



SIXTY YEARS  
**A RED**

...AND COUNTING!

*A Lifetime's Passion*

BRIAN BARWICK OBE

Foreword by Jamie Carragher

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## 1961/62 ... IT IS IN THE BLOOD

THERE ARE many ways in which the strength, quality and depth of devotion to your favourite football club can be measured. It has always been the stuff of a good pub debate or playground argument. Who is the better supporter? And why?

One person's undying loyalty to their team is another person's casual pastime. One person's 'never miss a match' is another person's 'never miss them when they're on the telly'. One fan's connection to their team is seminal to their well-being; another uses it as a convenient icebreaker at a party.

Some follow their team to the ends of the earth; others follow their progress from the comfort of their favourite armchair. Some live and breathe their heroes from cradle to grave; others knock it on the head with a dismissive 'they're all paid too much money these days anyway'.

Some fans would sell their car to get a ticket for a big game, whilst others would sell their ticket to get the car! There are those who would never be seen *not* wearing their team's colours – while some others wouldn't be seen dead in them.

There are no rules, nor do there need to be. Some people proudly say they know where they fit on the club loyalty 'chart'. Others have long stopped caring. Some only sing 'when they're winning'; others don't even know the words to the songs. And,

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of course, the ways to follow your chosen team have expanded over the years, with the likes of cheap air travel, global broadcasting and social media adding greater opportunities and choices to the ways you can express that all-important support for your club.

It is no longer about cutting your fixture list out of the newspaper and working out how many games you will get to see – it may be more about how many sports channels you can afford to subscribe to.

One thing is for certain: you cannot start following your team until you are born! Then the slow burn to becoming a passionate or a ‘part-time’ supporter begins. Or the preset propaganda plugs in exceedingly early. The decision may be made for you – generations of your family will expect you to follow where they have already been.

And that’s how it was for me, born 21 June 1954, in a city almost defined by its love of the beautiful game – Liverpool. A city with an unquenchable appetite for football, with clubs who have ruled the roost at special times in their illustrious histories, with famous players, legendary managers, unforgettable matches and special stadiums – all part of a wonderful tapestry woven over the last 130 years or so.

I popped up after the end of the 1953/54 season – a unique one, with Liverpool being relegated to the Second Division and Everton promoted to the First Division. Not a very auspicious start for what turned out to be a lifetime’s passion.

Overall, the 1950s was a decade of underachievement for Liverpool – starting with an FA Cup Final defeat against Arsenal, then some embarrassing FA Cup losses against lower opposition, including non-league Worcester City, a perennial failure to be promoted back to the First Division season after season, a record defeat and a record post-war low home league attendance of only 11,976.

Having been relegated as the bottom team in the First Division, the club's fortunes continued to slide in the 1954/55 season – beaten 9-1 by Birmingham City, they ended the campaign with a 6-1 hammering at Rotherham, finishing a club-record low 11th in the Second Division.

Over the next six seasons, with a lack of crucial investment in the team, and a playing staff that boasted bloated quantity over real quality, promotion remained tantalisingly out of reach – third, third, fourth, fourth, third and third in an era when only the first two teams went up.

During this decade, Liverpool did have a hero – Scotsman Billy Liddell, a magnificent one-club man who was also at times a one-man forward line. 'Liddellpool', as the Reds would often be dubbed. Mild-mannered Liddell would combine learning accountancy with adding to his goal tally week by week, his fearsome shooting prowess being one of his standout abilities.

Billy would play 534 games for Liverpool and score 228 goals. He was one of the club's special players – somebody who could comfortably sit alongside Sir Kenny Dalglish and Steven Gerrard as all-time Liverpool greats.

I only ever saw him play once in a testimonial match at South Liverpool in 1967. Mind you, it was a proper contest – Hungary and Real Madrid's Ferenc Puskás captained the opposition.

If Billy Liddell was Liverpool's immediate post-war star man, it was a fellow Scotsman who joined the club in December 1959 that sent the club into orbit.

His name was Bill Shankly. His name will be threaded like a golden ribbon throughout this book but his contribution to Liverpool Football Club's change of status cannot be matched.

His forceful, energetic, engaging, persuasive style took the club and its directors, players and supporters on a remarkable

journey in his 15-year reign as manager. And 'reign' is probably the right description for this humble son of Glenbuck, Ayrshire. He made a tight-fisted Liverpool board that lacked ambition back his judgement in buying players, had those players run through brick walls for him, and had supporters who hung on his every word.

As Liddell stepped out of the limelight, Shankly stepped into it. The Scotsman's first full season, 1960/61, ended with the Reds finishing third – again. But at the end of that season and during the close-season break, Shankly's persistence in wanting to improve the quality of his squad saw him land two fellow Scotsmen, Ian St John from Motherwell and Ron Yeats from Dundee United.

Expensive but essential, St John and Yeats became pivotal figures in helping move Liverpool – the club and the team – from the mundane to the magnificent. Star man Shankly had set Liverpool on a path to promotion and beyond.

The 1961/62 season finally delivered the Reds that vital step back into the big time in English football. They won ten of their first 11 league games, scoring 31 goals and conceding only four in the process. They were scoring goals for fun – Roger Hunt would end the season with 41 league goals, and a trip to the 1962 World Cup in Chile. The Reds ended the season having notched 99 league goals and 105 in total.

This was the season I made my first matchday trips to Anfield as a seven-year-old schoolboy.

My dad was a keen Liverpoolian but his work in the Merseyside police force often meant he was working at the matches rather than watching from the terraces.

Anyway, there was an obvious yet important choice to make first. Liverpool or Everton? Red or Blue? Two teams in the city – which was to be mine? I'm not completely sure why I ended up a Red. My dad followed them but not with a

huge passion. I do have faint memories of wearing a sleeveless, V-necked, red football shirt as a young infant.

Perhaps the dye was cast. I now speak as somebody who always buys red toothbrushes, drives a red car and, in my early 20s, was the proud owner of a pair of bright red shoes, until my boss told me to dress more appropriately in the office.

Moving on. I do not think anybody can be sure when they saw their first match. Especially, if it was when you were still in short trousers, your bedtime was eight o'clock and your favourite TV programme was *Four Feather Falls*, but everything points to 28 October – Liverpool v Leyton Orient – being my first visit to Anfield to see the Reds play for real. I still have the programme from the game, along with thousands of others now, and scrawled on its front cover is the final score – 3-3.

I now know it is sacrilege to write on the front of a football programme – ‘sof’ (score on front) as avid collectors disapprovingly describe it. Anyway, 3-3 it was, and two goals by Roger Hunt and a late equaliser from Tommy Leishman secured a point against the London side, who would finish runners-up behind Liverpool in the table.

After the game, my dad and I dropped in for some tea at my auntie's house which was situated on the junction of Anfield Road and Priory Road – just a long throw-in from the stadium itself.

Before the end of the season, I went to Anfield again to see Liverpool play Preston North End. Despite having Ian St John (and Preston defender Tony Singleton) sent off, it turned out a 4-1 win for the Reds, over a team they had played five times during the season, including a three-match FA Cup saga which the Lancastrian side ultimately won.

Starring for Preston in those games was a young winger called Peter Thompson. Shankly had seen enough of the tricky flank man in that series of matches to sign him ahead of the

1963/64 campaign. Peter Thompson would be a special talent for Liverpool over the next nine seasons – and become one of my favourite players. St John's suspension meant he was not on duty when Liverpool secured their place back in the First Division with a 2-0 win over Southampton at a sodden Anfield in April. Two first-half goals from the Scotsman's replacement, Kevin Lewis, sent Liverpool up on a day when the heavens opened above Anfield.

It rained and rained and rained. But whilst the day was grey and dismal, and the crowd figure of 40,410 seriously affected by the atrocious weather, the after-match scenes of celebration were memorable. Literally singing in the rain.

Liverpool were back in the big time – and I was about to go on a lifetime's journey with them.

It would involve huge highs, the odd devastating low; a bus ride, a train journey or an overseas flight – a vast number of passport stamps, scrapbooks, programmes, tickets and autographs. It would take me up the road and around the world. I would meet many of my heroes and rarely be disappointed.

For a spell, my professional life would give me an 'access all areas' to life at Anfield and yet I never lost some of a real fan's wonderment. And it was a journey that still is ongoing – a constant pleasure in what's been a fast-moving life. Millions of memories spread over 60 years. Red toothbrushes, red cars, red shoes – and a red scarf and bobble hat to get it all started.

Off we go.

***Kop That** – Bill Shankly saw only three of his fellow countrymen capped in his time at Anfield: Tommy Lawrence, Ron Yeats and Ian St John were the spine of his team, but they amassed just 19 caps whilst on Merseyside.*