where all the boots were kept. To me it was the most beautiful shop display. The football boots stood on top of boxes so that their profile could be shown to maximum effect. I would take as long as I could over choosing them, I wanted to try them all on and my granddad was

patience personified, never rushing me, in fact encouraging me to take my time.

I'm not ashamed to say that I usually chose them based on how the studs and the sole looked. I wanted extravagant patterns underneath. I was always about how things looked, the flair players, the skills, the extravagant tricks, the spontaneous attempt on goal. I thought that if your boots had a sense of style then it gave you the confidence to play like the *fantasistas*. I always asked for metal studs if they didn't come with them and extra long laces so that I could wrap them underneath my boots before tying them. When finally I couldn't prolong the inevitable and it was time to pay I would carry the boots home and display them in whichever room I was in, including the chest of drawers by my bed, so they were the last thing I saw before going to sleep and the first thing I saw when I woke up.

The establishment of the fact that I lacked a permanent footballing influence makes the rest of this contextualisation more understandable. With a football pitch and goalposts literally at the bottom of my garden, permanent ownership of a football and a single parent who actively encouraged me to play out, I had a triumvirate that facilitated my growing intense relationship with the game. A relationship that was self-directed and free from any unwanted external influence. I created the relationship that I wanted.

The first game I can remember watching from start to finish is the 1978 FA Cup Final between Arsenal and Ipswich Town. My granddad's team had made the final and I can clearly remember celebrating when Roger Osborne scored the winning goal. I remember my mum had bought me some crisps and lemonade for me to enjoy while the match was on. It was a rarity experienced only at Christmas, but what became an FA Cup Final tradition subsequently developed into a biannual treat. The strange part about the developing FA Cup Final tradition was my reluctance to invite any of my friends to it.

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It was probably arrogance on my part, an unjust perception that they wouldn't be as focused or as dedicated to the cause as me. They might want to talk to me about something other than the game, or heaven forbid they might ask if we could do something else. It was just better for all concerned if I watched it by myself and then met up afterwards in the back field to re-enact key moments from luminaries such as Alan Sunderland, Trevor Brooking, Ricky Villa, Bryan Robson, Andy Gray, Norman Whiteside and Gary Lineker. Theirs were only fleeting appearances, selected for maybe one or two days, before being dropped for the ever reliable Keegan, Hoddle, Dalglish or Zico.

Another early memory is the appalling decision by my mum to send me to bed at half-time of the 1978 European Cup Final. It was an incredulous moment and one that I had hoped to get away with, though I don't know how. I was emphatically dismissed from the lounge by my mum with all the authority of Charles Corver, who was officiating the Liverpool versus Club Brugge showpiece at Wembley that night; a man who would reach new heights of notoriety four years later at the 1982 World Cup when he refused to even award a free kick to France following Harald Schumacher's aggravated assault on Patrick Battiston in the semi-final. Sulkily I left the lounge for an early bath, though it was probably just a wash and brush of the teeth, and so had to wait until Brian Clough's Nottingham Forest defeated Malmö FF in 1979 to watch my first full European Cup Final. It probably had something to do with the fact that the 1978 final was on 10 May, which is my mum's birthday.

So with the viewing of football arranged at every opportunity and subsequent late nights negotiated along with clashes between the chart run-down and the weekly football highlights programme, I was in a good place for watching football. However, 'What team do you support?' was a question I was frequently asked growing up. When you were

as obsessed with football as I was, I suppose it was a natural question to ask. Scarborough Football Club was one of those sides that had a decent pedigree at non-league level, as FA Trophy winners in 1973, 1976 and 1977 alongside a runners-up position in 1975. By the end of the 1970s Scarborough had been selected to be part of the Alliance Premier League, the National League in today's vernacular. As I had no one to take me, being a committed supporter of my local team was never really an option.

I'm afraid to say I never supported a team growing up and even to this day I still don't. My answer is met with the same incredulity today as it was 40 years ago. I just loved the game too much. Football on the television was such a rarity that I just wanted to immerse myself in any match that I could. For me it was and always has been about the joy; watching outstanding players in outstanding teams. Some argue that it has meant I have missed out on the almost weekly extreme highs and extreme lows that can come with supporting a team. They also say that I miss out on being a member of a brotherhood that binds strangers to each other potentially from every corner of the globe. But I counter that with the fact I have always been free from the tribalistic, blinkered obsession that can, at times, be a default in the make-up of some fans. Please note I am fully aware that this perspective and stance will be abhorrent to some supporters. There are times when I sit and wonder what I am missing out on with regards to those intense weekly emotions and those occasional football moments that must surely time stamp a person's life.

This self-entitled freedom to enjoy all football has, however, shaped the way I see the game and afforded me the ability to see the beauty in it at every opportunity. Being able to watch as a neutral has developed my appreciation of football and what it can offer. For me I was all about the flair players and the teams that entertained. The Liverpool side of the late 1970s and early

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1980s were always highly anticipated. Iconic performances in cup finals could be absorbed, treasured and appreciated for their individual brilliance, such as Ricky Villa's second goal in the 1981 FA Cup Final replay and Steve MacKenzie's brilliant opener in the same game. I could fully celebrate and watch in awe as the neutral observer who was just desperate for the spectacular to wash over him.

This is why the 1982 Brazilian World Cup side had such a literal life-changing impact on me. My appreciation of how the game was played and who were the best players I had seen pre-España '82 and post-España '82 were very different. Following Brazil's opening tie against the USSR on 14 June, my perspective of what was possible on a football pitch changed. In my eyes, the aesthetic potential of the game had been completely transformed: the colours, the sound, the heat radiating through the television screen, the skill, the creativity, the imagination and the goals. Oh, and those two goals by Sócrates and Éder. From that moment on I had a new benchmark with which to compare any side in any era. I'm sure everyone who hopefully reads this book will have their own version of this team and I would like to think that for some of you, it will be Telé Santana's side.

As mentioned earlier, the greatest tribute I could pay that side at the time was to adopt one of their names in the playground on the Tuesday morning, the day after that opener against the USSR. Morning playtime at Overdale County Primary was about 10.30am, and the class prior would be spent doing whatever the lesson at that time was. However, for the football-mad boys in the class, that was the time to pick who you were going to be in the playtime matches for the day.

'Bagsy I'm Bryan Robson.' Bagsy was just a colloquialism used as a prefix to your choice of player and was used to validate your choice. 'Bagsy Keegan,' 'bagsy Hoddle,' 'bagsy Whiteside,' 'bagsy Souness.' No player was off limits and there was an

unwritten hierarchy in being able to choose. The best players in the school team usually chose first and the players of the moment were snapped up early. 'Bagsy Zico' my choice was in. It may have been Sócrates and Éder who scored the goals on that Monday evening, but to me Zico was the man who caught my attention, perpetual motion and all the tricks. From that moment on for the rest of my time at primary school, I was Zico. Only occasionally was he dropped because of sporadic outrageous performances by others, but he was always quickly reinstated.

So, the final component of this contextualisation is the detailed recollection of semi-structured football in the back field as this is really where my adoration of football was truly founded. In the summer I would be home from school, have tea and then I would be out. Ball under the arm, thrown over the fence and then climb over. Sometimes there would be people already in there waiting or kicking about a ball that they had brought. It was almost an acknowledged responsibility or perhaps a conferred deference that I should bring the football because my house backed on to the pitch.

The football was usually a traditional black-and-white, pentagon-styled affair. The coloured veneer patches would start to peel off if it was constantly played with on wet grass. 'Never bounce it on the concrete,' was a mantra we all threw at each other. 'It will scuff the ball.' The dedication with which the action and subsequent consequence was adhered to was right up there with, 'Don't swallow your chewing gum, it will wrap around your lungs and you'll die.' The nightmare scenario was when the stitching started to split and you would catch a glimpse of that dreaded orange bladder winking at you like the eye of Sauron. You knew there and then that the football was on its way out. Eventually it would bleb and burst, which could be an absolute game-wrecker if there was no one else out with a spare football.

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I was very lucky in that my mum always seemed to find money when I needed a new football; I was never frivolous or mistreating of any of mine. They were a currency which afforded me entry into every game in the back field. I also kept one of those fly-away Striker balls in the shed, just in case of emergencies. They were the ones that were usually sold on the seafront in a net for £1 and when you kicked them hard would move in four different directions. They were also impossible to kick against the wind. I have to say that even now I have never owned an Adidas Tango football. I assume this was due to cost or difficulty in sourcing, but if I have one unfulfilled dream from that time, it was to play as Zico with an official España World Cup Tango football in the back field.

The games were always semi-structured; a hard-core eight to ten of us, all living within close proximity of each other, all of us attending either St George's or Overdale primary schools. Not for us the intense local rivalry. We were young but aware enough to know that the quality of the games lay in the numbers involved. It would have been easy to have separate games or unfair teams, but the collective was stronger than the potential local derby mentality. Jason McAleese, Glen Fordyce, Adrian Atkinson, Robert Braund, Simon Glave, Adrian and Phil Wignell, John Bennett, David Booth, Scott Hallas and Zico. These were the hardcore few. Any number, or combination of, would always be involved in a game.

If it was an even number higher than four, we played a regular game; if we had an odd number we played in one goal and then had even sides. Sometimes we played 'Wembley', another colloquialism for the one goal and you're through format. If there were just two of us it would be shooting practice or a game of crossbar. If it was just me, then it was free kick practice. When you bear the name of Zico, the responsibility of being a dead-ball specialist was one I took very seriously.

The added bonus of living about 20 yards from the goalmouth meant I could stay out until it was dark. My mum knew exactly where I was. If she was participating in her favourite pastime of gardening then I imagine she could hear and see me. Being the last one to be called in was crucial, especially when you were the owner of the football.

If there was to be one contentious and fractious issue between my mum and I in this period of our lives, then it was the persistent grass stains I would come home with. I always went out with my mum's words ringing in my ears, 'Stay on your feet.' At times she could sound like an accidental managerial expert. I always went out with the best of intentions, but if there was a slide tackle to be made or an outrageous scissor-kick to be attempted, I just couldn't resist.

By 1982 I was a boy already obsessed with football, playing the game at every waking opportunity. I wasn't tied down by an obsessive blinkered attachment to a team. The game filled my every waking thought. I had access to a pitch and goals – despite that incessant 'No Trespassing' sign. I had freedom to leave the house and stay out until it was dark; I had relatively unrestricted access to the television and the sporadic sprinkling of televised football.

England as a nation though was not in a good place in 1982. At war with Argentina over the Falkland Islands, unemployment at a record high with over three million out of work; football hooliganism was at its peak, train drivers were on strike and there were the beginnings of discontent among the coal mining industry. However, for me the summer of 1982 was about as perfect as it got.

I was too young to remember anything but images from the 1978 World Cup in Argentina, but I was more than ready for España '82 to start. I didn't need a constant patriarchal companion. I was happy watching on my own. I watched as many games as the BBC and ITV would show. I was so excited

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to watch previously unheard of names and unrecognisable faces fill the television screen. I hung off every word, every statistic and every outlandish lyric spat out by the commentators, co-commentators and pundits back in the studio.

So that was me going into the tournament, a young football-obsessed boy living in a seaside town in England. Telé Santana's team were the perfect ones to watch at the perfect moment in my life. I couldn't have been more impressionable and more receptive to a brand of football that was destined to enthral football fans around the world, but with an attitude that would ultimately break the hearts of those same fans. It didn't stop me trying to kick a ball around a corner or embark on an obsessive search for sticker number 375 for my *ESPAÑA '82 World Cup* Panini sticker album, but how did this joyful, flamboyant side arrive at the same point as me?