

A Glorious Life

DANNY
BLANCHFLOWER

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The Authorised 100th Anniversary Biography
of a Global Football Icon

DANNY BLANCHFLOWER

Forewords by Richard Blanchflower and Pat Jennings CBE

MIKE DONOVAN



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Richard

THE CROWDED concourse was bathed in soft rays of sunlight which shone through the fifth-level entrances from the arena at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium this Sunday in May; darling buds, as Shakespeare had it, no doubt blossoming in the surrounding pockets of parks and gardens in this otherwise urban area of north London.

Richard Blanchflower, the only son of our subject, and your author searched, found and tucked into a small but available spot alongside the recycle bins, swiftly filling up with food packaging and wooden eating utensils discarded by customers. Pies and rolls bought cashless across the way – where youthful sellers also served beers in ‘I am reusable’ plastic glasses somehow filled from underneath – consumed.

Richard seemed a chip off the old block, with physical resemblances to his dad both facially and in his slim build. He also betrayed a similar self-confidence and wit expressed – pure home counties rather than an Irish brogue – in a charming, affable, articulate manner.

Dressed in smart trousers and a dark blue polo shirt with the legend ‘Hertfordshire Golf’ emblazoned on it, he betrayed a sporting influence which had seeped through from caddying as a youngster for his golf-loving father.

It was clear, though, like Danny, he had absorbed football as his favourite sport.

He said, ‘I’ve played a lot of cricket, a lot of golf, but football is the best game. The reason I say that is, and I’m quoting my dad now, “You can play brilliantly and your team loses, it counts for nothing. If you can play like a dog, your team wins, you’re there.” It’s a team game.’

And supporting his dad’s old north London club was clearly another big reason why; the Blanchflower family were still very much in evidence at Tottenham home games with six season tickets between them, for Richard, wife Amanda, boys Tom, Ross and Jack and daughter Grace.

Our conversation briefly drifted on to another charged mutual passion – music; our regard for the likes of Neil Young, Fairport Convention (whose song *Farewell, Farewell*, Richard insisted, would be played at his funeral) and even psychedelic pioneers Grateful Dead.

But we were soon back on point: talking football; talking Danny Blanchflower.

There was a hubbub of excited chatter and movement around us as we all gathered for the final Premier League game of the 2024/25 season, against Brighton & Hove Albion, although, in truth, it was a continued celebration.

Spurs supporters and players had feasted on a UEFA Europa League Final triumph against Manchester United in Bilbao five days earlier. And an estimated 225,000 attended the open-topped bus parade along the Tottenham High Road to continue the carousing, with master of ceremonies Paul Coyte telling the multitudes ‘the game is about glory’ – drawing on the phrase our subject made synonymous with the Lilywhites to describe the way it achieved things; name-checking its author.

The final ‘panel’ of the ‘triptych’ of revels was completed later following the Brighton game.

The victorious players were given a guard of honour as they returned to the field from the bowels of the dressing room by club legends including 1972 UEFA Cup heroes Pat Jennings and Martin Chivers, along with 1984 duo Steve Perryman and Graham Roberts, both successors to Danny Blanchflower as skipper, who shared the captaincy in the two-legged final of their winning campaign in the same competition.

The huge silver Europa League trophy was carried by club captain Son Heung-min followed by the rest of the team and other squad mates, manager Ange Postecoglou, coaches and loved ones on the ‘lap of appreciation’, responding and waving to 60,000 joyous fans who flew the club flags placed in their seats.

No bubble was burst despite a 22nd league defeat of the season which after a ‘review of performances’ saw Postecoglou sacked and replaced by Thomas Frank a week or so later.

Certainly, there clearly remained much excitement about it being Spurs’ first piece of silverware in 17 years, their first European success in 41.

The fourth glittering continental prize for the club 62 years after the first when Richard's father led the Lilywhites to the Cup Winners' Cup, a season after he guided them to within an ace of the final on their European Cup debut.

Prime continental competition had become a reality in the 1950s, promoted by the lauded original *galácticos* of Real Madrid – Alfredo Di Stéfano, Ferenc Puskás, Paco Gento *et al*, changing the face of football with style and panache as the beautiful game spread from the parochial to the Champions League of today, something our subject predicted.

And Danny and his boys certainly confirmed their right to also earn plaudits for the glorious and entertaining way they went about their campaigns abroad, particularly in the five-star demolition of Atlético Madrid in the 1963 Cup Winners' Cup Final in Rotterdam.

It was questionable whether Paul Coyte's decision to borrow Blanchflower's glory phrase was accurate as Postecoglou's side secured a ninth return to the tournament renamed the Champions League in 1992 for the club by plunging a trident into the Red Devils in the Basque Country.

It was achieved more through pragmatism than idealism. Danny would no doubt have preferred Spurs to lift the cup via Postecoglou's vaunted and expansive 'Angebali'.

The Australian boss deemed a flood of injuries in a squad lacking experience in the search of silverware from the campaign necessitated a change of approach.

Richard said, 'You won't need a reminder of my father's famous quote about going out and playing in style rather than waiting for the opposition to die from boredom.'

Yet Richard insisted that Danny would certainly have been impressed by the captaincy of Son, the South Korean superstar appointed to the role by Postecoglou.

He said, 'My dad would have held Son in very high esteem because he liked model professionals. Someone who never deliberately fouls anybody. A great example to the kids, a diplomatic choice as captain. My dad would have had a lot of time for Son.'

He drew a parallel between Son and Harry Kane, a Spurs and England strike legend and captain of the Three Lions.

Richard said, 'Harry has shown himself to be a model professional, pretty close to my dad. Someone with fantastic ethics who looked after himself.'

It was, of course, Son's first taste of success with the Lilywhites after ten years of loyalty to the club before heading to the MLS and LA. For Danny Blanchflower, that moment came leading the team in completing the first half of the first English league and cup Double in the 20th century.

And Richard recalled experiencing the moment first-hand both in the stands with 61,204 others and inside the dressing room as a nine-year-old – on a school night.

He bore witness to a blood-and-thunder midweek encounter under the White Hart Lane lights from his seat in the West Stand on 17 April 1961. Nearest rivals Sheffield Wednesday were beaten 2-1 by goals from Bobby Smith, who knocked Wednesday goalkeeper Ron Springett into a post, and Les Allen, who scored the clincher with Blanchflower the architect.

Fans swarmed on to the pitch – rather like the majority of the estimated 30,000 of those who witnessed the 2025 Europa League decider live on the big screens at the £1bn Tottenham Hotspur Stadium.

Back in 1961, Bill Holden, the *Daily Mirror*'s chief football correspondent, dictated the following down the phone to his copy taker, 'As I write these words pandemonium reigns at White Hart Lane. The song is ringing in our ears: "glory, glory – the Spurs go marching on".'

And it was Richard's dad they decided deserved most credit for it and so, opposite the directors' box along from a proud son, they chanted 'We want Danny' over and over for around ten minutes.

The celebrating fans raised lit flares and torches and increased the volume of their voices as Blanchflower led his team up the steps. In a muddied white shirt and with a smile as wide as the Irish Sea, he received the trophy from Football League president and Barnsley chairman Joe Richards and held it aloft for the delectation of the supporters. *Daily Express* reporter Clive Toye wrote, 'The crowd was delirious ... They didn't care tuppence if they never got home.'

The trophy, its silver plate reflecting off the floodlights, was eventually carried back down into the inner sanctum of the dressing

room and placed on a bench in the middle of it. The senses were under attack: the players noisily celebrating with the usually more taciturn manager Bill Nicholson donning a bowler hat for the occasion. The smell of mud-spattered, sweaty kit seeped into nostrils; the clatter of discarded boots hitting the floor echoed. Steam drifted across the room from its communal baths about to be filled by the victorious individuals who had secured Spurs' first championship in a decade.

Richard was enveloped by the cacophony when he walked into the room having stepped down from his eyrie in the West Stand.

It was a moment he instantly recalled, a treasured memory for ever situated in the mind's eye. A sitting tenant with the owner having no wish to tell it to vacate.

He said, 'Dad used to take me to and from the games in his car [a Sunbeam Rapier, with the personal numberplate 428BLF], able to afford one through the extra income he earned as a journalist.

'I can only assume I had stayed in my seat in the stands at the end of the match, looked after by a couple of my dad's friends as Dad and the rest of the team were in the directors' box.

'But what I really remember is walking into the dressing room afterwards and seeing the trophy. They used to have a bench in the middle of the dressing room and on it this night was the league trophy. It was a moment I will never forget. I was fortunate; I've got a wife and four children who are all Spurs supporters and have never experienced them winning the league.'

Richard's wry humour came to the fore when your author asked if he could describe the mood. He said with a mischievous smile, 'I'd have thought they'd have been pretty pleased at winning the league trophy. Stupid question! You are prompting a favourite saying of my dad's, "If you are asked a stupid question, give a stupid answer."

'I sat next to my dad as he changed and kept quiet. All the players knew me as I used to always go into the dressing room after games. I was not a nuisance to anybody so never felt any animosity about that at all. It was odd because I was the only kid in there. I was amazed I was let in. You would have expected someone like Bill Nicholson saying, "I don't think that is a good idea."

As it was prevalent, I asked how those moments compared to the Europa League success in terms of achievement.

Richard said, ‘You could see the euphoria after the game in Bilbao. Spurs weren’t 100 per cent sure of winning that. But they were pretty much certain of winning the league in 1961, weren’t they? They beat Sheffield Wednesday with about four or five games to go. So it’s not like it was the last game of the season. They had been pretty much expecting it for quite a while.’

Of course, Richard was to witness Danny collect the second pot at Wembley after defeating Leicester City to complete that fabled Double in charge of a team rated the best in Spurs’ 140-year-plus history, although this time just from the stands.

Richard fondly remembered his dad’s remark to the Duchess of Kent before the match about his players not needing their names on their tracksuit like Leicester as they knew each other.

Richard was introduced to football by his father at the age of five years old when he watched him and Tottenham take on Wolverhampton Wanderers at White Hart Lane on Boxing Day 1957. He said, ‘Wolves were a good side then, went on to win the title, but Spurs won 1-0.’ Bobby Smith got the winning goal that day and went on to equal the club record of goals in a season with 36.

The following season Richard was present as Spurs overcame Everton 10-4 in a historic Lane encounter on 11 October 1958. He said, ‘It was Bill Nicholson’s first game in charge. Incredible.’ Tommy Harmer was reported to have made nine of the goals besides scoring one.

Danny certainly appreciated Harmer the Charmer. Richard said, ‘I used to see Tommy Harmer when I’d grown up and went up to work in the City. My dad told me before one visit, “Give Tommy a message from me. Tell him I said, ‘You could play.’” From my dad, that was the ultimate praise. There was nothing of Tommy. Slight, but he was unbelievable. He could take ten corners and he’d get all ten right.’

Richard also attended classic glory, glory Euro nights with Danny leading the men in all white at White Hart Lane.

He said, ‘I was there for Spurs’ first match in European competition. It was against Górnik [Zabrze] in the European Cup and Spurs won it 8-1 with Cliff Jones getting a hat-trick. I remember the three “angels” who paraded round the ground and got the “Glory Hallelujah” singing going. There was another against Dukla Prague that got us into the

last four. And, of course, Benfica in the semi-finals in which we had THREE goals disallowed.'

Richard was back at Wembley as Danny and Spurs beat Burnley in the 1962 FA Cup Final on 5 May, again from the stands. He said, tongue in cheek, 'I was lucky, because I had connections I could get a ticket!'

He was impressed by Danny's penalty-taking technique as he secured the victory from the spot ten minutes from time. Richard said, 'He totally did Adam Blacklaw, the Burnley goalkeeper. Adam just couldn't work out which direction Dad was going to put it and sank to his knees, leaning to his right as the ball was tucked in the opposite corner.'

Richard was also present alongside Steve Smith, the son of the first goalscorer that day, Bobby, on the open-topped bus parade through Tottenham the following day.

The victory, of course, was the start of the pathway leading to Spurs' first taste of European success, when they beat Atlético Madrid in the Cup Winners' Cup decider on 15 May 1963. Richard is most proud of his dad's role in the triumph, performing a pre-match rallying speech. He said, 'Dad knew what motivated players.'

Looking back, Richard is grateful to Danny for the experience of allowing him to be a silent observer in a room that was otherwise an escape from the outside world for Spurs players during the greatest and most glorious period of their club's history.

Through his child's eyes he picked up a few insights. He said, 'I discovered Jimmy Greaves's sense of humour. I was right there when he said he was not going to score another goal that year. It was, near enough, the last day of December!'

'I was also amazed that some of them smoked. Jimmy Greaves and Terry Dyson were smokers. Alan Gilzean and the boys used to go to the Bell and Hare after a game.'

'Further back, I remember the winger George Robb having to get a bus to get to the ground. And I've heard Terry Dyson did the same thing.'

Time with Danny proved to be limited overall, due to his football career, domestic upheaval and, it seems, his innate personality. Richard said, 'My dad was away from the family for a lot of the time. He was a loner, really, wasn't a family man.'

But first-born Richard revealed he saw more of his dad than his two sisters – Gail, who passed away on 7 April 2016, and Susie – when growing up in Southgate, five miles from White Hart Lane.

And it was a pattern which continued into adulthood.

The children's mother was Betty, who was Blanchflower's second of three wives and whom he married in 1953.

Richard said, 'My mum was from Birmingham, where all her side are from. It was when he played for Aston Villa, and where I was born.

'I don't remember him being home a lot because he was playing a lot of football for Spurs and Northern Ireland as well. My parents split up when I was about eight or nine. He became more like an uncle, really.

'It wasn't easy when my parents parted, of course. Not great, is it? I stayed with Mum and he began to come and pick me up and drop me off when Spurs were playing, or I caddied for him when he had a round of golf at Wentworth.

'I was probably in the more fortunate position to my sisters from having been with Dad at the games. As well as Spurs, I went to internationals with him on Wednesday afternoons. I saw Brian Clough make his England debut in 1957. I also went with my dad to see England play the Rest of the World in 1963, the FA centenary match.

'I even went to quite a few matches with him when I'd grown up. When Arsenal won the Double in 1971, I was there when Ray Kennedy scored the goal to clinch the first half of it, the league title. And I was there when we drew to seal the UEFA Cup Final against Wolves in 1972.

'I saw him away from football too. I was a co-signatory to the limited PR company he had because he used to work from the Café Royal with sports executive Jarvis Astaire.

'My dad would call me and I'd meet up with him. We met in the tea house at the top of Haymarket in the West End, because he wasn't a drinker.

'He'd phone me occasionally and run through what he was going to do in his article in the *Sunday Express* and asked me what I thought. And he told me about the stories.

'When he was working for the *Sunday Express*, he'd write about golf in the summer as there was nothing to write about football. At the Open one year, he went up to Nick Faldo and said, "I wouldn't mind 15 or 20 minutes with you." He reckoned, "Faldo hid from me for the next four

days." So my dad's now struggling. Tom Watson, who was a great golfer, was coming out for his final practice. My dad goes up to him, explains who he is and says, "I don't want to trouble you now, you are about to go out on your practice round." Tom Watson said to him, "Come and walk round with me." My dad said what a fantastic bloke he was. Just unbelievable. So Dad got something in the end, which is what you need as a journalist.

'Dad spoke at my club's annual dinner and he read out a fictional letter from his mum in Belfast. She said she was "writing this slowly because I know you can't read too quickly". She said, "The weather in Belfast has been quite good this week. It's only rained twice, the first was for four days, the second for three." It's great, Irish humour.'

Danny also attended the wedding of Richard and Amanda on 15 September 1978.

Richard said, 'I was pleasantly surprised he turned up. We got married down in Dover; he was living in Virginia Water in Surrey. I suppose that was respect for me that he made the effort to come down. The local paper wanted a picture of him posing with me and my wife with a glass of sherry. So he said, "Why would I do that, I don't drink sherry." That gives you an example of what he was like. I don't mind that. It was true!'

Danny also, indirectly, helped when Richard set up a surveying business 30 years ago.

He said, 'I started off with my original boss, Peter Heard, a life president of Colchester United. He was on the FA and had a lot to do with the development of St George's Park. And he was on the disciplinary committee. I used to have business meetings with him at his offices.

'I used to get invited to a lot of England matches with him. He liked using my name as well, didn't he? I don't mind that.'

Richard had sympathy for siblings Gail and Susie. He said, 'I feel for my two sisters as they had little contact with him [Danny]. I remember Gail came along to one match when we were young but after 20 minutes she lost interest. When she grew up, Gail was desperate to associate herself with Dad and everything to do with him, probably because she suffered in not seeing a lot of him.'

'She'd seen I was close to my dad, because I was still going to the football with him. Susie was born in March 1960, and my parents had

pretty much split up by then. So she hardly knew him at all, really. She has accepted it.'

Richard also had empathy for Danny's daughters from his third marriage, Cindy and Stacey.

He said, 'I am not in contact with them but they didn't have a great time of it as they lost their mum [Blanchflower's third wife Avrielle] and Dad developed dementia. Stacey was looking after him at the end of his life which would not have been easy.'

Having a famous father can be a mixed blessing, especially if the child follows the same path. But Richard revealed he had not suffered negatives in the role he inherited.

He said, 'In the comparison of us sharing similar characteristics in our personality, it's fair enough to use the expression "easy-going". Certainly I never saw him lose his temper any time I was with him.'

'My dad was a fantastic passer of the ball and I could pass it a little like him but I just played at an amateur level, my school old boys [Old Minchenians in Southgate] and Norseman FC in Edmonton.'

'I'm not at all fazed by stardom. My dad was famous, but we are all human beings at the end of the day. If you treat those considered famous normally they are fine.'

When asked how he would sum up Danny's personality, Richard said, 'Private. He really wasn't one of the lads. If you speak to anybody who reckons they got drunk with my dad, don't believe them. He didn't drink, didn't smoke. Everything was geared towards being a top professional. For instance, he was influenced by Stanley Matthews who was ahead of his time with sports nutrition. It is said he had an energy drink before games. Stan was also teetotal. And he played until he was 50!'

'Dad thought in simple but logical ways a lot. He used to say, "You see players who haven't got an injury and they wrap all these bandages round their ankles. Well, what's the point of doing it when you don't need it? You are not going to have the benefit of it when you do."

'Lots of what he said seemed obvious but I'm not sure it was. Taking a throw-in, for instance. If he held the ball in his right hand before he threw it he was going to throw it that side of the player he was throwing to. If he held it in his left hand he was going to throw it the other side and if he held it in both hands it would mean it's tight,

give it back to me. And as a player, as I've suggested, he played very much by the rules.'

There was Danny's humour, of course. Richard said, 'My introduction to golf was caddying for him at Wentworth. He loved his golf. He always joked and said when he managed Northern Ireland he moved their training ground from Belfast to Portrush, and that everyone thought there was a great tactical reason for it. It was so he could play golf at Portrush!'

Richard also appreciated how Danny's brilliant mind provoked interest in philosophy, literature and a host of other things.

In the meantime, there has been the glory of Danny's football career to savour for his family, as well as the tragedy of mourning the passing of Betty, in 2000, Gail in 2016 and, in our subject's lifetime, his third wife Avrielle, along with nearest and dearest back home in Belfast.

We have mentioned the second marriage, with Betty, which ended in 1961, a tumultuous year for Danny personally with his father John passing, and professionally with the completion of the Double.

But details of the other two marriages? His first was in Belfast, to Lilian from his neighbourhood in the home city after he had joined Barnsley, his first English Football League club, according to a Belfast publication.

His third – to Avrielle – took place in Hampstead and was registered in the last quarter of 1963, states the trusted website, Wikitree.com.

The only other particulars about Danny's first and third marriages to emerge were also factual.

Northern Ireland football historian Brian McClelland shed light on the first – through his first professional club, Glentoran – via a family scrapbook dedicated to the East Belfast club in which he discovered a newspaper cutting about it.

It shows a picture of the wedding party from Ireland's *Saturday Night* newspaper, which was part of the *Belfast Telegraph* group. It is dated 2 July 1949.

The newspaper states, 'Footballer Weds- Mr Robert D. (Danny) Blanchflower, formerly of Glentoran and now with Barnsley FC, son of Mr and Mrs J. Blanchflower, Dunraven Park, Belfast, and his bride, Miss Lilian Denise Rankin, daughter of Mr and Mrs W.H. Rankin, Cregagh, leaving St Finian's Parish Church in Belfast.'

McClelland said, 'I understand both Danny and his bride lived in East Belfast. I don't know how they met but they didn't live miles apart.'

The extra nugget regarding his third marriage is in a photograph from 1981 depicting Blanchflower with his daughters Cindy and Stacey by Avrielle. The caption reads, 'Danny Blanchflower And His Daughters Cindy And Stacey After The Inquest To His Wife's Death.'

There was a public spat over the auction of Danny's memorabilia four years after his 1993 passing. It was reported that his youngest daughter Stacey put up items of it – which raised a reported £40,000 – via an auction at Christie's in Glasgow.

Half-sister Gail was quoted in newspapers then saying, 'Stacey wasn't even born when Dad earned those medals. He wanted my brother Richard to have them.'

Stacey, who, as we have learned, helped nurse Danny in his final years, was quoted by the *Belfast Telegraph* saying, 'I wish I could keep those medals, but I've got three children and need a bigger house.'

Richard said, 'That's something I didn't want to get involved with. I've got my memories and they are more important. Medals just sit in a drawer, locked away. I've got Dad's Footballer of the Year trophy from 1961, but apart from that I've got none of his medals, although I've a few international shirts.'

A decade later there was another dispute.

The *Belfast Telegraph* of 14 April 2002 reported how daughter Cindy 'last night gave up hope of suing the man she believes stole her dad's European cup medal [for winning the 1963 Cup Winners' Cup].'

The medal discovered in a £25 claret jug by a west London pensioner had been sold at auction to a Spurs fan for £10,575. After the event, Cindy told the *Telegraph*, 'I just haven't the money.'