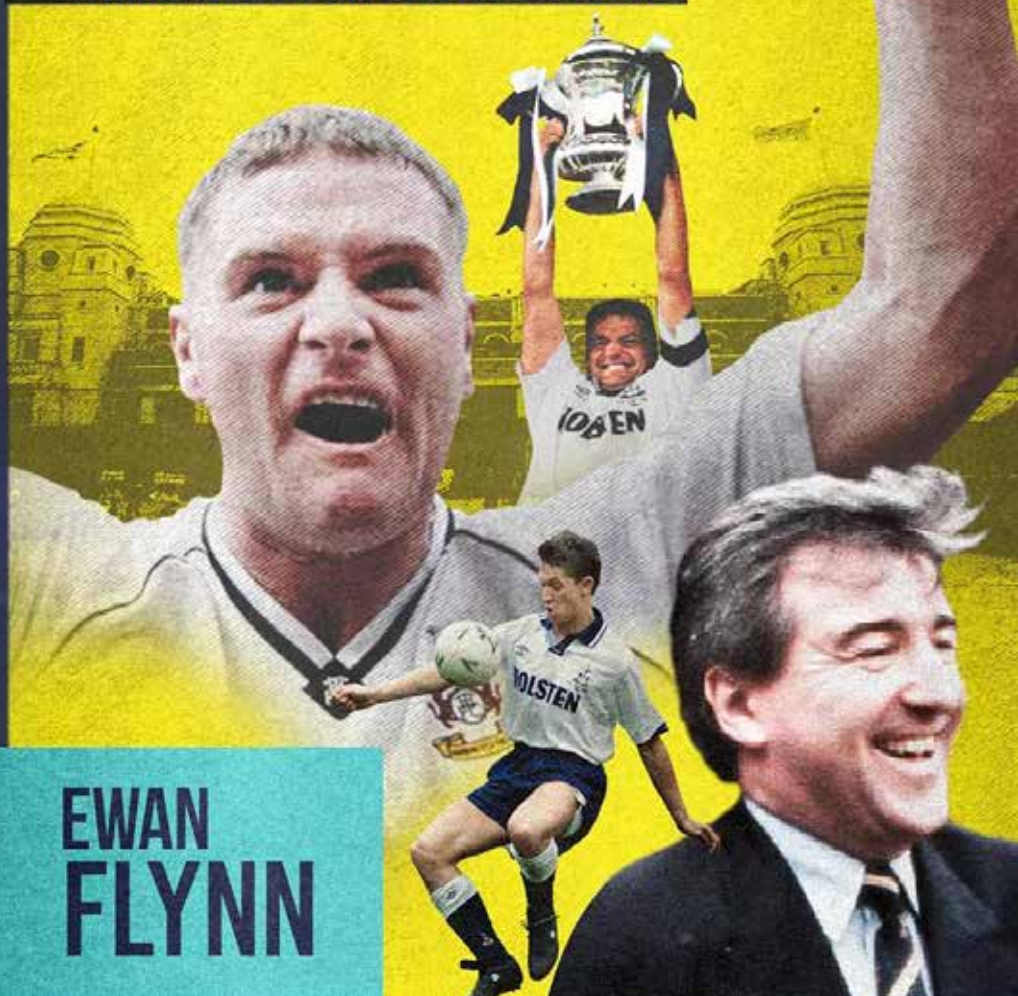


"I loved this book, and I loved remembering a time when Tottenham did win things when the year ends in one - all Spurs fans will." Max Rushden

WHEN THE YEAR ENDS IN ONE

HOW TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR'S 1991
FA CUP WIN SAVED THE CLUB AND
TRANSFORMED ENGLISH FOOTBALL



EWAN
FLYNN

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Prologue

DRESSED IN his dark suit and the formal club tie he never particularly relishes wearing, Terry Venables strides purposefully on to the lush Wembley turf, determined to rally his players who have gathered in a daze near the centre circle. His face, usually so demonstrative, offers no tell of the panic he must be fighting to suppress. Barely 15 minutes of the 1991 FA Cup Final have elapsed, and Venables's Tottenham have just fallen behind. Far more damagingly, however, Paul Gascoigne, the team's totemic midfielder, whose preternatural performances have – against a backdrop of existential crisis for the club – somehow enabled Spurs to navigate a path to this, English football's most revered occasion, is being loaded on to a stretcher. Gascoigne's tearful departure, with a career-threatening injury, appears to snuff out hope of an unparalleled eighth FA Cup triumph. Worse still, it obliterates the deal for the player – scheduled to complete immediately after the final – promising emaciated Tottenham a world-record transfer fee from Lazio. Without this injection of funds to tackle the club's mountainous debt, the Midland Bank's receiver can no longer be expected to stay his hand. The team will be broken up, Venables will leave, and what will happen to Tottenham Hotspur Football Club from there is anybody's guess.

Whoever said, 'It's lucky for Spurs when the year ends in one'?

Chapter One

Gazzamania

SUPERFICIALLY, THE summer of 1990 seemed ripe with promise for Tottenham Hotspur. The club had finished the 1989/90 campaign third in the First Division. After two full seasons in charge, the declaration Terry Venables had made when first arriving as manager about bringing the league title to White Hart Lane appeared far less outlandish than it had. Not least because Spurs always seemed to prosper in seasons where the year ended in one. They'd won the FA Cup as a non-league side in 1901, then repeated the feat in 1921; 1951 had been marked with the club's first First Division title, while 1961 saw Spurs complete a historic 'double'. A League Cup followed in 1971, while the FA Cup had been captured again in 1981.

Moreover, England's thrilling run to the 1990 World Cup semi-finals gave succour to the entire domestic game. At last, a chance appeared to be presenting itself to English football whereby its desperate image of death, disaster and male violence, played out in the stands of decaying Victorian-built stadiums, could be decisively shed.

The poster boy for this optimistic new dawn was Spurs' Paul Gascoigne. His potent blend of on-pitch panache allied with raw, unrefined charisma and vulnerability had taken an audience of over 25 million people on a life-affirming journey that ended with his tears in Turin as England lost to West Germany on penalties. It's a remarkable figure given that only

five years earlier, in the wake of the revulsion caused by the Heysel disaster and the horror of the Bradford City stadium fire, both the BBC and ITV had contemplated whether to let club football slip quietly from their schedules. As Neil Harman wrote in his 90/91 season preview for the *Daily Mail*, 'Football needs a groundswell of good feeling, not the bitterness that has followed its leap from one terrible tragedy to another. Perhaps Gazza can cleanse us ... Reach for the sky, lads – lead them there, Gazza.'

In the monolithic media landscape of the early 1990s, the chronicling of Gascoigne's meteoric rise to white-hot fame was unavoidable. Only Princess Diana could rival the celebrity he suddenly 'enjoyed'. The term 'Gazzamania' was quickly coined to describe the phenomenon. As Brian Glanville, writing in *The Times*, sagely observed ahead of the new season, 'Gazza is public property now, with all the attendant risks.' Icelandic defender Gudni Bergsson, who arrived at Spurs soon after Gascoigne had signed in 1988 and was billeted in the same Waltham Abbey hotel while they adjusted to London life, explains the new reality after the World Cup. 'After Italia 90, we went on a pre-season tour of Ireland. The attention and pressure on Gazza, wow, it was mayhem. Gary Lineker was more used to that side of things than the rest of the squad. Those two were John Lennon and Paul McCartney, whereas the rest of us combined weren't even George Harrison and Ringo. We didn't matter at all.' The team's goalkeeper, Erik Thorstvedt, laughs at the memory. 'Suddenly, Gazza was the most popular person in Britain, and he's having to be smuggled in and out of the training ground in the trunk of cars and stuff like that. It was absolutely crazy.'

The thirst for a glimpse of Gascoigne reached far beyond the British Isles. Tottenham's opening league game of the season versus Manchester City – at a sold-out White Hart Lane – reportedly attracted a 300 million worldwide television audience. Obliging, he supplemented two fine Lineker goals

with a late solo effort of his own in a 3-1 win. Commentator Jonathan Pearce recalls travelling to Sunderland with the official Tottenham party to cover their next fixture. “The chairman, Irving Scholar, let us go up there with the team. I think we flew into Newcastle. After the game, we got on the coach from Roker Park to the airport, and Gazza only had his shorts on. He’d given everything else – kit, tracksuit, the lot – away. He said, “Don’t worry, lads. My mum’s picking me up ’cos I’m staying up here tonight.” But we were flying back down from a different airport, so the last thing we saw before entering the terminal was Gazza, stripped down to his shorts, stranded at the wrong airport. He’d become a global superstar during that summer. I don’t think it changed him at all. There are so many great stories about him from then. Looking back now, though, they have a tinge of “Whoops, where is this all leading to?””

Within ten days of the season’s opening, the rapacious demand for a pound of Gascoigne’s flesh saw him go directly from training on Monday morning to a photo shoot for one of his many new sponsors, on to Madame Tussauds to pose for his impending waxwork before heading across to the BBC in Shepherd’s Bush for a sit-down chat with Terry Wogan. Having witnessed the hysteria of the crowd of thousands who had gathered outside the studio to greet their new idol, the avuncular host warned Gascoigne of ‘tall poppy syndrome’. ‘We have a tradition in this country, certainly among the press, where as soon as you become enormously successful, there reaches a point where they decide “we’re going to knock him off the parapet now”.’

Gascoigne’s reply showed how steep the learning curve ahead would be, ‘I’m working so hard to behave myself ... I just want to be one of the lads. I want to stay one of the lads. They’re trying to make me something I’m not.’ Recognising the naive inadequacy of his guest’s answer, Wogan could only sign off by saying, ‘I just hope the tabloids will be kind and you’ll be able to have a happy and enjoyable life.’

Not bloody likely, given the ferocious circulation war between the Rupert Murdoch-owned *Sun* and Robert Maxwell's *Daily Mirror*. Both were desperate to be Gascoigne's official patrons and continue to pump him up before revelling in the inevitable fall from grace. *The Sun* got his signature and rushed the *Paul Gascoigne Story* cartoon strip into print. Having missed out, *The Mirror* expedited knocking him down. In a press interview at the time, Gascoigne wrestled with his transformed life. 'Sometimes I feel like doing a runner for a few days to just hide ... The publicity I've had has been great, but I'm worried I'm being built up so high. They're just waiting for anything that goes wrong. I feel better on the pitch. I'm safe there with my boots and strip on. When I'm in the centre of the pitch, no one can get to me.'

Paul Stewart, who shared a house with Gascoigne that season, reflects, 'Gazza loved the fame, and I think that's where things started to get difficult for him. He didn't fully realise the press wasn't always going to write glowingly about him. And when they were nasty, he wanted to have a go back. You can't win at that. The papers down in London were much harsher than in the north, where we'd both come from. They were always looking to cause trouble, planting girls in hotels and setting up confrontations. What they went on to do to him was disgusting.'

To ward off the potential for burnout amid this frenzy, Venables imposed a moratorium on Gascoigne undertaking commercial activities for the 72 hours before games. Not that those outside the Tottenham coaching staff could see any sign of impaired performance. Quite the opposite. In his next match after the Wogan interview, Gascoigne underlined why, in his case, it was time to absolutely believe the hype. Derby County were thrashed 3-0. Gascoigne's hat-trick past his England World Cup team-mate, goalkeeper Peter Shilton, included two outrageous bending free kicks, steered into opposite top corners of the net. He'd get four in a League

Cup match later in the same month, and on and on it went from there.

Gascoigne's dubious reward was to be rendered as a latex puppet on *Spitting Image*, which perhaps prompted Margaret Thatcher – badly in need of his rub during the dog days of her administration – to invite him to Downing Street. In the view of the broadcaster and encyclopaedia of all things Tottenham Hotspur, Danny Kelly, 'Gazza went on to be beyond special that year. His 90/91 was as good a season as any Spurs player has had. I'd hold it up against virtually anything I can think of in English football. Liam Brady, Cristiano Ronaldo, Gareth Bale, maybe they were on a par, but certainly no better.'