

RICHARD BUXTON



FINE MARGINS

HOW MANCHESTER CITY
AND LIVERPOOL
FORGED FOOTBALL'S
ULTIMATE RIVALRY

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Contents

Introduction	9
Born of Frustration	12
Maladjusted	33
Ascension	51
Dizzy Heights	66
Bigmouth Strikes Again	85
Warriors of the Wasteland	116
This Is How It Feels	149
Seven	185
Chasing Yesterday	198
Kick and Complain	213
Fool's Gold	244
Boy on a Pedestal	279
The Bottle	309
High Tension Line	339
Stop the Clocks	352
Acknowledgements	378
Bibliography	380

Born of Frustration

EVERYTHING STARTS with Bill Shankly, both in terms of Liverpool's modern renaissance and the definitive starting point in their rivalry with Manchester City. When he pitched up at Anfield in December 1959, the Scotsman surveyed what he would later describe as 'the biggest toilet in Liverpool'. Sweeping changes were required to transform both the decrepit stadium and its team, languishing in the Second Division, to former glories.

Shankly's playing career had come to life at Preston North End, where he won the FA Cup in 1938 alongside the great Tom Finney, before embarking on a route in management which took him from Carlisle United to Huddersfield Town, via Grimsby and Workington. His arrival from Huddersfield proved to be a seminal moment in the histories of both the Reds and English football itself. An open-door policy at Leeds Road had endeared him to the Terriers' players and helped several promising youngsters make their first-team breakthrough, including Denis Law and Ray Wilson.

But Shankly feared that he had taken the Yorkshire club as far as was realistically possible due to a level of ambition that was not reciprocated within the boardroom. Efforts to sign compatriots Ian St John and Ron Yeats were rebuffed by the Huddersfield hierarchy, who claimed they could not afford even one of the pair, let alone both. His frustrations with the money men would be mirrored in the formative months of his time on Merseyside when Shankly lobbied for a reunion with Law, who had already established himself as a Scotland international. Within weeks of

taking charge as manager, attempts to persuade his paymasters to relinquish the funds to lure the 19-year-old to Anfield fell on deaf ears with the club's transfer limit capped at £18,000.

On 16 March 1960, a day before the transfer deadline, Law set a new British record with a move to Manchester City. The £55,000 fee would have made him one of the first million-pound footballers in 21st-century equivalence and stood at over three-and-a-half times the figure that Liverpool had been willing to sanction. A switch to Maine Road offered the teenage forward's talents the more befitting stage of the First Division, although Law later admitted that he had expected to pitch up on the opposite side of the newly created M62 motorway.

'Well of course Bill Shankly was the manager at Huddersfield and he had just gone to Liverpool so when they were coming in, I thought that I would be going to Liverpool, really. Unfortunately, the fee was just a bit too high, so I went to Manchester City,' he told the *Blue Moon Podcast* in 2014. 'Bill Shankly was like a father to me. He looked after me for four or five years so I was a bit disappointed at the time not to go there because he was a great manager anyway and of course you know what he did to Liverpool, took them from the Second Division right through until all the honours.'

Law scored twice in his first seven appearances for City before repaying their outlay in full with 23 goals from 43 games in the following season as Les McDowall's side finished 16th in the First Division. He can legitimately claim that his figure would be far higher had an FA Cup fourth-round tie with Luton Town not been postponed after 69 minutes. The Blues had taken a 6-2 lead at Kenilworth Road, with Law scoring all six, before referee Ken Tuck called time because of treacherous conditions. When the game was replayed four days later, both he and City were on the receiving end of a 3-1 defeat.

Law, however, would not be long in Manchester's blue side and left the following summer in a £125,000 move to Torino, at a time when British players were becoming sought-after signings for Serie A clubs. On Merseyside, Shankly set aside his

disappointment of missing out on the man he later claimed ‘could dance on eggshells’ by securing long-term targets St John and Yeats, from Motherwell and Dundee United respectively, for a combined fee of £59,500. Buoyed by the capture of players who would offer his side focal points at opposite ends of the pitch, he joked that Yeats’s strong defensive presence meant his side ‘could play Arthur Askey in goal’.

Within 12 months of the pair’s arrivals, Liverpool had ended an eight-season hiatus from the First Division. Upon their return, they renewed acquaintances with City at a time when all seemed right for the leading cities in England’s north-west. Liverpool’s name resonated throughout the world thanks to The Beatles’ early chart success while Manchester dominated the arts with the creation of Granada TV and its flagship programme *Coronation Street*, where Liverpool-born actors Jean Alexander and Peter Adamson were early stars of the long-running soap opera.

City’s start to the new First Division campaign felt like a storyline from Weatherfield’s cobbled streets as they suffered an 8-1 hammering at Wolverhampton Wanderers. McDowall’s players responded in their first of two midweek encounters with Liverpool.

Home-grown winger Neil Young spared City’s blushes as he cancelled out goals in either half from Ronnie Moran and Roger Hunt to hold their inter-city rivals to a 2-2 draw at Maine Road on 22 August 1962. A week later, the men from Moss Side headed to Anfield for a return fixture which City striker Glyn Pardoe, who died suddenly in May 2020, will never forget.

‘It was the first time I went to Liverpool and I was talking to my mum and dad outside before I went into the dressing room,’ he says. ‘I went to go in and I got stopped! They said, “Who are you?” I said, “Well I’m playing,” and they said, “Oh you can’t be!” so I had to send for somebody to come out from the club to get me in which is funny when you think about it.’

City’s side that day still contained the legendary Bert Trautmann, who had played on in the 1956 FA Cup Final despite suffering several broken vertebrae in his neck. En route to

Wembley, the German goalkeeper had played on the same ground in a fifth-round tie where Billy Liddell struck a late equaliser for Liverpool that had hit the net just after the referee blew the final whistle on a 2-1 away victory.

But Trautmann's final appearance at Anfield came in a transitional City team which married survivors from that previous trophy-winning era with a crop of upcoming local talent. Pardoe, who learned news of his first-team debut directly from the German goalkeeper, belonged to the latter category. 'When you went to Anfield, if you didn't survive for the first 20 or 25 minutes, you never got a chance,' he says. You used to go there and think, "Well, if we can survive 20–25 minutes without them scoring then we're in with a shout." When you were at the Kop end, I'll never forget it; you'd have a corner, a free kick or something like that and you'd be shouting to each other – you couldn't hear a word. It was unbelievable. That's one of the highlights of football, really; if you're playing against Liverpool at The Kop, because the noise was incredible.'

Despite falling behind to a strike from St John in the third minute, City did more than hold on against Shankly's evolving side and pulled level through Peter Dobin shortly before the half-hour. But the even score at half-time proved a false dawn as Liverpool quickly scored three times in ten minutes courtesy of a brace from Roger Hunt either side of a goal from Alan A'Court. 'That was nothing fresh at Anfield for anybody I don't think!' says Pardoe. 'They had a great side. We'd been in front a couple of times there early doors, but in the end we were very lucky if we got a point or anything like that because they were such a good team. It was very difficult scoring against Liverpool at Anfield.'

Shankly later declared the win over City to be the sign of a potential shift in the footballing landscape. With Everton taking an early lead in the First Division title race and his own team back in the top flight, he forecast that Merseyside would soon be riding the crest of a wave. 'The salad days of the north-east seem to have gone,' he said. 'Now Liverpool could be the new Soccer Mecca. I, for one, will try to make sure it is.'

His prophecy began to bear fruit at the end of a season that had been prolonged by the Big Freeze. When English football finally thawed, Liverpool had consolidated their First Division status with a respectable eighth-place finish on their maiden return while, just across Stanley Park, Harry Catterick led Everton to their sixth championship.

The picture was far bleaker in Manchester, where City's 12-season run in the First Division was finally broken as they languished second from bottom. Adding insult to injury, Manchester United, under Shankly's compatriot and friend Matt Busby, had finished one point clear of the relegation zone and won the FA Cup. Les McDowall's reign as City's longest-serving manager, a feat which is yet to be surpassed, was ended on 29 May 1963. His former assistant George Poyser was elevated to replace him in the belief that his working knowledge of the squad would give them a greater chance of securing immediate return over an external candidate. But the popular coach failed to deliver City back to the promised land by finishing sixth, 15 points adrift of the two automatic promotion spots.

They fared even worse in 1964/65 with the same shortfall but dropped down another five places. Poyser and his deputy Jimmy Meadows both resigned on 14 April, near the end of a season where the previously unthinkable idea of a merger with Manchester United had been mooted.

Put forward by vice-chairman Frank Johnson, the radical proposal would have seen City effectively absorbed into a power vacuum with Old Trafford earmarked as the more desirable home for the prospective hybrid club. Only the backlash from Maine Road devotees articulated in newspaper letter pages brought the controversial idea, which was discussed by Johnson and his Red Devils counterparts on several occasions, to a definitive end. United's march to the First Division championship seemed to confirm that Moss Side was the home to Manchester's poor relations. On and off the pitch, City were in a mess. 'We were just in a downhill spiral. We were hanging on, really,' says Glyn Pardoe, who remains the club's youngest debutant at the age of

15 years and 341 days. 'As a player, I was only a young lad, so I didn't really worry about managers and things like that. All you were worried about was playing in the first team.'

Liverpool, in contrast, never had it so good. Bill Shankly had overhauled United in the following season to earn the Reds' first league title since 1946/47 as City endured their first campaign back in the second tier. Hopes of ending a 73-year wait in lifting the FA Cup had also moved a step closer the following season after setting up a clash with Leeds United in the final, taking place just three days before a European Cup semi-final against holders Inter Milan. Ian Callaghan, who had been handed his debut by Shankly and become a mainstay of that mid-1960s side, credits the rapid turnaround in success for cementing his rapport with the Anfield crowd. 'The fans had taken to Bill Shankly like I don't know what, they really did,' he says. 'When you think about it, he came in '59; in '61/62 we came out the Second Division and then in '64 we won the First Division, and then obviously in '65 the FA Cup for the first time in our history. What he achieved in those years was just incredible.'

Shankly's body of work had drawn admirers from far and wide within English football and at least one finally appeared willing to test the strength of his bond with The Kop. In the build-up to the Reds' Wembley date, Kenneth Waite told readers of the *Daily Sketch* newspaper to 'stand by for the sensation of the season' in revealing that he had been tipped off that Manchester City were plotting an audacious move to install Shankly as Poyser's successor. 'The Maine Road bosses want a new image and are prepared to pay for it,' he wrote. Although under no illusions of the challenge that City's ambitious hierarchy faced in luring the Scot away from his adoptive home city, Waite concluded, 'It is the sort of job that appeals to Shankly, whose affection for Manchester City is something he has admitted often.'

Throughout his time at Liverpool, Shankly was routinely at odds with the club's directors. He had threatened to quit in 1962 when winger Johnny Morrissey was sold behind his back to Everton. A resignation letter had even been written before

compromise was subsequently reached whereby the board agreed no future transfers would be sanctioned without the manager's approval. But Shankly became prone to making resignation threats during the summer months, when he would grow restless as the game he lived and breathed took its annual respite. Anfield chiefs, including club secretary Peter Robinson, later termed the regular occurrence as 'Bill's summer madness'.

Whether an approach from City would have turned his head is unknown. Some journalists covering Merseyside football during that period, including John Keith, who became a trusted confidant of Shankly and his coaching staff as a reporter for the *Daily Express*, have dismissed the *Sketch's* link as a complete non-starter. Even without Shankly on board, the strength of City's ambition under chairman Albert Alexander was undeniable and eventually saw the appointment of Joe Mercer. As a player, Mercer's career had begun with his local club Ellesmere Port Town before joining an Everton team which had just clinched the 1931/32 First Division title and contained several household names in Dixie Dean, Tommy Lawton, Cliff Britton and Ted Segar. Shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, he would win the championship in his own right in addition to captaining England during wartime internationals.

Like Shankly, he moved into management immediately after hanging up his boots and placed a similar emphasis on developing exciting young teams. His three-year spell in charge of Sheffield United had started with their relegation from the First Division. In the following season, the Blades bowed out to Shankly's Huddersfield Town in a second replay in the FA Cup's third round. In December 1958, he took charge of Aston Villa where his impact was near instant with a fresh-faced team dubbed 'Mercer's Minors' narrowly missing out on a place in the FA Cup Final in consecutive seasons. A third time proved the Villains' charm as Mercer guided them back into the First Division before delivering further success by winning the inaugural League Cup in 1961. They reached the final of the competition again two years later, where they lost to Birmingham City, and he became

a firm favourite among the media to lead England at the 1966 World Cup, although he never actually applied for the vacant position. A combination of ill health and supporter unrest saw his Villa Park tenure come to an end.

Upon joining City a year later, Mercer took his health into account when deciding on the approach to take following the end to his time in the Midlands. He identified the need to work alongside a younger coach who could take a more hands-on role at Maine Road. Malcolm Allison had recently caught Mercer's eye during a session at Lilleshall, the Football Association's national training centre, after recently parting ways with Plymouth Argyle and had already attracted interest from other clubs. Raich Carter had already arranged a meeting with the former West Ham United player to discuss the possibility of joining his coaching staff at Middlesbrough when a call from Mercer brought about a sliding doors moment.

Together, he and Allison forged the perfect good cop/bad cop partnership that began to revolutionise Manchester's secondary club. 'When Joe came and Malcolm came, everything changed,' says Glyn Pardoe, who was converted into a full-back under Mercer's tutelage. 'The manner of the club, the training routines – just a completely different way of training, mindset and everything once they came.'

Allison's propensity to be outspoken worked seamlessly with the avuncular Mercer. Ian Callaghan later encountered his fellow Merseysider when they were colleagues on Littlewoods' Spot The Ball panel following the former Liverpool winger's playing retirement in 1981 and appreciates why he had been held in such high esteem at Maine Road. 'He was on Spot The Ball when I joined [Littlewoods] after I'd finished so I got to know Joe quite well,' says Callaghan. 'He'd finished managing but he had a lovely, lovely personality, he really did – and you could understand how players wanted to play for him.'

Although a 2-0 defeat to Mercer's old club Everton in the FA Cup quarter-final denied them a chance to take on Manchester United in the last four, City's rejuvenation under their new

managerial double act produced an immediate return by winning the Second Division at a canter. England's triumph at the World Cup captured the feel-good mood around the country in the summer of 1966 but it was not exclusive to the international scene. Alongside City's return to the First Division, Liverpool had wrestled the title back from Manchester United after a below-par finish of seventh the season before. Not even the disappointment of a European Cup Winners' Cup final defeat to Borussia Dortmund could puncture the growing belief that Shankly's side were set to dominate the domestic game for the foreseeable future; a view that became further validated by Anfield boasting the joint-highest number of club representatives called up for Alf Ramsey's future world champions in the form of Callaghan, Gerry Byrne and Roger Hunt. Allison had attempted to make productive use of the tournament on home soil by observing the training methods of Golden Boot winner Eusébio and his Portugal team-mates at their Manchester base.

In a bid to reaffirm their top-flight standing, City spent the summer scouring for a more dependable right-back to see through the 1966/67 campaign. Allison convinced Mercer to take a chance on Tony Book, a part-time bricklayer who he had previously coached at Plymouth Argyle, for £17,000. Book's arrival at Maine Road came just weeks before his 33rd birthday; something which had initially made Mercer reluctant to sanction the move. But the player's worth, which would grow exponentially in the decades that followed, became immediately evident when Liverpool wore their now iconic all-red strip in a first visit to Moss Side on 24 August 1966. Two days earlier, on the same ground, their reserve team had emphatically run out 9-0 winners over City. Home fans feared that their returning senior players would suffer a similar experience.

First-half goals from Jimmy Murray and Geoff Strong had left the contest delicately balanced until the closing stages, when Strong teed up Hunt with a cross that caught out the home side's defence but saw the England marksman's header strike the inside of the post and bounce out, where it was smothered by goalkeeper

Harry Dowd. In the final minute Colin Bell, signed at the tail end of City's promotion-winning season, drilled past Tommy Lawrence to record their first victory back in English football's top tier.

Allison was equally buoyed by the victory and stated, 'Liverpool will provide us with our first double,' before adding, 'I am only joking, but I meant it.' Shankly's players threw that attempt at humour back in his face when City ventured to Merseyside just six days later for the return fixture. The evening kick-off was put back by several minutes owing to the visitors' team coach becoming delayed in rush hour traffic, leaving Mercer, Allison and their players to make the final stage of their journey on foot through the streets of Anfield transporting their kit skips with them. 'I think we stayed at a hotel in Lymm and [when] we set off, it was murder,' says Glyn Pardoe. 'We couldn't get there. I think we went a couple [of goals] down straight away in the first 15 minutes. We battled back a bit, but they beat us in the end. I remember it quite well. It was incredible.'

Liverpool had followed up their Maine Road ordeal with a 3-1 reversal to Everton but took an early two-goal lead against City through Hunt and Strong before Matt Gray reduced the deficit early in the second half. Allison's showmanship after his side's win the previous week did not find favour with referee Jim Finney, who gave the assistant manager a stern lecture in the dugout midway through the clash for summoning Dave Connor while Peter Thompson received treatment on a knee injury. His crime would not have been deemed heinous in the modern game but the idea of relaying instructions to players from the touchline was still considered to be something of a cardinal sin before the advent of technical areas in 1993. City's woes were further compounded by another effort from Hunt in the 80th minute, which was offset by a late Jimmy Murray consolation.

A win each provided little comfort in a season where both sides had finished empty-handed. Liverpool had relinquished the First Division title to Manchester United with a fifth-place slump that was followed by an FA Cup fifth-round exit at the hands of

Everton. They had bowed out of the European Cup's second stage in embarrassing fashion to a Johan Cruyff-inspired Ajax, who won 7-3 on aggregate. Manchester's blue side had more grounds for optimism despite being edged out by Leeds United, managed by their former striker Don Revie, in the FA Cup quarter-final. City had assembled a team which was primed to take the fight to United and the rest of the chasing pack. Key additions such as Book, Bell and Mike Summerbee had all blended perfectly into their new surroundings alongside a crop of home-grown talents. Assisted by a cocksure Allison, confidence was brewing that Joe Mercer was on the verge of taking the club back to its previous competitive heights.

Belief had swelled within both clubs' ranks when they did battle on the opening day of the 1967/68 season. Shankly spent the summer on astute signings, with goalkeeper Ray Clemence plucked from Scunthorpe United for £18,000 alongside Chelsea striker Tony Hateley, who joined for £96,000. As the Reds' new record signing, Hateley started a fiercely contested game at Maine Road where even the fans were seemingly prepared to fight it out. Police arrested 12 people following skirmishes during the opening 15 minutes of the second half between rival supporters on an afternoon when disorder had reared an ugly head at several other English grounds, including during Everton's 3-1 win over Manchester United. On the pitch, little separated the sides as Neil Young fashioned City's best chance when he struck the underside of Tommy Lawrence's crossbar. The winger proved integral again in the 75th minute when he was tripped by Tommy Smith for a penalty which Tony Book, newly installed as captain, failed to convert.

Sensing his team may have needed freshening up, Shankly had turned to one of his former allies in attempts to improve Liverpool's recruitment strategy. Geoff Twentyman had played under the Scot when he was managing Carlisle United, where he was reinvented from a left-half into a central defender. By the time Shankly left Brunton Park, Twentyman's switch had earned him a move to Anfield in 1953, where he remained until shortly after

the arrival of his former boss. He would return to the club as chief scout in summer 1967, replacing the outgoing Norman Lowe. The first player that Twentyman recommended to Shankly was Francis Lee, who had left a firm impression by scoring in front of The Kop during Bolton Wanderers' 1-1 draw with Liverpool in the League Cup's second-round tie on 13 September. Also paying attention at Anfield that evening were Joe Mercer and Malcolm Allison.

Later that month, having disposed of Liverpool in the replay, Lee walked out on the Trotters citing the terms of a new contract offer as the reason for his unhappiness. But Twentyman's confidence in the 23-year-old's qualities could not wear down the Liverpool hierarchy's transfer parsimony, despite the soon-to-depart chairman Sid Reakes publicly declaring the club's wish to see at least one star name added to the squad. 'I rated Lee as fine a player as I'd seen,' Twentyman later told the national press. 'I reckoned he was being wasted at Bolton as an orthodox winger. I felt if we could let him run free ... he'd be brilliant. But at that time, Liverpool were not looking for big-money players and it was obvious Lee was going to cost a fortune.'

City were also on the lookout for a talented player to strengthen their own options. Everton forward Alex Young emerged as a viable target before Mercer turned attention away from his old club and on to the signing of Lee, which was completed on 9 October for a club-record £60,000. Mercer believed that the future England international would be 'the final piece of the jigsaw' in his Maine Road masterplan.

'If Liverpool had come for me, I would have gone there straight away. There's no doubt about that,' Lee told Simon Hughes in his book *Secret Diary of a Liverpool Scout*. 'I was keen to leave and because Manchester City made the first approach, although Stoke made enquiries as well, I went there. It was as simple as that. It was quite an easy decision to make. Manchester United were linked with me too but I think City had a couple of bad results and took a gamble on me because they wanted to change things round quickly. Maybe if Liverpool had been on a bad run

or something like that they would have moved quicker like City. I had no preference where I went.’

Shankly would routinely seek out Lee whenever their paths crossed to rue his mistake in not signing him. The Westhoughton-born player’s second Anfield appearance that season, this time in City colours, came at a time when both teams were neck-and-neck in attempts to overhaul United. The defending champions had taken 28 points out of their first 20 league fixtures while their closest challengers were level-pegged on 27, although the Blues sat in second place ahead of the 16 December meeting due to a superior goal average. Ian Callaghan accepts that City were emerging as a formidable prospect. ‘With the players they had playing for them and the management, I think we all thought they were going to be a force,’ he says. Without a doubt.’

Minutes before kick-off, Liverpool’s new chairman Harold Cartwright took to the stadium’s PA system to announce that the game’s start risked a potential delayed ‘owing to unforeseen circumstances’. Traffic problems had temporarily deferred the previous season’s game when City’s team coach was caught up en route to Merseyside and was also the reason for the latest setback, only this time it was the home team that had been hampered. Liverpool duo Roger Hunt and Tommy Lawrence faced a similar gridlock when travelling to the match from their Warrington homes. ‘They were coming from Culcheth, where they lived, and got stuck in traffic,’ says Callaghan. ‘When they got near the ground, they had to park the car [and walk]. We were all stripped ready and the sub, whoever it was, was going to go on but then they arrived. It was just like a quick change and then on to the pitch.’

The Football Association (FA) later hit Liverpool with a £100 fine for holding up the game’s kick-off, which was put back by two-and-a-half minutes.

City’s staggered pre-match arrival in the 1966/67 season may not have incurred a financial penalty but arguably contributed to them falling behind early in the game. The hold-up which was now affecting their opponents failed to dampen their own

approach a second time around. ‘I don’t think that bothers you,’ says Glyn Pardoe. ‘All you’re interested in is getting ready, getting out there and battling it out. It doesn’t make any difference to your mindset. It might help you a little bit because they’d be rushing and they wouldn’t be concentrating the same as us but I don’t think it made much difference.’

Psychological warfare still played its part when the teams finally took to the field. The previous weekend, City had run out 4-1 winners over Tottenham Hotspur on a snowy Maine Road pitch in a majestic performance which was billed as the ‘Ballet on Ice’. Heading into the game at Anfield, they had put together an 11-game unbeaten run. As the respective coaching outfits took their places in opposing dugouts, Bill Shankly warned Malcolm Allison. ‘You’re not going to tear our team apart like you have torn the others apart, you know!’ the Liverpool manager roared.

His assertion rang true in an even-sided first half where Alan Oakes emerged as the game’s stand-out player with Tommy Smith ranking a close second. In the 50th minute, Hunt shrugged off his previous travel sickness to drill home an opener. But Shankly’s regret at not signing Lee came back to haunt him when City’s new recruit seized upon a weak headed clearance by Emlyn Hughes and unleashed a ferocious drive to end the game with honours even. Liverpool, like many other clubs, learned the hard way about the forward’s perennial goal threat. ‘Franny was a tremendous player. He was one of the finishing touches that Malcolm and Joe bought,’ says Pardoe. ‘There was Mike Summerbee, Belly [Colin Bell], Franny: they bought three or four good players which was just a finishing touch because we had one or two young lads there that were coming through who turned out to be good players. But they were the finishing touch and Franny was a tremendous finisher. You couldn’t give him a chance because he’d score.’

The strength of the north-west rivals’ challenges did not go unnoticed. Writing in *The Guardian*, Paul Fitzpatrick surmised, ‘The fairest thing that can be said of this match is that if City were majestic, Liverpool were magnificent,’ adding, ‘But a draw was a just result too, by far the best game I have seen this season.’

As the 1967/68 season reached a tense finale between Manchester's two clubs, Shankly's side were still in with a fighting chance of recapturing the title. City had to win a final-day trip to Newcastle United and hope that their local rivals either faltered against Sunderland or failed to rack up a superior goal average to clinch the trophy nicknamed 'The Lady', on account of the statuette which sat atop it. 'Knowing Bill Shankly, everything was possible,' says Callaghan. 'He just played to win the games and you don't worry about anybody else. His attitude was just to try and win the games. That's the way he was. He was one of those people who thought "if we win the games, well fine" and if they slipped up ... It was a tight season.'

Failure of either club to secure victory would have given Liverpool the chance to overtake their regional counterparts by a solitary point by winning their two games in hand. United's pre-eminent status as the glamour of English football saw them cast as firm favourites in the media's view. But Shankly backed Mercer's team to reach the finish line over the Red Devils. 'I regard City as favourites now,' he said. 'Any team that can do what they did at Tottenham must have a great chance.'

A brace from Neil Young, Lee's 17th goal of the season and a Mike Doyle effort ensured that City would clinch the title in a 4-3 win at St James' Park. Their triumph later became lionised in a chant set to the tune of 'Hey Jude' by The Beatles, released that summer, which is still sung by the club's supporters to this day. 'I think in that mind, all we were interested in was if we could win the games and win them well, we couldn't see us getting beat,' says Pardoe. 'But it's all about [what's] in the mind. You only get chances like that very, very rarely. We had a great set of lads who were very confident in themselves and knew we had a chance, and luckily we took them.'

United's home loss to Sunderland afforded Liverpool the chance to leapfrog Matt Busby's side into the runners-up spot with their final two games but a 2-1 defeat at Stoke City meant they finished a narrow third. Following a celebratory press conference at Maine Road the day after, Mercer returned to the

family home in Chorlton to warm congratulations from his two beaten adversaries. Even in defeat, Shankly maintained his now-famous opinion, 'If you are first, you are first. If you are second, you are nothing,' and immediately telephoned Mercer to hail City's achievement. A telegram from Busby, who had played for both clubs, followed later that afternoon.

Any bonhomie became quickly forgotten at the start of the 1968/69 season. Even before the champions had stepped out at Anfield on the opening day, they were handicapped by injury to Tony Book. When City's players took a pre-match stroll around the pitch, half an hour before kick-off, they were confronted with a white-hot atmosphere as The Kop singled out Mike Summerbee for special treatment with chants of 'who the fucking hell are you?' The attempts at intimidation from English football's most famous terrace were ones which Glyn Pardoe relished. 'The fans get on your back, of course they do. That's part of it,' he says. 'That's part of the game you love because you know if their fans are getting on your back, you're doing well. If they're not getting on your back they know they're on top, they're dominating you. I used to love that. It was fantastic. That's what makes it. When you went to Liverpool and went to the Kop end, they were incredible. But it was a spur for you as well. It made you think, "Bloody hell, I'll show these." It was fantastic.'

City initially succeeded in subduing the Kopites when Neil Young broke the deadlock inside the opening ten minutes before Bobby Graham and Peter Thompson wiped out Liverpool's early deficit on an afternoon when record signing Tony Hateley had found himself dropped. It also proved a chastening encounter for the visitors. Malcolm Allison was twice reprimanded, initially by referee Kevin Howley for running on to the pitch without permission alongside trainer Johnny Hart to speak with Pardoe. His next brush with authority was slightly more severe when a policeman spoke to him about an incident near the dugout area.

'Obviously Joe [Mercer] must have thought a heck of a lot of him,' says Ian Callaghan. 'Malcolm was the one with the big cigar

and the Jack the Lad type, if you like, but obviously they made a great pairing. It was like Bill Shankly and Bob Paisley.'

Pardoe reiterates the Liverpool winger's view on the close connection within the City setup, which provoked Allison's on-field encroachment. 'Malcolm was one of us [and] Joe was one of us,' he says. 'We had that little bit of respect that Malcolm was the coach and Joe was the manager. But we were very, very close as well. We were like a family. Joe was the dad, Malcolm was the son and we were just like a family.'

Mercer acknowledged after the defeat, 'We expect everyone to be gunning for us,' and The Kop had City firmly in its crosshairs at the final whistle when their travelling supporters defiantly chanted, 'We are the champions,' only to be met with a rebuttal from the home end that 'you won't be champions anymore!'

Neither would Liverpool after finishing six points behind Leeds United in the First Division, a gap which could have been reduced in their penultimate game of the season at Maine Road. Still fresh from their FA Cup Final victory over Leicester City, who had knocked the Reds out in the fifth round of the competition, Mercer's side took the spoils against the visitors courtesy of a second-half Francis Lee strike. Even Shankly's penchant for talking up his own side took a rare back seat to extolling the qualities of their regional rivals. 'City are a young side and they have so much skill,' he said. 'They can reach a standard of skill which I doubt anyone in England can equal. They are capable of thrashing any side. While some teams are content to beat you, City want to go and thrash you. They can murder a team with their skill.'

With a new decade approaching, Liverpool and City picked up in 1969/70 where they had left off in the previous season as both sides racked up four-goal hauls in their respective openers. In their first meeting of the campaign at Anfield, Ian St John had put the hosts ahead inside two minutes before an own goal from Tommy Smith, early in the second half, gave City a foothold back into the game. A quarter of an hour later, Ian Bowyer had headed the FA Cup holders into the lead, prompting The Kop to respond with a chant

of ‘no surrender!’ With his side leading in the final ten minutes, Mike Summerbee was still on the receiving end of The Kop’s heckling when preparing to take a corner. The winger responded to his tormentors by proceeding to lower his shorts, something Glyn Pardoe claims was par for the course from his City team-mate.

‘That was part of the interaction with the crowd,’ he says. ‘It wasn’t meant nastily or anything like that. The crowd in those days had a little bit of banter and they loved it. Now you can’t say anything or do anything [like that].’

‘Mike used to go to Old Trafford and he’d go to the flag and pretend to blow his nose on it and wind them up a bit. But that was part of the game. The crowd used to wind you up. You used to go there and they’d call you a few names – “You’re not winning today, you big fat sod” – that was part of the game and part of the banter. You used to love it because if they were calling you, you knew that you were doing well.’

Summerbee’s show of a defiance did not come as a surprise to Ian Callaghan, his opposite number that afternoon, either. ‘That was Summerbee, wasn’t it really?’ he says. ‘He was, and still is, a larger-than-life character. He’s obviously still connected with City as an ambassador so it’s always a pleasure to see Mike. But I remember [after] he did that we smacked his bum!’

That act of bare-faced cheek came back to bite City as two goals in five minutes from Roger Hunt and another St John effort tipped the balance back in Liverpool’s favour. The Kop were quick to sting the player nicknamed ‘Buzzer’ of his indiscretion by chanting, ‘Show us your backside, Summerbee.’

Eight days later at Maine Road, Liverpool went in search of another two points in their duel with Everton at the league’s summit and duly ran out 2-0 winners courtesy of Scottish forward Bobby Graham. Another five weeks on, the teams met again on Moss Side in the third round of the League Cup with Alun Evans cancelling out Mike Doyle’s opener. But City rallied to a 3-2 win despite Graham striking back immediately after Bowyer had extended his side’s cushion just ten minutes after Neil Young gave them the lead.

Chris James's verdict in the following day's *Liverpool Echo* summarised the match as 'tense, exciting and sometimes angry', but Glyn Pardoe relished the occasion which took Mercer's team a step closer to tangible success in the competition later that season. 'That was a tremendous game, what the fans want. That's what it's all about, the cups,' he says. 'The league's the hardest to win, the FA Cup's the glamour one but the League Cup is just the same. It was tremendous for Manchester City to win that. I don't understand today why they don't want to win it. I suppose it comes down to the Champions League and things like that. I suppose that's altered it but when I was playing, I would want to win everything. I'm sure the players would today [as well]. It was tremendous for us and it gives you confidence and makes you feel wanted.'

In addition to the League Cup, City claimed the European Cup Winners' Cup, a feat which elevated them alongside Manchester United and Leeds as one of the first English clubs to taste Continental success. The sky appeared to be the limit for Mercer and Allison's crack team, who set their sights on completing a 'Grand Slam' of winning every possible competition at the start of the 1969/70 season. Liverpool, meanwhile, were facing a necessary overhaul after a tilt at the First Division title became short-lived as they finished four places and 15 points behind local rivals and champions Everton.

An unexpected FA Cup quarter-final exit to Second Division strugglers Watford, though, saw Shankly hit upon a moment of realisation that his team urgently needed freshening up. Seismic changes were made, with many of the players that had delivered the club's success in the previous decade discarded. Just four of those that had featured in the League Cup exit at Maine Road retained their places for City's visit to Anfield the following season on 12 January 1971. The game, staged a month before the UK entered the age of decimalisation, ended in a goalless draw and had been rescheduled from its original 22 December date on account of Liverpool's involvement in the Inter-Cities Fairs Cup the same day.

Shankly's ruthlessness paid off handsomely with Liverpool putting together a 17-match unbeaten run at home in all competitions that was further extended against City but they still failed to find a way past Joe Corrigan, a home-grown goalkeeper who was fast gaining a reputation as a future England international. Also lining up at Anfield that evening was a player that had been on the verge of moving there several seasons earlier. Freddie Hill had joined City in May 1970 for £12,000 from Halifax Town, spending double what the Third Division club had paid Bolton Wanderers just a year earlier. The forward almost joined Liverpool's ranks in March 1964 after they agreed a £45,000 deal with the Trotters before high blood pressure saw him fail a medical. Determined to get his man, Shankly sought a second opinion only for another doctor to confirm the original diagnosis.

Bolton took Hill to see a specialist who deemed him fit to play for them against the Reds on the eve of the Grand National. 'Malcolm Allison took him to Manchester City and said he would make him the fittest player in the whole world,' Shankly later said in *My Story*, his 1976 autobiography. 'But the point was that he was not fit enough to sign for Liverpool.'

After reaching the FA Cup Final and seeking to overturn a one-goal reversal in their Fairs Cup semi-final against Leeds United, two days later, the Liverpool manager took a cautious approach when his side visited Maine Road on 26 April 1971. It was one which would cost him more than maximum points as a less than full-strength line-up were held to a 2-2 draw.

Shankly had recalled several former stalwarts, including Ron Yeats, Tommy Lawrence and Bobby Graham, who scored both of their goals. Owing to their own semi-final commitments in defending the European Cup Winners' Cup against Chelsea, City's starting XI was similarly changed but still included several mainstays in Tommy Booth, Ian Bowyer, Arthur Mann and Francis Carrodus. Both clubs faced potential inquiries from the Football League for fielding sides which devalued its flagship competition. Liverpool were later fined £7,500, the second-

largest meted out to a British club at the time, after providing an unsatisfactory explanation for selecting a weakened team to the FA, who cited Shankly's stated intentions to the press before the match in their ruling.

The gamble backfired as his side suffered consecutive humiliations as they were dumped out of the Fairs Cup by Leeds and succumbed in the FA Cup Final to an Arsenal team that became the second English team to complete a league and cup double. Winds of change were blowing at both ends of the M62, but a tornado was preparing to ravage Manchester's blue half.