

DAVID CLAYTON



GREATEST GAMES MANCHESTER CITY

Introduction

GREATEST GAMES aren't always cup finals and title deciders, which, as a lifelong Blue, is just as well as I would have been struggling to fill this book! City, of course, haven't always been able to send out a starting XI full of stellar names and familiar faces and over the past 40 years or so there have been plenty of journeymen and bargain buys who've donned the sky blue jersey. For 35 years, we didn't even have a trophy to show for the 1,500 or so matches played during that period.

But as any Blue will tell you, there has been plenty of drama and many unforgettable games. It is not all about Champions League Finals and Premier League and FA Cup doubles, even though we wouldn't say no.

Our memories as City fans are filled with just as much drama and rollercoaster moments – our club more than most – and that's what I've tried to capture in this book.

While most of the games you would expect to find in a collection such as this are indeed here, there are a few curveballs that might evoke some raised eyebrows and a couple that might even raise the question, 'Why?'

Well, there's a reason behind each one and while some may be more obvious than others, I hope you enjoy reading about one or two gems that might have otherwise been forgotten and confined to a stat in a history book.

I reckon the next few years will probably yield another 20 or so new matches that could live happily in this book so with that in mind, here's to the revised edition in 2015!

Until then, here are 60 that should certainly stick in the memory banks for one reason or another.

Enjoy the book and thanks for reading it. I'll see you at the Etihad.

David Clayton, Manchester, 2013



v Newcastle United 3-3

Premier League

24 February 1996

Attendance: 31,115

MANCHESTER CITY:

Immel
Summerbee
Hiley
Curle
Symons
Brown
Clough
Lomas
Kinkladze
Quinn
Rosler

NEWCASTLE UNITED:

Srnicek
Barton
Beresford
Albert
Peacock
Howey
Clark
Ferdinand
Beardsley
Asprilla
Ginola

KEVIN KEEGAN'S Newcastle United – dubbed 'The Entertainers' by the media – rolled in to Maine Road with most of the nation willing them to keep winning games in order to stay ahead of Manchester United in the race for the Premier League title.

At the time, it was a tough one for most Blues fans! In the build-up to the game, United supporters claimed that City would roll over to help the Geordies edge towards the championship trophy but, of course, this would be anything but the case, as ensuing events would prove.

In fact, history has shown that whenever the Reds need a favour from City, for some reason, the Blues always come through. You just can't count on anyone these days ...

It was a crisp and sunny February afternoon as Alan Ball's men kicked off a game they were expected to lose on current form. With 14 defeats from 26 league matches to that point, plus failing to score in almost half of those games, it's understandable why few of the 31,115 crowd that day could have envisaged the football feast about to unfurl before their eyes.

The Blues were still struggling to recover from their awful start to the season during which they failed to win any of their first 11 Premier League games. In that same period, Newcastle had won all of their games and opened up a huge lead at the top – talk about contrasting fortunes, not

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to mention a 33-point gap! Yet this match was to prove that there wasn't a great deal between the two teams when the Blues actually fulfilled the potential that had been bubbling under the surface all season.

City, robbed of several key first-teamers including Garry Flitcroft, Peter Beagrie, Richard Edghill, Terry Phelan and Ian Brightwell through either injury or suspension, had full-back Scott Hiley making his debut and several other players who were on the periphery of the squad.

Yet despite the seemingly weakened XI, it was soon clear from the opening exchanges that City were up for the challenge with Georgi Kinkladze in majestic form.

As the two success-starved giants threw gentle jabs at each other, it was City who deservedly took the lead on 16 minutes.

Hiley made an impressive run down the wing and cut the ball back to Nigel Clough whose vicious low drive clipped Niall Quinn's heel and the ball spun agonisingly over the stranded Pavel Srnicek. There was a moment's silence and then a deafening roar as the ball nestled in the back of the net sending the packed Maine Road wild with delight.

Kinkladze was masterful, displaying the full range of his vast array of skills in midfield. The Magpies could do little to stop the little genius in this mood.

Yet, despite the hosts' dominance, City failed to add to their lead and paid the price on 44 minutes when Belgian centre-half Philippe Albert volleyed home a cracking drive from ten yards.

The second half was 15 minutes old when the battle between the volatile Faustino Asprilla and City skipper Keith Curle finally boiled over.

Asprilla's blatant elbow caught Curle full in the face but the referee either didn't see it or buckled under pressure and ignored it – a straight red should have been brandished but instead tempers were allowed to boil over – to City's cost later in the game. Two minutes later, justice was seen to be done. Kinkladze was at the heart of City's second on 62 minutes as he weaved in, out and mesmerised the visitors' defence before whipping in a low shot that Srnicek did well to keep out.

Kinky gathered the rebound and chipped the ball perfectly to the far post for Quinn to gleefully head home his fifth of the season and second of the game.

City tried to kill the game off with a quick third, but Keegan's irrepressible Magpies were soon back on level terms.

Albert, giving a masterful exhibition of attacking defence, pinged in a low cross-shot that Eike Immel could only parry allowing Asprilla – who should have been having an early bath – to screw the ball home from a tight angle for 2-2. It was a bitter pill for the players and the home fans to swallow.

Back came City again. Steve Lomas crossed from the right wing and Uwe Rosler steered home his sixth of the campaign with only 14 minutes to go and Maine Road once more erupted – surely, that was the end of the goal-feast?

Depressingly, it would be the only time that season that the Blues managed to score more than two goals. The defensive frailties that had haunted Ball's team all season would soon rear their head again and just five minutes later it was 3-3.

Newcastle's man-of-the-match Albert drilled a low drive in which deflected off Quinn and into the net for his second of the game and the sixth of a breathtaking afternoon.

Both teams had chances to win the game, but overall, a draw was a fair result on a day when Kinkladze and Albert lifted those assembled, if only briefly, to a higher plane.



v Tottenham Hotspur 4-3

4 February 2004

FA Cup fourth round replay

Attendance: 30,400

MANCHESTER CITY:

Arason
Sun
Tarnat
Distin
Dunne
Bosvelt
Wright-Phillips
Barton
Sinclair (McManaman 80)
Anelka (Macken 27)
Fowler (Sibierski 80)

TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR:

Keller
Carr
Richards
Gardner
Ziege (Jackson 60)
Dalmat
King
Brown
Davies
Postiga (Poyet 9)
Keane

IT WAS a match that was, quite simply, unforgettable, breathtaking and in terms of sheer theatre, incredible. For many, it was quintessential Kevin Keegan, with goals, drama, excitement and controversy in almost equal measure and a night that seemed to have sunk City fans' hearts to the deepest pits of despair ended with scenes of disbelief, elation and ecstasy.

For the Blues' beleaguered manager, this game was manna from heaven. The odds were stacked against the Blues following a disastrous run of just one win in 18 matches and in any language that amounted to one thing – relegation form. The Keegan magic had faded to a dull lustre and he seemed no longer capable of rallying his badly mis-firing team.

They needed a boost from somewhere – anywhere – before the damage became irreversible, though after the first 45 minutes of this match at White Hart Lane, it looked like the former England manager might be on the verge of holding his hands up and passing the reins on to somebody else.

For many, the first clash between these two sides at the City of Manchester Stadium had offered the Blues the best chance of progressing into the fifth round. A 1-1 draw suggested that chance had passed and within only two minutes of the replay in North London, City faced a monumental challenge as Ledley King showed a sleight of foot not usually associated with central

defenders as he cut inside Jihai Sun and fired a spectacular shot past Arnie Arason into the roof of the net.

There was worse to come for City, too. Robbie Keane latched on to a superb through ball on 19 minutes, controlling the pass and then lifting the ball over Arason to make it 2-0 and then Nicholas Anelka limped off with just 27 minutes played – surely the Blues' night couldn't get any worse?

Joey Barton's over-the-top challenge on Michael Brown a couple of minutes before the break earned him a yellow card and from the resulting free kick Christian Ziege curled a beautiful shot into the top corner to put the hosts – it appeared – into the next round.

The whistle blew for half-time but Rob Styles's work wasn't over as Barton continued to argue about his booking. Despite warnings from the referee, he persisted and was shown the red card as the rest of the team made its way down the tunnel.

Down to ten men, trailing 3-0 and playing terribly – no wonder Keegan's hair had gone grey.

Damage limitation seemed the order of the day. Spurs looked set for a cricket score and a five- or six-goal thrashing could have spelled the end for the Blues' enigmatic manager.

But something strange happened. City came out and began to play football and it seemed to take Spurs back a little. If fortune really did favour the brave, the Blues were going to have to dig deep within their reserves of courage and derring-do if they were to salvage a little pride and when a free kick was awarded 40 yards out just three minutes after the break, a chance to repair some of the damage presented itself.

The excellent Michael Tarnat floated the ball towards the six-yard box where Spurs, perhaps too cocksure, allowed a galloping Sylvain Distin enough space to fashion a header – of sorts – past Kasey Keller to make it 3-1.

Not long after Spurs came within a whisker of making it 4-1 as Ziege fired in another superb free kick, only to see it strike the bar and Keane miss the chance to head home the rebound as Arason scrambled back to stop the ball on the line. Arason, making his debut for City, was immense and would make another two incredible saves to keep the hosts at bay.

With almost 70 minutes gone, City were still clinging on at 3-1 down. As the ball was cleared by the Spurs defence, Paul Bosvelt hit a low drive that

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span wickedly off Anthony Gardner and past Keller to make it 3-2. Suddenly the White Hart Lane crowd sounded anxious and the players responded accordingly, mis-placing passes and looking increasingly nervous.

The 1,500 or so City fans who had made the journey south roared on their ten men and, with ten minutes to go, Shaun Wright-Phillips was put clean through and as Keller raced off his line, he lifted the ball gently past him to make it 3-3. It was a fantastic comeback and even if Spurs had grabbed a winner, proved the team were capable of much better things, but there was still one more twist to come.

With the clock ticking past 90 minutes, City pressed for an unlikely winner. Extra time beckoned and for the home team, a chance to regroup and restore sanity.

The ball was deep in the Spurs half when it found its way to Tarnat. The cultured German lifted a cross towards the back post where Jon Macken had an awful lot to do, but the former Preston man leapt up, made a terrific connection and then watched as his header sailed past Keller and into the net – cue pandemonium.

The City fans, players and management went wild and the Tottenham players looked at each other in total disbelief. How could they have thrown it away? Three goals up, 45 minutes to play and the opposition down to ten men.

The whistle went moments later, completing one of the greatest comebacks of all time and one of the most exciting FA Cup matches ever.

As Keegan succinctly pointed out afterwards, 'They'll be talking about this match long after we've all gone.'

Fortunately, most of us are still here, Kev, but we are, indeed, still talking about it.