

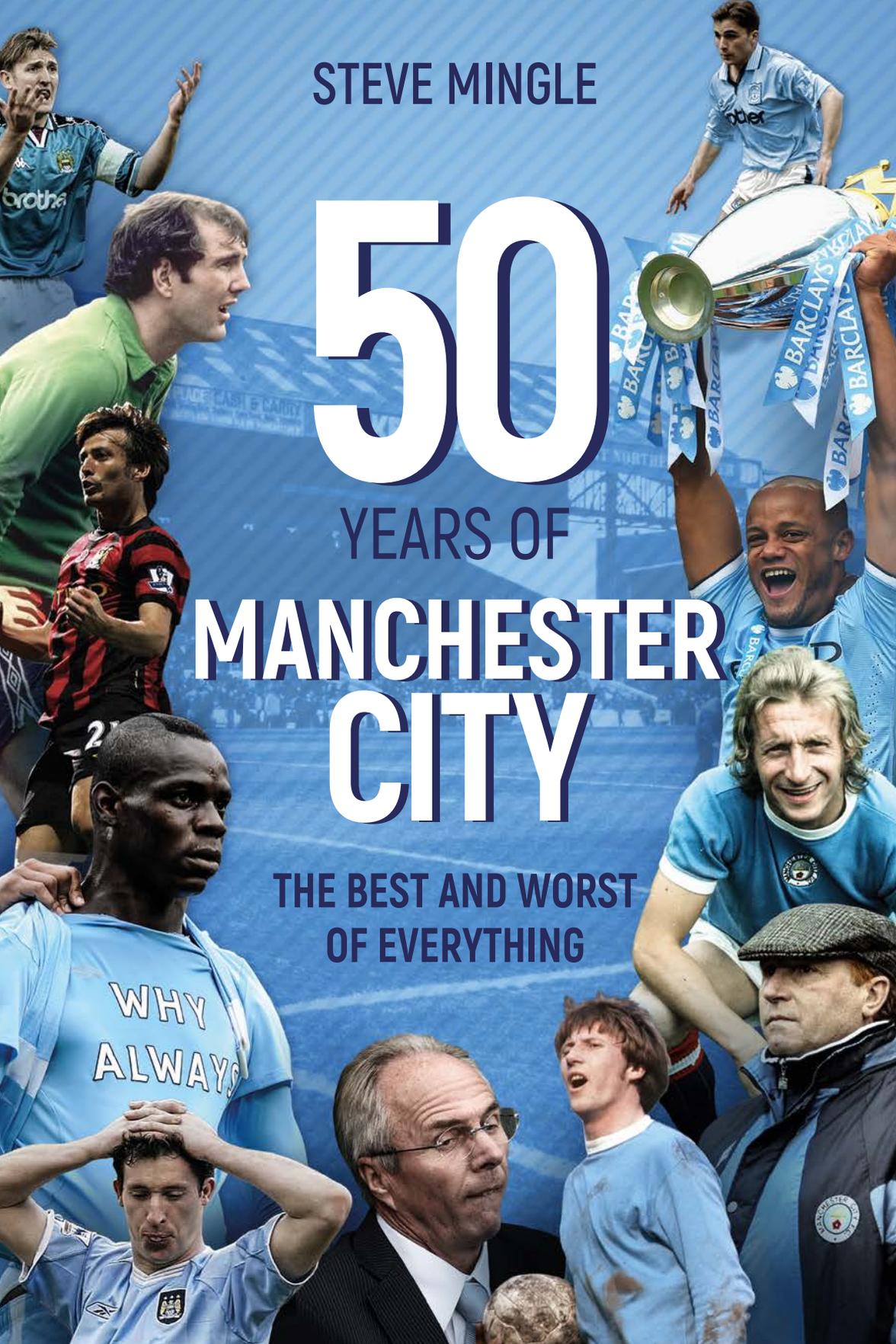
STEVE MINGLE

50

YEARS OF

MANCHESTER  
CITY

THE BEST AND WORST  
OF EVERYTHING



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# Introduction

SIXTEEN September 1967. *The Last Waltz* was No.1 in the charts. The Queen Mary set sail for New York for the last time. The railwaymen were on strike again. *Opportunity Knocks* and *The Golden Shot* were the big draws on telly. And a wide-eyed youngster climbed up the steps behind the Platt Lane Stand, caught sight of the pitch for the very first time and was hooked for life.

The 50 years that followed have delivered everything the football gods can manufacture. Absolute brilliance to abject incompetence. World class superstars and blokes more suited to flipping burgers. Indescribable ecstasy to inconsolable dejection. Comedy and tragedy. Flashes of genius and inexplicable stupidity. Players of balletic grace and lumbering carthorses. Moments of cruel misfortune and moments where you felt like we'd won the lottery. And one day when we really did win the lottery.

This collection of the great, the diabolical and everything in-between has been put together partly from memory and partly by researching a wide range of sources of information. Apart from official club publications and online archives of *The Times* and *The Guardian*, of particular value have been two outstanding online resources, 'City Til I Die' and the history section of the 'Bluemoon' website. Gary James' excellent tomes have also been a great help, in particular *Manchester City: The Complete Record* and *Farewell to Maine Road: the Official History of Manchester City's Grounds*.

The 50 years began with a season of beautiful football and stunning over-achievement; they ended with a season of beautiful football and bitter disappointment. Not quite the absolute symmetry I was hoping for when I started putting the book together, but the one thing we can be sure of is that the beautiful football won't be going anywhere soon. Whether it can deliver the rewards we City fans crave remains to be seen but, successful or not, City are guaranteed to be well worth watching as, even if not always for the reasons we'd have liked, they always have been. Enjoy the memories.



**T**HERE'S something particularly satisfying about seeing your team score five, being as it is the minimum requirement to be able to say you dished out a right pasting. Here are ten of the most memorable occasions when, in the vernacular of the *Football Pink*, the Blues went nap. And they start with that very first game.

### **City 5 Sheffield United 2, Division One, September 1967**

Despite four straight wins and some eye-catching football, City hadn't yet made the rest of the league sit up and take notice, but at least they were starting to merit a few more column inches. The visit of lowly Sheffield United wasn't expected to be too testing, but the way in which City put their opponents to the sword fully demonstrated the flair and talent at Joe Mercer and Malcolm Allison's disposal.

The result was never in doubt, with Colin Bell, Neil Young and Mike Summerbee all scoring within the space of three first-half minutes. Alan Woodward pulled one back, but City soon restored the three-goal advantage when Mike Doyle's long-range effort came back off the bar for Stan Bowles, making his league debut after bagging a brace as substitute in a League Cup tie three days earlier, to nod home. And after Peter Eustace slotted in the Blades' second early in the second half, Bowles completed the scoring with the goal of the day, moving on to a lovely through ball from Neil Young to curl in a left-footer from 15 yards.

When this run of five victories was followed by three straight defeats, suggestions it was merely a flash in the pan were rife. But they would be silenced soon enough...

Strange But True: These were the only league goals which Stan scored for City in his 17 appearances. Other players to score twice in a single league game but never again were Barney Daniels in 1974 and Jack Rodwell in 2013.

### **City 5 Schalke 1, European Cup Winners' Cup, April 1970**

City came into the second leg of the semi-final 1-0 down. Schalke had impressed during the first game, and the outcome of the tie was reckoned to be too close to call.

But, on one of Maine Road's most famous nights, City's fluid attacking play was too much for the Germans to cope with. Mike Doyle and Alan Oakes took turns to surge forward in support of the forwards, and with the recalled Neil Young in vintage form the visitors were overwhelmed. Doyle jubilantly opened the scoring, storming through the middle to fire past Norbert Nigbur. Young added an almost identical goal five minutes later before hammering home a brilliant and crucial third in inimitable style just before half-time.

City's dominance was so complete that the second half was completely stress-free, with Bell delightfully flicking home a fourth before Francis Lee

thrashed home a typically unstoppable drive. Reinhard Libuda's late consolation was an irrelevance, and Schalke manager's Rudi Gutendorf's assessment that City had played 'football from another planet' was a fitting eulogy to what many regard as the greatest performance of the Mercer-Allison era.

### **City 5 Wolves 2, Division One, January 1972**

City were many people's favourites in what was shaping up to be a thrilling title race, but Bill McGarry's emerging Wolves side, with its potent spearhead of Derek Dougan and John Richards, were expected to present a difficult test. It was one which City passed with flying colours.

Tommy Booth rammed home the opener after Wyn Davies's header had been cleared off the line, before the irrepressible Francis Lee took centre stage. When Tony Book played a precise ball inside the full-back, Lee sprinted in from the right touchline and headed at full pelt into the area. As the angle became more acute, and with no other options available, he simply put his foot through the ball and saw it thunder high past Phil Parkes into the roof of the net to score his best goal of what was proving to be a very prolific season.

The second half saw Tony Towers hit a long-range third before Lee completed his hat-trick with two more goals, the second a thumping volley. Richards's double for Wolves was mere consolation as City completed a highly impressive victory which, with other results going their way, put them top of the table for the first time. There were plenty who expected them to stay there, and they did ... until a certain southern showman arrived on the scene.

### **City 5 Charlton 1, Division Two, May 1985**

City came into the season's final match needing a win to secure a return to the top flight. Their form in recent weeks as the pressure built had been erratic and, despite the modest opposition, a huge crowd arrived at Maine Road expecting a nail-biting afternoon. For once, however, City allowed their fans to relax and enjoy themselves well before the final whistle.

An edgy start provided little indication of what was to come, with defensive nerves twice almost gifting the visitors the lead. But suddenly it all came good. David Phillips timed his run perfectly to slide home Paul Simpson's cross after six minutes and, just nine minutes later, Andy May's looping header from a corner squeezed just beneath the bar to double the lead.

The two-goal cushion wasn't yet enough for everyone to relax, but when Jim Melrose's superb header made it three, the atmosphere in the Kippax changed in an instant to one of celebration. The players immediately picked up on the mood, quickly adding further goals through Simpson and a brutal 20-yarder from Phillips, and the carnival atmosphere during the final 30 minutes was as joyous as Maine Road ever experienced. Charlton's late consolation somehow added to the fun, being cheered by home fans who by now were drunk on the euphoria of promotion.

### **City 5 Manchester United 1, Division One, September 1989**

This was one of the most famous and celebrated matches in the club's history, partly because of the scoreline and opposition but also because of its sheer unexpectedness. City have had other big derby wins, but almost always achieved with teams of proven quality. Mel Machin's side wasn't in this category. With youth at its core, the team had struggled on its return to the top flight, earning just one win from the first five games and warming up for the big occasion by losing at Brentford in the League Cup. Worse still, million-pound man Clive Allen was injured. And although Ferguson's United weren't pulling up any trees themselves, it was reckoned to be only a matter of time before their host of big-money signings made an impact. They came into the game as hot favourites.

David Oldfield and Trevor Morley wouldn't have been many Blues's idea of a dream striking partnership, but on this day they were too much for United to handle. Aided by a shambolic display from Gary Pallister in particular, both scored within the first 15 minutes, and when Oldfield's delicate cross was nodded home by the elegantly airborne Ian Bishop, City reached the interval a scarcely credible three goals to the good.

The last time they had been in this position was against Bournemouth four months earlier, so no one would be taking anything for granted. When Mark Hughes pulled one back 'here we go again' was the thought in the minds of all on the Kippax but, after a jittery few minutes, Oldfield restored the three-goal advantage before Andy Hinchcliffe headed the unforgettable, iconic fifth. Even City couldn't mess this up, and the final 20 minutes were played out in front of an increasingly relaxed and jubilant home crowd. If anyone tells you they bet on this score before the match ... they're lying.

### **City 5 Burnley 1, Division One, December 2001**

City's promotion challenge was gathering momentum as Kevin Keegan's side had largely eliminated their early-season inconsistency. The visit of leaders Burnley was expected to provide a tough test but this was the day that City demonstrated that they weren't just in the race, but rather that they were by far the division's outstanding team. The front five of Ali Benarbia, Eyal Berkovic, Darren Huckerby, Paolo Wanchope and Shaun Goater were all in top form but, on this occasion, it was the maverick Wanchope who took the headlines with a tremendous hat-trick.

Some of City's football was irresistible, combining slick inter-passing and movement with a level of individual skill which most teams in the top flight would have struggled to contain. All of Wanchope's goals were superbly constructed and taken, but the pick of the five was a low 20-yard drive from Berkovic after being set up by delightful interplay between Goater and Wanchope. City weren't totally convincing at the back – relying on a Carlo Nash penalty save to maintain their early lead before they really

cut loose – but when their attacking talents fired like this, it didn't really matter.

### **City 5 Barnsley 1, Division One, April 2002**

It was party time at Maine Road even before this game kicked off, as defeat for Wolves the previous evening meant that City's promotion back to the top flight had already been confirmed. But there was still the small matter of claiming the championship trophy and City accomplished it with a magnificent display. The records show that Darren Huckerby scored a hat-trick and Jon Macken hit a brace but, as so often in this season of exhilarating attacking performances, the real star had been Ali Benarbia.

It's no exaggeration to say that this was one of the greatest ever individual performances from a City player, and anyone thinking 'hang on pal, it was only bloody Barnsley' needs to get a grip. All of Ali's outrageous array of tricks and flicks were on display, as he provided three sumptuous assists and a key pass for another of the goals. A crowd by now well used to his virtuosity still gasped in astonishment at some of his improvisation. Reverse passes, backheels, dinks over defenders when pinned to the touchline, sublimely weighted through balls – they were all there for everyone to savour as the team, and Ali in particular, left the pitch to a standing ovation.

### **Tottenham 1 City 5, Premier League, August 2011**

City had started the season with two impressive wins, but hardly against stellar opposition. The game at White Hart Lane would provide a more realistic indication of the team's prospects. With former Gooner Samir Nasri making his debut there was plenty of scope for the home fans to vent their spleen, but City's performance soon rendered them as toothless as their team.

Nasri was outstanding, but the headlines would be made by Edin Džeko, who netted four times in a striker's masterclass. Two goalpoacher's finishes to put the final touch to flowing moves, a majestic header from a cross which seemed to be too far behind him and a glorious curling left-footer from the corner of the area, gave jubilant City fans the first real glimpse of the player's capabilities after an unconvincing start to his career at the Etihad. Sergio Agüero added a thrilling solo goal as City produced their finest away performance for years. Indeed, many Blues present struggled to remember a more impressive away display against such high quality opposition.

### **Tottenham 1 City 5, Premier League, January 2014**

Manuel Pellegrini's City were on fire, not just on a long unbeaten run but scoring goals at a rate unheard of in the club's history. Spurs were expected to at least provide a stern test, but instead were ripped apart, particularly during a first 30 minutes which saw City produce a quality of football seldom seen outside the Camp Nou. Agüero and David Silva were unplayable, combining

beautifully for the striker to give City the lead and prompting a silence bordering on reverence from the home crowd. Agüero's superb solo effort hit the bar, Hugo Lloris pulled off a startling save from his header, but when Sergio was forced to limp off with City still just one ahead, there were fears that the tide may have turned.

The next key moment came early in the second half when Džeko was felled in the area by Danny Rose, leading to a penalty and a red card. BT Sport's woefully prejudiced panel indignantly pointed out that Rose had brushed the ball with his studs before felling the Bosnian, conveniently failing to observe that the ball's path had not been affected and that Džeko would still have got his shot away had he not been fouled. Just another case of not letting the facts get in the way of another anti-City story.

Yaya Touré calmly converted the penalty, and Džeko quickly slammed in a third after Silva had hit the post. A fine effort from substitute Stevan Jovetić and a joyous prod from captain Vincent Kompany completed the rout, after which Spurs manager Tim Sherwood proclaimed City as 'the best team on the planet'. And on this particular night, they really did look like it.

### **City 6 Newcastle 1, Premier League, October 2015**

A 6-1 home win against a side which would go on to be relegated may not in itself have been too remarkable, but this was a day unique in 50 years of Manchester City. Five of City's goals were scored by Agüero, the only incidence of a single City player netting five in a game. And all this after Aleksandar Mitrović had headed the visitors in front early on.

But after that it was all about Sergio. A close-range header brought City level, and after half-time he went berserk. A lucky deflection on his 20-yarder put the Blues ahead, but there was no luck about anything else. He latched on to Kevin De Bruyne's through pass to dink the ball expertly over Tim Krul to complete his hat-trick. And, after De Bruyne himself made the game safe with a spectacular over-the-shoulder volley, Sergio hit his fourth with the goal of the day. Fastening on to a ball from Silva, he cut inside a defender to find a yard of space then bent a precise and powerful 20-yarder through the eye of a needle into the far corner. Just two minutes later, De Bruyne moved down the left on to a ball played outside him, and pivoted to flash in a low cross which Sergio gobbled up at the far post.

For many older fans, the initial reaction to the goal was how eerily De Bruyne had looked like Colin Bell when executing that manoeuvre. But then thoughts turned back to Sergio. He'd bagged five goals within 20 minutes and needed one more to become the Premier League's first ever six-shooter. It looked a certainty but, three minutes later, to the consternation of many in the crowd, Sergio was subbed by Pellegrini. The manager later revealed that Sergio had received treatment at half-time for a hamstring injury. That must have been one hell of a magic sponge.