



# When You're SMILING

Life, Love, Leicester City  
and Football's Greatest Fairytale

Matt Bozeat



Foreword by Steve Walsh

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**S M I L I N G**

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I BLAME the parents.

Dad was always doing jobs, Mum was forever cooking, cleaning or shopping.

Ours was a busy house.

We weren't rich and we weren't poor. Above all, we were an honest family. We never had anything we couldn't afford and we never pretended to be anything other than who we were.

We were from Leicester, so we supported Leicester City.

Only the hard kids at my school supported City.

The hard kids and me.

Perhaps you had to be tough to support City – or perhaps you became tough by supporting City.

Perhaps all those Monday mornings spent listening to people with thick Leicester accents taunting you for Leicester losing does that to you. I could see how walking to school glowing from your team's latest win

was preferable to dreading another day of mockery, but how much does it mean to you if you come from Leicester and support Liverpool because Liverpool always seem to win and Leicester always seem to lose?

How much does it mean if you always get what you want?

I was never hard and supporting Leicester didn't make me any harder, I don't think, but I was always stubborn – and proud.

Why wouldn't you want to come from Leicester? To me, it seemed like an exciting place to come from.

The city centre was full of big, tall buildings that stretched into the sky, lots of people and shops. It could be a bit scary sometimes, but it was exciting, too.

Every time I went into Leicester city centre, I sensed something might happen. I might see a Leicester City player or a police car screaming its way through the traffic, like you saw on the television.

Not everywhere was as exciting as Leicester, I discovered. Nothing seemed to happen where my grandparents lived, for example.

We drove through the town centre without me even realising and there was no Football League ground for more than 50 miles.

What sort of place was this?

So rather than spend their evenings and weekends watching football – come to think of it, Nan may not have

been that keen anyway – my grandparents relied on the television for entertainment.

On one of the three channels you might see Engelbert Humperdinck singing, Willie Thorne playing snooker, David Gower effortlessly swatting a cricket ball to the ropes or, best of all, Gary Lineker sticking one in the back of the net.

All from Leicester.

Who wouldn't want to come from such a place?

Even if you never went to a Leicester City match, if you grew up there in the 1980s you knew a couple of things about them.

Firstly, they were too good for the Second Division, but not good enough for the First.

They belonged in a First Division-and-a-half, somewhere between the two.

The other truism stayed with them for years. 'They beat the top teams, lose to the rubbish teams.'

This was all proved in the space of a few months in 1980, around the time Leicester City came into my life, smacked me on the leg and frightened the living daylights out of me.

\* \* \*

I ONLY went to the football ground to keep Dad company when he went to collect some tickets and I ended up with a giant spouting absolute gibberish at me.

The giant was Leicester manager Jock Wallace, but what on earth was he saying?

What he was saying – in a thick Scottish accent – was, ‘Who do you support?’

Dad told him, ‘Leicester.’

I said, ‘Ipswich.’

‘Why don’t you support Leicester?’

Dad tried to act as a peacemaker between his five-year-old son and the fearsome Leicester manager.

‘He supports Leicester really.’

I just sat there, wanting to go home.

So I didn’t become friends with Leicester’s manager – we could have taught each other English perhaps – and the affection for Ipswich lasted only a few more months. I liked Ipswich because they were good, and then Leicester started being good. Good, but inconsistent.

There was the embarrassment of an FA Cup defeat at non-league Harlow Town followed by the joy of winning the Second Division and the toppling of the European champions.

\* \* \*

THE CHOICE facing everyone growing up in Leicester at that time seemed to be: Leicester City or Liverpool?

Really, it had to be Leicester.

If you ever left Leicester for holidays or family visits – and I wasn’t sure everyone did – you told people that’s

where you were from. Did you then wag a finger and say, 'Oh, but I support Liverpool.'

Why? Did you want to be someone else?

If you were from Leicester, surely they had to be your team? It seemed straightforward enough to me, but for others, it wasn't as simple as that.

They had a choice to make between Leicester and Liverpool.

They had The Beatles, we had Showaddywaddy.  
1-0 to Liverpool.

They had Anfield, we had Filbert Street. 2-0.

They had Kenny Dalglish, we had Andy Peake.

Peake chose Leicester.

Peake was one of ours, a lad from just down the road in Market Harborough, who grew up supporting Leicester and then lived out all our dreams for us by playing for his team – and scoring a goal that helped them win their biggest match of the season.

The 1980/81 season started with losses against Ipswich Town and Everton and nobody envisaged City's first points coming from their next match.

Liverpool, champions of England and Europe, were coming to Filbert Street.

Introducing the highlights on ITV's *The Big Match*, Brian Moore told viewers Leicester were 'a young side, average age 21, and, well, we all know about Liverpool.'



Liverpool's defenders didn't appear to know much about Peake or if they did, they weren't too bothered about him. They just stood and watched as he got the ball around the centre circle, put his head down and set off towards their goal. He kept running and running and no Liverpool players seemed to notice.

Possibly annoyed that nobody seemed to think he could shoot from range, Peake decided to try his luck and left commentator Hugh Johns gasping disbelievingly, 'He's beaten one of the greatest goalkeepers in the world from 30 yards,' after the ball flew past Ray Clemence's fingertips.

Martin Henderson made it 2-0 and afterwards, Wallace made the bold prediction that his team could go on to win the First Division.

They didn't. They finished one place off the bottom.

But Leicester did have the satisfaction of twice beating Liverpool that season, handing them their first loss at Anfield in 85 games by a 2-1 scoreline.

That thunderbolt against Liverpool at Filbert Street would make life much easier for Peake years later after he became a policeman. He said that drivers initially furious at being pulled over would recognise him and want to reminisce rather than argue.

\* \* \*

I WASN'T at the Liverpool game or any other game that season. I was too young.

The 1981/82 season would be my first supporting Leicester. I was seven years old and as excited as it was possible to be.

Wrexham were the opposition in Leicester's first home fixture and by the time the game kicked off, I knew as much about their players as the manager, having spent hours studying the pages of my Panini sticker album.

Joey Jones, my stickers revealed, had twice won the European Cup with former club Liverpool. He was surely the best player either side had. Leicester looked to be up against it. This would be a confusing day.

We saw the sign for 'Leicester Football Club' and walked straight past it.

That was the rugby ground, Welford Road. The walk to Filbert Street went on.

This really was the most momentous of occasions. The Filbert Street ground was the biggest building I had ever seen, I had never seen so many people in the same place at the same time and once Dad had helped push me through the turnstiles, everywhere I turned I bumped into knees.

The smell wafting from the toilets was revolting and everyone seemed to be smoking and angry.

Nobody I knew smoked and was angry. I thought you went to watch football because you enjoyed it. I thought it was what grown-ups did for fun. I wasn't quite sure what to make of it all.

There was the smell of tobacco and toilets, the angry faces and the noise.

The sound of 12,905 football supporters was the loudest thing I had ever heard. By far. I wanted my mum. Not that my mum – or any woman – would surely ever be seen at such a place.

I noticed there weren't many women there and I didn't blame them. Filbert Street was an angry, filthy and noisy place to spend a Saturday afternoon.

Even when they were happy, Leicester supporters were angry. They were just angry with someone else. I have a vague recollection of Stewart Hamill scoring the only goal of the game and Leicester supporters – of whom I was now one – turned their anger away from the officials and players and instead towards the small gathering of Wrexham supporters.

Fingers were stabbed at them and the chant was 'one-nil, one-nil, one-nil'.

Naïve as I was, I knew this wasn't done to let any Wrexham fans who may have missed the goal know that Leicester had taken the lead. That wasn't the tone of the chanting – or the afternoon as a whole. 'One-nil, one nil' wasn't followed by a helpful description of the goal, just more shouts of 'one-nil, one-nil' and more finger pointing.

I felt sorry for the outnumbered Wrexham supporters. They had travelled all this way, their team were losing and

thousands of fingers were being jabbed at them, which wasn't going to make them feel any better.

Did I really want to be a Leicester City supporter? We seemed like a horrible bunch.

Of course, subsequent visits to Filbert Street proved that Leicester supporters weren't bad people who gloated over supporters who had the misfortune to follow a team not as good as theirs.

They were just football supporters, and when your team scores, you have to let the other team's supporters know all about it.

As for Joey Jones, who was supposed to be the best player on the pitch, I didn't even notice him.

\* \* \*

I'VE FOUND I take disappointment better than most.

The reason? Because few disappointments compare with a disappointment I had to accept when I was seven years old.

The realisation that I was never going to play football for Leicester City.

Only when I was kicking a ball around by myself could I play for Leicester. The moment others joined in, I realised I wasn't going to be Gary Lineker, whom everyone wanted to be because he scored all the goals.

Perhaps I could be Mark Wallington ...

\* \* \*

ASK ANY football fan what they knew about Leicester City around this time and they probably would have said, 'Nicknamed "The Foxes" ... play at Filbert Street ... good goalkeepers ... never won the FA Cup.'

Wallington was the latest of the 'good goalkeepers' for which Leicester were known.

We always seemed to have good goalkeepers, starting with Gordon Banks.

So good was Banks he stopped possibly the greatest player of them all, Pele, scoring what seemed to be a certain goal.

That was at the 1970 World Cup and by then, Banks had left Leicester, but he was a Leicester player when he had won the World Cup four years earlier.

After Banks came Peter Shilton, who made his Leicester debut at 16 years old, dislodged Banks from the England team and was then sold to Stoke.

After Shilton, came Wallington.

For my generation – born in 1974, first game in 1981 – he was our goalkeeper and, what's more, Wallington seemed glad about it.

He smiled quite a lot and so loved was Wallington, if you ever criticized him, you felt apologetic within seconds.

\* \* \*

THE FIRST rule of schoolboy football is that you stick the rubbish players in goal.

If you're rubbish in every other position and fat, you are certain to be the goalkeeper.

That was me.

Because I was carrying a few extra pounds, I filled rather more of the goal than others and I was quite happy to throw myself around in the mud.

Who doesn't like throwing themselves around in the mud?

To start with, Banks, Shilton and Wallington probably only went in goal because it gave them an excuse to throw themselves around in the mud. Or perhaps they were rubbish in every other position, like I was.

Mum wasn't keen on me throwing myself around in the mud, but there were times when it was worth it.

The Save From Andy Spence was one such occasion. It was followed by much back slapping and hair ruffling, the sort of attention I wasn't used to, and there were whispers afterwards I might even get a game for the school team ahead of Nicky Marshall.

Told you it was a good save.

Nicky didn't fill the goal like I did – he was skinny – but he got around the goal rather quicker and I never did get to play for the school team.

Later, I decided to be a new Gary McAllister.

He had arrived from Motherwell, along with Ali Mauchlen, and proved to be a classy and confident playmaker.

'Gary Mac', as he was nicknamed, made it look effortless and when you're a stone or two overweight and rather uncoordinated, effortless is the look you want.

Except McAllister didn't just stand around in the centre circle ping-pong pinpoint passes into the path of centre-forwards and taking lots of breathers in between.

One match, I watched his every move and discovered he did a lot of running as well and, upon learning that, I gave up on playing for Leicester City.

Almost.

\* \* \*

EVERY SCHOOLBOY knew the dates 1066 (Battle of Hastings) and 1966 (England won the football World Cup).

I also memorised 1949, 1961, 1963 and 1969.

They were the years Leicester City reached the FA Cup Final – and lost.

The 1949 final was lost to Wolverhampton Wanderers 3-1 and the subsequent defeats were against Tottenham Hotspur (2-0), Manchester United (3-1) and Manchester City (1-0). Mal Griffiths got Leicester's goal in 1949 and Ken Keyworth was the goalscorer against Manchester United.

I haven't had to look up those facts for years.

The FA Cup Final was one of the highlights of the year, a day when the country stopped to watch a football match.

There were only four television stations – three before November 1982 – and two screened the FA Cup Final live, after several hours of build-up that included interviews on the team coaches, daft quizzes and cameos from B-list celebrities.

There was also blanket coverage in national and local newspapers, so it was hard to escape what happened at Wembley Stadium every May.

Even my big brother got excited about the FA Cup. He had told me Santa Claus didn't exist, but he believed in the magic of the FA Cup.

I believed in it too after what I saw at Filbert Street on Saturday 6 March 1982.

\* \* \*

*A QUESTION Of Sport*, BBC One's platform for sports stars to show how desperately unfunny they are, once asked, 'In which FA Cup quarter-final were there seven goals scored – and two goalkeepers didn't concede any?'

I knew the answer instantly. I was there and 40 years and hundreds of matches later, it remains my favourite ever ...

Teams from the middle and bottom half of the Second Division usually exited the FA Cup by the time there were only eight left, but in 1982, Leicester and Shrewsbury were in the draw for the quarter-finals – and paired against each other.



As always, Wallington was in goal for Leicester, his 331st successive appearance for the club, but after a collision with Shrewsbury striker Chic Bates left him fuzzy-headed, he didn't know much about the goals that flew past him to put the visitors 2-1 ahead.

Wallington had to be dragged off the pitch and, with no goalkeeper on the substitutes' bench in those days, Jock Wallace looked for a volunteer.

Alan Young was a Scottish centre-forward snapped up by Leicester after he had dumped us out of the FA Cup a couple of seasons earlier, and such was his reputation, when Young volunteered to go in goal, nobody fancied arguing with him.

There was a comical look about Young in the green goalkeeper's jersey that he seemed to acknowledge by grinning and we prayed Larry May and John O'Neill would keep the ball away from him, and that Wallington would recover.

Minutes later, there was panic at the *Leicester Mercury* newspaper offices a couple of miles away.

Reporters heard a noise so huge they thought a bomb had gone off in the city centre.

That wasn't the story.

What they heard was the sound of around 29,000 Leicester fans showing their pleasure at the sight of Shrewsbury defender Colin Griffin rolling the ball past his own goalkeeper to tie the score at 2-2.

Perhaps if we all kept smiling and cheered loudly enough, this would still be Leicester's day after all ...

It didn't look likely after stand-in goalkeeper Young was dazed and had to be helped off the pitch. With Wallington still seeing stars, Leicester were left looking for a *third* goalkeeper. There were taller options than the 5ft 9ins Steve Lynex, but he pulled on the jersey confidently enough and started shouting at defenders and bouncing the ball as any goalkeeper would.

Even so, I willed Wallington to recover.

He didn't.

The next change between the posts was Young returning for Lynex after ten minutes in the treatment room and Lynex went back to doing what he was paid to do. His cross picked out Jim Melrose and he poked home for 3-2, a goal that knocked the stuffing out of Shrewsbury. Lineker grabbed a fourth and Lynex crossed for Melrose to put the finishing touches to a scarcely believable afternoon with a header that made it 5-2.

\* \* \*

IF YOU supported Liverpool, you drooled over internationals who cost fortunes.

If you supported Leicester City, you admired spirit. It was spirit that won that game against Shrewsbury.

How many other teams could have done what my team did that afternoon?

No amount of money could buy what Leicester showed that afternoon.

Since the 1960s, Leicester supporters had sung *When You're Smiling*, a song written in the 1920s and made famous by Louis Armstrong.

The song's message was that if life's mishaps are met with a smile, your fortunes can change.

That was proved against Shrewsbury, a match that, for me, proved Leicester City – and therefore those who support them – were made of good stuff.

\* \* \*

TO THE disappointment of this seven-year-old, that sprit wasn't enough against Tottenham Hotspur in the semi-finals at Villa Park.

Villa Park, I discovered, was a much, much bigger ground than Filbert Street and FA Cup semi-finals were much, much bigger games than Division Two fixtures.

People were everywhere and they were all going to the match. My Larry May badge pinned to my jacket, I stuck my chest out and tried to sound grown up.

A Spurs team including Argentine World Cup-winners Ricky Villa and Ossie Ardiles didn't need a helping hand, but we gave them one anyway. The second goal in a 2-0 defeat was a calamitous own goal by Ian Wilson.

I'm not sure how disappointed I was afterwards. Every Leicester fan knew their team had never won the FA Cup,

## CHAPTER 1

but I didn't have any scars from previous heartbreaks and, having got so close, all I could think was, 'Surely it will happen soon?'