

Praise for Jeff Goulding's Books

Red Odyssey: Liverpool FC 1892–2017

'This eminently readable and beguiling addition to the Liverpool FC story should adorn every Red's bookshelf.'

Racing Post

'Celebrates the club's incredible journey, recounting tales and memories that tell of friendships, rivalries and of course trophies. He brings to life this pre-war era using his extensive knowledge of the club's history tallied with reports in local media and club folklore. Provides a complete picture of Liverpool's colourful history. Here's looking forward to *Red Odyssey* part two.'

It's Round and It's White

'A history of Liverpool, but one written in an affectionate way, and from a personal perspective. Particularly informative on the pre-Bill Shankly years, which are much less well documented than the subsequent decades.'

Backpass Magazine

We Conquered All of Europe: Red Odyssey II

'*We Conquered All of Europe* brings things back to life. Although you know the ending you will still get that funny feeling as you go through this account of what was a wonderful season and how the past four years under Jürgen and company have seen Liverpool Football Club rise again.'

Red All Over the Land

'Excellent as always. I'd highly recommend it.'

Dave Usher, *The Liverpool Way*

'*We Conquered All of Europe* provides a unique first-hand view from around the stands, from not only Jeff but a plethora of supporters who you discover each find varying degrees of significance in moments which have transpired over the last four years. It's a journey from the stands, grounded in emotion – with a touch of humour – which is then delicately intertwined with statements from the media and Klopp at the time, with views from former players Jamie Carragher, Jimmy Case and John Barnes also adding another valuable perspective. And as a result, I found myself transported into the exact moment of time each chapter homed in on; whether that be stood in Anfield for the spine-tingling rendition of "You'll Never Walk Alone" against Borussia Dortmund or the ferocious Anfield atmosphere that awaited Man City in Europe.'

This is Anfield

Stanley Park Story: Life, Love and the Merseyside Derby

‘Crossing football fact with the fictional is an art form, which few authors can pull off. A genre popularised by Nick Hornby’s iconic *Fever Pitch* and continued adeptly by *Mr Shankly’s Photograph*, *The Damned United* and *Red or Dead*, Jeff Goulding’s brilliant *Stanley Park Story* is the modern benchmark and successor to the football faction greats.’

These Football Times Lob Podcast

‘The author’s storytelling is simply brilliant. A wonderful knack of informing the reader whilst entertaining them at the same time. A respected expert in the knowledge of the history of Liverpool FC and the social dynamics of the city, Goulding is well versed to tell this football story of sporting rivalry.’

Fields of Anfield Road

‘An insight into the social and cultural history that created one of the game’s most passionate rivalries, the book offers perspective from both those who sit on the Kop and those who frequent the Gwladys Street.’

Official Liverpool FC Magazine

‘Jeff Goulding makes it the real thing as he brings to life a genuine rivalry which exists in households and families throughout Liverpool. Captures the humour of the best of times and the darker mood of the not so good social times and of life in general. Encapsulates life on Merseyside in the way only few have previously done.’

Red All Over the Land

‘*Stanley Park Story* is a history lesson with a heart; a generational saga set against the backdrop of 50 years of Merseyside footballing rivalry telling the story of lives that all of us from the area will find familiar.

Highly recommended.’

Ian Salmon, playwright, and author

‘Brilliant.’

This Is Anfield

‘Full-on Merseyside football.’

David Maddock, *Daily Mirror*

‘A rich tapestry. Evocative and always entertaining. A hugely engaging novel, it is also a documentary of the times in which the story takes place. So rich is the setting that on finishing the book, I almost wished it had an index. Highly recommended.’

Public Reading Rooms

‘Jeff Goulding has achieved something unexpected and remarkable with both the style and content of this book, which more than deserves its place among the pantheon of great books about football in Liverpool.’

Mike Morris, co-director, Writing on the Wall

J E F F G O U L D I N G



Champions

Under Lockdown

Red Odyssey III

Jürgen and The Holy Grail



Champions

Under Lockdown

Red Odyssey III
Jürgen and the Holy Grail

J E F F G O U L D I N G



Contents

Acknowledgements11
Foreword13
Introduction18
Prelude to Battle23
Liverpool FC: June 2019–August 2019	
Once More unto the Breach51
Liverpool FC: August–November 2019	
The World is Not Enough93
Liverpool FC: November 2019–January 2020	
A Team for the Ages but a Storm is Coming.	135
Liverpool FC February–March 2020	
Anfield Under Lockdown	167
Liverpool FC: March–June 2020	
Return of the Kings.	221
Liverpool FC: June–July 2020	
The Sweet Silver Song of a Lark280
<i>Coming Soon.</i>287

PRELUDE TO BATTLE

Liverpool FC: June 2019–August 2019

The Phoney War: A Mixed Bag of ‘Friendlies’ but a ‘Little Diamond’ Sparkles

Our moods could not have been better. We bombarded social media with memes, variously showing Jürgen Klopp counting to six on his fingers, while perched precariously on the top deck of an open-topped bus, or of a gleaming European Cup with the number six next to it, on top of it or under it. The number six featured heavily in our conversations with everyone to be fair.

Many of us celebrated one-day, one-week, and one-month anniversaries. We were, as predicted, unbearable. Why shouldn't we be. Liverpool were champions of Europe; we had missed out on the Premier League by the slimmest of margins and we were convinced we could go one better in the forthcoming season. But, if we didn't, we could always just remind everyone that we won it six times, in Madrid.

This was the phoney war. A period of basking in past glory and rubbing your rivals' noses in it. At times like this, it's best to make the most of it. After all, who knows what's round the corner. And, to be fair, there are few better at milking success than Liverpool fans. We have proudly earned our 'unbearable' tag.

Throughout June and July, the sun shone, Britain was experiencing a heatwave with temperatures eventually reaching a record 38.7°C. TV audiences in their millions watched the Women's World Cup, with almost 12 million taking in England's 2-1 defeat to the USA in the semi-final. Meanwhile, Brexit rumbled on, and we all discovered that 'proroguing parliament' was a thing governments did when they didn't fancy being scrutinised.

There was also tension in the Middle East as Iran seized a British tanker, while Jeremy Hunt warned of 'severe consequences', and Boris Johnson became prime minister by winning the Conservative Party's leadership contest. The close-season simply flew by.

Before we knew it, pre-season games were upon us. Liverpool were scheduled to kick-off their preparations for 2019/20 with a visit to Tranmere Rovers. Liverpool dispensed with them with ease, winning 6-0. Then came a trip to Valley Parade and a 3-1 victory over Bradford City.

These were comfortable run-outs as players shook off the rust of the summer and youngsters like Rhian Brewster, Curtis Jones and Bobby Duncan did their best to convince Klopp and everyone else that they could break into one of the greatest Liverpool sides in the club's history. This too was something of a phoney war, and we all knew bigger challenges lay ahead.

A few days after the routing of Tranmere and Bradford, Liverpool would fly out to America and a three-game tour in which they would face much sterner tests. Lying in wait were Borussia Dortmund, Sevilla and Sporting Lisbon.

The Reds faced Klopp's old side, Dortmund, on 19 July at the Notre Dame Stadium. The ground holds some 81,000 spectators, but a mixture of ticket prices and perhaps the continuing second-class status of 'soccer' in the United States meant it would only be half full.

Liverpool were missing several players, including striker Mo Salah. Virgil van Dijk and Jordan Henderson didn't appear until the hour mark and once more the youngsters were given a run. The sun was shining, and it was only pre-season after all. Nobody reads too much into pre-season, do they?

Well Klopp did. The boss wasn't too keen on the pitch. He told the waiting media at a routine press call after the game, 'You want to talk to me about the pitch? What do you think? Difficult because it's not a soccer pitch. They put grass on it. Everybody tries his best, but in the end you saw these two teams can play much better football. It's difficult when the ball is not rolling. That's an important part of the game – that the ball rolls.'

Liverpool had lost 3-2. That didn't stop the supporters making the most of their chance to see the Reds up close and personal though.

The Indy, a supplement of *America Today*, observed, 'Pageantry in the red-bathed stands was on display as a heavily pro-Liverpool crowd sang along to the club's traditional "You'll Never Walk Alone" and "Allez, Allez, Allez" from the outset.'

Next up was a game against Sevilla. The game against the Spaniards was hardly an ideal outing either, with Liverpool going down to another defeat.

In truth, all Jürgen cared about was fitness, organisation, and tactics. This was a time to bond the group together and work on plans for a gruelling 38-game season, if the squad could come through it without any setbacks in terms of injury, then it will have been time well spent. Ahead of the tour, he played down expectation and told the media, 'Hopefully, we can go through this period without injuries. That would be very, very important. It would be cool.'

'The boys are a year older; the boys are a year further in their career. They're more experienced in different situations. That's what we have to use – try to use – and then let's play football again, against a lot of very, very strong teams. The others don't sleep. They develop as well, so we have to be ready.'

The final game of the US tour was played against Sporting Lisbon at Yankee Stadium. It finished 2-2, and the Reds' preparations had so far failed to set the world alight. But this was only pre-season, right? Nobody cares about pre-season, do they?

The truth is, although we say we don't, we do. It wasn't always this way. There was a time, when I was a kid, when I didn't even know we were playing friendly games. What a glorious time that must have been for the club's coaching staff. Imagine watching the portly shapes of Liverpool players dragging their arses, which were on average 5lb bigger than they had been a matter of weeks

earlier, around the world's stadiums. Thankfully there was no 24-hour sports coverage back then, or we would have doubtlessly entered every season fearing the worst, instead of the unbridled optimism that usually drove those eventually slimmed-down and toned-up players to glory.

There were now just two games remaining before Liverpool took on Manchester City at Wembley in the Community Shield. Now there's another 'pre-season friendly' that's taken on even greater significance in recent years. More of that later.

If Liverpool were to satisfy the army of experts who pour over these arguably meaningless fixtures, then they would need to up their performances significantly. Jürgen had it covered, but they worry about these things.

The Reds travelled to Edinburgh to play Napoli at Murrayfield and were beaten 3-0. They then faced Olympique Lyonnais and won 3-1. Who knows what would have happened had they also lost to the French side?

Not surprisingly, Goal.com saw problems for Liverpool. After watching the Reds limp through pre-season without capturing the heights of the previous campaign, the website suggested Klopp's men were still a little sluggish. The implication was that City may have a little too much for the Reds at Wembley.

'Liverpool must find an extra gear against Manchester City in Sunday's Community Shield despite ending their pre-season slump,' read its post-Lyon match report.

For the local media, the focus was on the Reds securing the services of a prodigious talent. Youngster Harvey Elliott had arrived at the Liverpool Academy from Fulham a year earlier and was about to sign his first professional contract in the summer of 2019. The *Liverpool Echo* drooled, 'Whether it's leaving opponents in his wake with a piece of trickery or progressing through the Academy ranks, the youngster has made the most of every second since arriving at Anfield last summer.

‘From the moment Elliott first stepped on to the field for the closing moments of the pre-season friendly against Napoli at Murrayfield back in July, Liverpool supporters have been impressed.

‘More importantly, so too have Jürgen Klopp and his backroom staff, both at Melwood and the Academy.’

He had been described as a ‘little diamond’ by those charged with guiding his development, and though he would find only a few opportunities to sparkle in the forthcoming season, his future at Liverpool was clearly bright. Although he wouldn’t be the only Academy gem to shine.

In truth, nothing that happened on the field could dull the lustre of Klopp’s Liverpool. Securing the Champions League crown at Madrid, the resultant parade and swashbuckling style with which Jürgen’s men had fought for the Premier League had bought the club a lot of goodwill. Surely, they would do nothing to squander that, would they? Turns out, in the phoney war of pre-season, anything is possible.

A Spectacular Own Goal as Reds Attempt to Trademark the Word ‘Liverpool’

In the summer of 2019, Liverpool Football Club sat on top of the world. Off the field, scepticism surrounding the club’s American owners was beginning to dissipate, with opposition far less vocal. Fenway Sports Group (FSG), almost a decade into their stewardship of the club, were beginning to deliver in the footballing and business sense.

Talk of an expansion of the Anfield Road end was on the agenda and a new £50m training base in Kirkby was being built. Meanwhile the balance sheet made very good reading. What could possibly go wrong?

Towards the end of July, and with the team and supporters gearing up for another campaign, brimming with optimism, the

club made an application to claim the word 'Liverpool' as its intellectual property when used in a football context. It would cause a great deal of controversy and threaten to overshadow the Anfield feelgood factor. Such was the reaction to the news that CEO Peter Moore took to the airwaves on BBC Radio Merseyside to explain the club's position.

Mr Moore was keen to point out that Liverpool FC were not seeking to penalise local vendors, but rather prevent those who would seek to mislead customers with fake products purporting to be official merchandise. However, he had to concede that even a T-shirt which simply contained the word 'Liverpool' on it, surrounded by images of footballs, could be in breach should the application be successful.

While some supporters suggested that the club was perfectly within its rights to protect its products from cheap counterfeits, pointing out that the sale of these damaged the reputation of Liverpool FC and deprive it of potential income, others were deeply troubled. They argued that the club was seeking to monopolise something that does not belong to it, the name of the city itself. A spokesperson for Liverpool Football Club told me, 'We are applying to register "Liverpool" as a trademark but only in the context of football products and services. We are not and wouldn't ever, seek to register "Liverpool" across the board. This application is strictly to protect the club and supporters from those benefiting from inauthentic products. The benefits to the club to have this protection in place are to ensure all revenues from official products and services are channelled back into the club and this is reinvested into the team and supporting infrastructure.'

He was also keen to make clear that only if the club felt an organisation was benefiting from inauthentic products or services, which were being sold to supporters, would it consider acting.

The club already held the intellectual property rights to several other words, phrases, and symbols. For example, they

had trademarked ‘This is Anfield’, and ‘YNWA’. They had an initial attempt to gain ownership of the Liver Bird image, in the context of football, refused. However, a subsequent appeal to the EU would prove successful.

Many supporters and traders argued that the club had already done enough to protect its interests, and that attempting to trademark the name of the city is a step too far. Ian Maloney, the Liverpool-born founder of Love Follow Conquer, an independent clothing label, suggested that if the club was successful in its application, it would lead to the right to police who is allowed to produce football-related clothing with the word ‘Liverpool’ on it.

He pointed out that the club’s application included reference to classes ranging from apparel to podcasts, broadcasting, education, and catering. He argued, ‘If LFC are successful in their application trademark law states the holder of a trademark must enforce their trademark. They won’t be able to pick and choose when to enforce it otherwise the trademark could be challenged by others.’

This potentially contradicted the argument put forward by the club, that it would be able to pick and choose which independent producers it pursued. I don’t possess the legal expertise to comment on the above, but a cursory internet search would suggest that an organisation is at risk of losing its trademark if it fails to use it after it is granted.

However, for Ian, there was a deeper issue at stake. And his concern is one shared by many of the people who responded to my original post – an objection to the club attempting to have ownership and control of something they didn’t create or invent in the word ‘Liverpool’. For many of us, it was simply unfathomable as to why trademarking ‘Liverpool FC’ wouldn’t be enough to protect the club’s brand. Why seek monopoly over the name of a city?

Ian felt the move threatened to drive a wedge between the club’s owners, the city and its supporters, arguing, ‘The city of

Liverpool is a community and has been a cultural centre for over 800 years. Liverpool FC wants to be part of that community and because of this it can't own the community it wants to belong to. Liverpool FC shouldn't have the right to trademark the word "Liverpool" in the same way any other business shouldn't. The word "Liverpool" belongs to the people of Liverpool, not to any corporate business.'

Liverpool City Councillor and future West Derby MP Ian Byrne, who was also a leading figure in the Fans Supporting Foodbanks charity, felt that the move jeopardised the futures of independent traders, and added his voice to calls for the club to withdraw its application, saying, 'The importance of the independents who do so much to add to our fan culture cannot be overestimated. They are fundamental to our current success on and off the pitch, and the club have previously embraced their role. This plan will place them in danger. FSG should cease with the trademark idea, which also endangers the huge bank of goodwill and optimism built up last season.'

Of course, the independent producers and traders weren't the only stakeholders concerned by the potential trademark. A few local amateur football teams, such as AFC Liverpool and City of Liverpool FC (COLFC) also use the name of the city. One of the directors of COLFC, Peter Furmedge, told me, 'City of Liverpool FC has a number of concerns about this trademark application, particularly as it would give LFC effective ownership over the word "Liverpool" in every conceivable football-related context.'

Peter explained that his club is committed to the principles of common ownership and community wealth building. Central to this is the fact that 'Liverpool' is part of a shared identity, an identity that represents significant social capital that has been built up over many generations. He continued, 'Such a shared asset, and the social capital it has accrued, belongs to all of us

within the Liverpool community. We contribute to its value daily, just as previous generations have done, and future generations will do. A shared community asset, like “Liverpool”, should never be appropriated into private ownership. At “fair value”, nobody could ever afford to buy it!

To Peter, the value of the name ‘Liverpool’ had been created by the activities, efforts and sacrifices of countless generations. All of us, as citizens of the city, continue to contribute to this ‘social capital’ daily. Liverpool FC are just one component of that community, as are Tranmere, Everton, and others. Sure, they have also contributed, quite considerably in fact, but does that entitle them to monopolise it in any context?

While there was no suggestion on the part of COLFC that Peter Moore was acting in bad faith, when he states that the club would never seek to act against City of Liverpool FC or others, the club objected strenuously to the suggestion that they should be placed in a subordinate position to the club, if the trademark is granted. The concern was that organisations, like COLFC, would be required to ‘get the nod’ from Liverpool FC to continue to use their own name.

In addition, others argued that, even if they accept the club’s assurances, there is no guarantee that FSG’s intentions wouldn’t change in the future. And, there was a real fear that potential future owners could use the power of the trademark to shut down all competition. As Peter pointed out:

‘This is something that could occur in any number of realistic scenarios. For whatever reason, future owners of the club may not be willing to accept the presence of other football-related activity taking place with the word “Liverpool” involved. Liverpool supporters will remember the antics of Hicks and Gillett, and the infamous “sons of strikers” dossier on supporter activists. Imagine that lot, and Christian Purslow, with these trademark rights to play with!

‘Unfortunately, rogue football club owners and executives are not uncommon. In my 30 years’ involvement in the football supporters’ movement, I have met many supporters’ groups at clubs with ownership regimes that would not hesitate to use the trademark rights that Liverpool has applied for as a weapon against perceived local rivals.

‘Regardless of the expressed best intentions of the current ownership, they cannot guarantee that somewhere down the line the club will not have owners that will use these trademark rights in ways that the owners currently assure us they won’t, but the wording of the trademark application clearly allows.

‘A further concern of ours is that Liverpool FC may sell, or transfer, the trademark rights to a third party, such as a commercial partner. They have previously done this, when the Moores and Parry regime transferred rights to Adidas. That severely restricted their ability to develop its own brand. As things stand, if the trademark is granted, there is nothing to prevent a third party from using the rights as leverage in raising their brand awareness – this being the whole point of commercial partnerships after all.’

Another independent trader shared his concerns. Hat Scarf or a Badge has been producing Liverpool FC-related apparel close to Anfield for many years. Its products have been worn by supporters and ex-players alike. Indeed, its designs are inspired by and continue to inspire supporter culture. I contacted the company for comment, and found they share many of the concerns raised by others. A spokesperson told me, ‘We are concerned about how these trademark rights may be used by future owners.’

Transalpino, which takes its name from the epic trans-Alpine trek taken by Liverpool supporters on their way to Rome in 1977 harboured similar concerns. A spokesperson told me, ‘The main concern is that “Liverpool” belongs to the city. I totally get that they are a business and they have to protect their brand. I can accept them trademarking “Liverpool FC”.

‘Peter Moore said on BBC Radio 5 Live that it wasn’t the small local vendors they were after, but he then went on to say that a red shirt with “Liverpool” on surrounded by footballs would be viewed as alluding to be official merchandise.

‘The club will do what they want once they have the trademark. They’re a US multinational who want to take ownership of the name of our city; what happens once they sell to unscrupulous owners?’

‘When I learned of this, in protest, I made an application to trademark “Manchester” in a couple of classes, I will be monitoring it to see if we succeed. I will make a big song and dance about it if we lose, especially if Liverpool win.’

Another group of creators and innovators who could have been potentially affected by this move, are the various fanzines, websites, podcasts, and other online content producers. It has often been via these mediums that fan culture is propagated.

Indeed, something of a symbiotic relationship has been at work between Liverpool FC and these outlets for many years. By that I mean the club latches on to supporter content and uses it for marketing purposes and vice-versa. There may be nothing wrong with this, in fact it may well be desirable. However, the attempt by one partner in the relationship to monopolise words associated with the club dangerously shifts the balance of power in the direction of the club.

I discussed this with Dave Usher, founder and editor of *The Liverpool Way*, a popular fanzine and website, and Chris Pajak, co-founder and presenter of *The Redmen TV*, a supporter-generated show that broadcasts daily on YouTube. Both were concerned about the club’s attempts to trademark the city’s name.

Dave told me that, while he felt the club would eventually back away from the idea, he has been angered by the move. He was even more irritated though, by supporters who he believed were supportive of the club’s application. He said, ‘Frankly, it’s

appalling that some suit in a marketing department thinks they have the right to monopolise the word. But what bothers me even more than that are the fans who are attempting to justify it.

‘The same thing happened when they wanted to put the ticket prices up. There were fans out there saying it’s okay because it means more money in the transfer kitty. I mean, really? The hundreds of millions they get from sponsorship deals and the unprecedented revenue from TV isn’t enough?’

‘Worse than that, though, are those fans who can’t seem to differentiate between FSG and the club. As far as owners go, we could do a lot worse, but let’s not forget who they are and why they got into this. They are a group of rich American fellas who made a shrewd overseas investment.

‘They aren’t “the club”. They just currently own it. Yet some think it’s okay for them to prevent anyone else from using the word “Liverpool” in a football context? It baffles me, to be honest. It’s actually scary how some people see the world.’

Meanwhile, Chris Pajak doubted whether anyone, anywhere in the world, who purchases unofficial merchandise, outside of an official club store, does so believing it to be the real deal. He explained, ‘It’s a bit of a stretch to say they are protecting people from buying inauthentic products. To me, it looks like a land grab. Liverpool FC want all the money that’s spent on Liverpool FC. With no unofficial merch [sic] on offer, then revenues go up. Simple as.

‘As far as independent retailers go, I can see it affecting their livelihoods. Ninety per cent of the scarves sold outside the ground will have the word Liverpool on them. What does the club expect them to say – Merseyside Reds? Give over. The word Liverpool does not belong to a football club, it belongs to the people. And that’s that.

‘This is a foot through the door and, once they own it, there’s no going back. If they own it, they’ll want to protect it. Otherwise

why do it in the first place. Even if FSG's intentions are pure, who's to say the next owners will feel the same. This needs to end before it reaches a point of no return.'

In my conversations with many of the stakeholders affected by this move, it is clear to me that the club's reassurances did little to assuage anxieties. Irrespective of the legalities many were sceptical of the club's intentions, and even those who are willing to believe they are acting in good faith, fear the repercussions under future ownership structures, if this trademark is granted.

With all of that, it felt astonishing that Liverpool FC had chosen to embark on this path. Especially as it risked such reputational damage and might have even undone much of the goodwill earned in the previous few years.

However, it appeared there was hope that the club were listening and may even compromise or even withdraw the application. Both City of Liverpool FC and Spirit of Shankly, the Liverpool FC supporters' union, told me that despite their opposition to the plan, they were encouraged by continuing dialogue between the club and interested parties. Peter Moore would describe those discussions as 'congenial and intelligent'. Peter Furmedge described them as 'friendly and constructive'.

COLFC's Furmedge also held out an olive branch, suggesting that he had sympathy for what the club was trying to achieve and was keen to meet with them to find an amicable solution. Fortunately, for all concerned, the application would ultimately fail, and the club indicated that it would not appeal on this occasion. Peter Moore would hail the decision and declare 'common sense had prevailed', even praising those who had objected for their intelligent and constructive engagement.

Today this feels like a pattern at the club. We will return to it later, in discussing another controversy that engulfed the club. Liverpool's ownership and leadership have not been immune to controversy and decisions that put them at odds

with their followers; however, they have repeatedly shown a willingness to listen and step away, rather than dig in their corporate heels.

Reds Fans Take Aim at Establishment but City Edge Closely Fought Battle at Wembley

We begin our journey in London. It's 4 August and the city of Liverpool has once more dispatched a small army to the capital for the Community Shield. The opponents were last season's Premier League and FA Cup winners, Manchester City. They had sent a much smaller contingent, as is their style. Liverpool had earned their place by virtue of finishing second in the league, despite losing just one game all season and amassing 97 points.

The warm glow of our victory in Madrid still lingered, which was just as well given that the weather had forgotten it was summer and persisted in randomly dousing us with rain. As we wandered along Wembley Way, our numbers were once more legion. Meanwhile, sky blue shirts were few and far between.

When it came to the squad, Jürgen Klopp had decided some minor tinkering around the edges would do. So transfer window activity at Anfield provided nothing capable of elevating the pulse rate of a Sky Sports anchor, and to be honest most of us were perfectly happy with that.

Liverpool did add a young Dutch defender called Sepp van den Berg for £4.4m, a kid with a man-bun called Harvey Elliot on a free from Fulham and a couple of goalkeeping reinforcements in Adrián San Miguel and Andy Lonergan.

The boss had declared that the 2018/19 vintage 'deserved to stay together', but only after he had dispensed with a whole raft of fringe players. Daniel Sturridge, Danny Ings, Rafa Camacho, Alberto Moreno, Ryan Kent, Simon Mignolet, and a few others left for combined fees of almost £48m. It meant the Reds were once more showing a profit in the transfer market and some supporters

were calling for a statue to be built in honour of sporting director Michael Edwards.

Meanwhile, back at Wembley, we had eventually grown tired of the overcrowded bars and expensive beer and decided to head into the stadium, where we could stand on an overcrowded concourse and drink even more expensive beer. I was in the mood for this game. It might be a 'friendly' but it's a trip to Wembley and I've always felt that once you're there, you want to win it, and you're gutted when you don't; no matter what you might say to the contrary.

In any case, I felt this was a chance to stick it to the nouveaux riche. For all City's protestations and delusions of grandeur, they're not our rivals. At least not in the same sense as their neighbours United are, or our neighbours Everton. Those are truly historic and meaningful rivalries. The one we currently endure with Guardiola's men is more reminiscent of the days when we did battle with Brian Clough's Nottingham Forest or, more recently, Jose Mourinho's Chelsea. They withered and so too would City, I hoped.

Manchester City have essentially won the lottery and have been busy filling their previously humble abode with alabaster bathroom furniture and gold taps. They are the Trump Tower of the sporting world and as far as I was concerned, they needed knocking off their gilt-edged thrones pronto. It was just a matter of who got there first, Liverpool or UEFA.

Inside the stadium, there was the usual pointless pomp and ceremony. Choirs on the pitch and an irritating match announcer doing his impersonation of a circus announcer trying to rev up a crowd who should be able to rev up themselves. This was football after all, not the NFL.

'Please be upstanding for the national anthem,' he boomed. My son and I immediately sat down. It's what we have always done. We have no time for a song that calls upon an imaginary

deity to save a woman who frankly does not need saving. It speaks to neither of us, nor does it address any of our concerns. Even if I believed that you need a song for a nation, this isn't it. It is a song for the monarchy.

Therefore, I fully expected to hear an attempt to drown it out with an especially loud rendition of 'You'll Never Walk Alone'. That's what's happened at every cup final I've attended since the early 1980s. Older generations will recall singing 'God Save Our Team'.

Instead, what I heard was loud and sustained booing. This felt new and it marked a significant hardening of attitudes among Reds supporters toward the establishment. Of course, the reaction in the national media and non-Liverpool supporters on social media was entirely predictable and spectacularly failed to ask the obvious question.

Why would the citizens of one of Britain's major cities feel such a disconnect with the country it resides in? Instead of deep soul-searching on behalf of the nation, we would be treated to a mixture of ridicule and faux outrage from the patriotic brigade. I'm told some Manchester City fans joined in the booing, but somehow that got lost in the column inches of condemnation that followed.

It shouldn't surprise anyone that Liverpool has a less than affectionate relationship with the British establishment. Nor should anyone expect anyone else to stand and sing a song if they don't want to. Jürgen Klopp would later agree, saying, 'If Liverpool fans don't want to sing the Queen's song, I respect them for that.'

As is often the case, not all Scousers felt the same way and Liverpool supporters in general had differing opinions on the matter. Those from outside the city and those overseas felt it was a bit disrespectful, like John Whitehead and Ricky Olivares, for example. John, a Red from the Midlands, who was at the game,

told me, 'It's our national anthem, whether you like it or not. I wouldn't boo another country's national anthem, and so I didn't boo ours. I joined in with singing it, though I sort of get those from Liverpool booing it though.'

Rick Olivares, a sports journalist and Liverpool supporter from the Philippines, said, 'To be honest, I was surprised by the booing of the national anthem. Having lived in the United States, the Philippines, and Hong Kong, I have not seen anything like it. I cannot claim to understand the dynamic between Liverpool or even England as a whole – politics included. But I still think it is disrespectful. Whatever the grievances, there are proper places to vent one's anger and frustrations.'

Andy 'Toggsy' James, an Australian broadcaster and Liverpool supporter, was similarly surprised, saying, 'In Australia we boo the politicians that hand over trophies or are on stage for presentations. But we don't boo the anthem. We don't sing it as proud as some other countries, but it wouldn't go down well to boo it.'

However, those supporters who grew up in Liverpool throughout the 1980s had much more sympathy for those who decided to boo. Ian Salmon is a Liverpool-born playwright, and although he'd have rather heard supporters drowning out the national anthem with our own song, he found himself in complete sympathy with those who chose to protest. He told me, 'As a city we have been mistreated by the Tory party and the establishment for decades. They have been happy to operate a policy of "managed decline" over Liverpool. We know that our hometown exists in the manner that it does today due solely to the investment of European funding.'

'We also know that the abuse we've taken as citizens of the city has increased exponentially in the last couple of years. The "bin dippers" nonsense, the "thieving Scouse bastards" rubbish. The rise of our club has seen this become more and more prevalent.'

‘The idea that so much of England wants to criticise us as people, as fans, as a football team but then want us in some way to show approval of the country. Ridiculous.’

To many, the royal family and that anthem has come to symbolise the establishment and everything that they perceive is wrong with the country. John Thompson, a Liverpool-born author and Reds supporter, told me, ‘It’s not just about booing the Queen or the royal family. It’s about booing the establishment, the aristocracy and the landed gentry as a whole. My daughter attends Liverpool College, at every formal gathering or prize giving, usually in the big cathedral, they blast out the national anthem. I make a point of remaining seated throughout, a silent booing, if you like.’

‘The list of reasons why our city should treat them with nothing but disdain, is endless. And, when it feels that Liverpool is being dragged into being just another part of England, the booing of the national anthem fills me with a sense of pride. Wouldn’t it be great if we lived in a country where we could be proud of our ruling classes instead of viewing them as the mortal enemies they are?’

So the game hadn’t even started and already in the stands the battles lines were being drawn for a season which would see Liverpool and its army of supporters prepare to do battle with the existing order. The pain of another domestic near miss still felt raw, and it was time to lay down a marker. The booing of what is essentially an ode to the establishment felt entirely appropriate in this context.

However, it seemed that the previous season’s rulers had one last fight in them. The Reds were sluggish out of the blocks and City seemed well up for the game. They took the lead after just 12 minutes thanks to a Raheem Sterling strike. But in truth they could have been ahead earlier, had Leroy Sané been more clinical instead of hitting his shot into the side-netting. The

Reds had been huffing and puffing their way through each of their pre-season friendlies, and it was starting to look like they were yet to shake off the cobwebs of the summer. As half-time approached with Liverpool a goal down, there was little to offer hope of the perfect season Klopp had called for at the end of the last.

Ninety-seven points hadn't been enough last time. If the Reds were to finally wrest the title from the clutches of City they would have to produce an epoch-defining campaign and reach levels no team had ever managed before. And they would need to do it without having splashed the cash like a drunken sailor on leave, while being chased all the way by a much richer and better-equipped opponent, or so we thought.

None of that looked likely on the evidence of that first half though. Fortunately, there are two halves to every game and the Reds emerged from the break a very different animal. They immediately took the game to City and had already hit the woodwork twice before eventually hitting the equaliser in the 77th minute. Joël Matip pounced on an assist from defensive partner Virgil van Dijk and it was all square, at last.

City seemed to panic, and from my vantage point in the stands, I could see Pep remonstrating and gesticulating to his players and barking instructions they couldn't possibly hear. At least that's what he did when he thought the cameras were on him. As soon as they moved away, he would retake his seat and sit, silently pondering and looking all genius-like.

I would later describe Guardiola as a fraud and a phoney during a conversation in the pub before a home game. Admittedly my assertion was fuelled by beer and it probably wasn't my most insightful piece of analysis. Pep is undoubtedly a great manager, possibly the best. Maybe. But my comments were more to do with his antics on the touchline, that day in August, during the Community Shield.

I get the sense that there's something of the showman in Guardiola, and that he cultivates his image as the tortured genius. What other manager can be described as losing a game because he 'over-thought it'? It's nonsense. I was aware that my analysis of Guardiola was tantamount to heresy, but it would turn into that sort of season.

Meanwhile, those studying Klopp's pitchside behaviour may well accuse me of double standards. After all, there are few managers more animated than Jürgen. However, whereas Pep's demeanour seems contrived to me, there's a natural almost involuntary nature to Klopp's antics. He's more like a supporter in the dugout than a manager, albeit a tactically astute one. The Liverpool boss's genius is organic, not concocted.

For all Pep's protestations and gyrations, his City side were struggling to contain Liverpool in the dying moments of the game. They had the air of a side desperate for time to run out, just like their ideas. Liverpool pressed forward in search of a winner and in the stands there was a growing sense that it would come. In the final moments of normal time, it almost did.

Right at the death, Kyle Walker headed a Mo Salah header off the line to prevent a certain goal. We groaned in disbelief. City had got away with one and they would soon be leaving with the shield.

That glorious missed opportunity was to be the last act of the 90 minutes and Liverpool had done more than enough to suggest that they would once again push City all the way. Whatever happened now, I thought, there is at least pride in matching the champions.

Extra time couldn't separate the sides and penalties beckoned, bringing back bitter memories of that League Cup Final defeat to City back in 2016. The Reds would prove far more efficient and clinical from the spot this time, but the result would be the same.

Sadly, Gini Wijnaldum missed his penalty in the shoot-out, and it would be left for Gabriel Jesus to deliver the winning blow for City. As we filed out of Wembley and contemplated the journey home, we felt we'd seen enough to give us optimism for the season ahead.

Paul Doyle, writing in *The Guardian*, also felt the game was somewhat portentous: 'Call it a phoney war, if you like, but the Community Shield suggested Manchester City and Liverpool are set for another epic battle. One point separated them last season and there was nothing between them on Sunday until City prevailed in the penalty shoot-out. So, Pep Guardiola's side won by the narrowest margin. Again. But there was enough to indicate things could go the other way over the next nine months.'

Neither him, nor us, had any idea what we were in for. And neither did Pep.

Liverpool Football Club were about to mount their most relentless assault on the established order in their entire history. And, in doing so, it would ensure that the record books were rewritten, and both manager and players would achieve immortality.

End of An Era as Reds Announce Sale of Historic Melwood Training Base

In the run up to the Community Shield, Liverpool announced their decision to sell off the land which had served as the club's training base for decades. Melwood, the scene of so much history was to be bought by Torus, a charity based in nearby St Helens which specialises in affordable homes.

The decision represented a significant step in the club's move to a £50m training facility in Kirkby. It also marked a new twist in the campaign by residents to ensure the club did right by them and the history of the site.