

MUDHUTTER

F O O T B A L L E X P R E S S

NO DECKCHAIRS NO WINDBREAKS NO SUNCREAM NO SHIRTS



SURVIVAL DAY SHOWDOWN PRESS TO KICK
LOS ROJILLOS AN OBJECTIVE LESSON
PICK OF THE NORLEY POPS SPRINGFIELD PARK
AND TONS MORE SUMMERY GOODNESS



2011 SUMMER SPECIAL



SCHOOL'S OUT FOR SUMMER

Welcome to the Mudhutter Summer Special, a free downloadable PDF version of that printed thing you will occasionally spot us flogging on matchdays. Why is it free? Because we don't have a match to sell it at. And yes it is a bit thinner than usual but then what do you want for nothing. Consider it a taster of things to come and a pleasant way to pass a couple of hours when you should be working.

Last season ended in the most dramatic style, you need no reminder of that and like most Wigan Athletic fans we are proud that the team has remained in the Premier League for a seventh successive season but of course the hard work starts here. We'll have more views on that and the silly season to come when the first issue of the fanzine is out for the QPR game towards the end of next month but for now we can bask in the glow of our survival.

The silly season is upon us with player rumours incoming and outgoing aplenty and whereas this fanzine ceased to be topical the day that someone plugged in the Internet, well we never were to be honest. This is a home for views, opinions and a platform for all Wigan Athletic fans to write about the club they love. We are fortunate to have built up a great rapport with the club and the fans over the years and whereas fanzines may not play a pivotal role these days in fan culture with the much more instant and nauseating radio phone in and internet message board culture coming to the fore, we still have a small but dedicated following who cherish what we do and make it all worthwhile.

I often fail to give credit to the many people who buy this magazine and those who sell and help to produce it, it is as ever a labour of love for all of us but we will continue into 2011/12 with your support and willingness.

The first printed issue of the Mudhutter will be on sale from all the usual places at the QPR game on Saturday August 27th. If you're feeling particularly generous, you can always take out a subscription here and give us the cash up front:

[The Mudhuts Shop](#)

Otherwise, enjoy this offering and we'll see you in a few weeks

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For more info on the Mudhutter visit www.mudhutsmedia.co.uk

For our new combined football site visit www.thisnorthernsoul.co.uk

The views and opinions contained herein are those of individual contributors and not of Mudhuts Media. Any resemblance to any characters living or dead is purely coincidental.

Deadline for contributions next issue: Sunday 14th August

For more info on MFE, The Mudhutter or Mudhutsmedia visit www.mudhutsmedia.co.uk or contact us at info@mudhutsmedia.co.uk **Elusive purchasing points:** The MFE incorporating the Mudhutter can be purchased on the bridge or outside Rigalitto's on match days. We've not got the legs of those credit card girls we're sorry to say but we won't sign you up to a lifetime of unaffordable debt either. In addition, it can also be purchased online at www.mudhutsmedia.co.uk including a selection of back issues or from any of the following kind shops and hostelryes: Waterstones, Grand Arcade, Wigan. Sparks News, Wallgate, Wigan or the Brickmakers Arms, Woodhouse Lane, Wigan.

Life In A northern Town (aka Star In The Ghetto)

You all know me. Cool as.

I play all the best new soul / house / everything inbetween (very) occasionally in the clubs and every week on my regular slot on FCUMRadio. Raised on a diet of soul music since I was old enough to climb off the teat and onto the Technics I'd owned since I'd been tall enough to reach the plug, right? Well, no actually. Because I was raised on one of the roughest council estates in Wigan in the 1970's where, despite the "Best Disco In The World circa 1978" being a short 609 bus ride away, the world of cool clothes, amphetamines and sweet soul music were eschewed in favour of snorkel parkas, Double Diamond and Slade. Black men were who your mam had "run away with" (usually around teatime) and the only black face in Wigan was the irascible Green Vigo whom even the most charitable amongst us would struggle to label aspirational.

I got there eventually by the time things started sprouting down below in the early 80s and I've more than made up for lost time since (as testified by the sumptuousness of my vinyl collection and the paucity of my bank balance). Nonetheless, I still remember my formative years with a degree of fondness and there will always be records that, if the moment and the wind is right, will transport me instantly back to WN5.

1) Middle of the Road - Chirpy Cheep Cheep 1971

I was only three but apparently, when they used to sing "where's your mama gone", I used to get upset at the thought of being parted from her. So there you go. Before the stroke and the brain tumour and the bugging off to picturesque Longsight and the strange men and the coming home to find my bedroom rented out and selling off of my books and toys and the slow descent into the Julie Walters character off "Dinnerladies", there was a mother who I loved more than anything in the world.

2) The Osmond's - Crazy Horses 1973

Another one where I don't remember the song as much as one of my mate John chasing the school oddball round the playground, making him cry bellowing the "Waaaah waaaah" refrain at him. Yes, I know, but it was the 70s and bullying in our school was as prolific as head lice. If I recall correctly, the Osmond's fared badly in the battle of the boy bands with proto chavs The Bay City Rollers round our way. My mate's older step sister went so far as to paint "Bay City Rollers" on the shed wall in white emulsion, which remains to this day. She later made the local news when his dad was convicted of "attempting to procure an abortion with ornamental daggers" on her. She was 14. It was his dad's child.

3) Peter Frampton - Show Me The Way 1976

Now entering the phase where stuff I was hearing on TOTP and the radio was starting to enter my consciousness. I remember this one because a) it's got a catchy hook b) my juvenile mind found it hard to distinguish between Peter Frampton and Paul Nicholas and c) my mate John's (see point above) brother had "Frampton Comes Alive" on record. To this day, I've never actually heard this album but judging by its' present day position as a car boot staple alongside Boney M's "Nightflight To Venus" and Gloria Estefan's "Cuts Both Ways" it must have achieved some degree of popularity.

4) Tavares - More Than A Woman 1977

Not just this one, the whole of the "Saturday Night Fever" soundtrack which my uncle James always seemed to be playing whilst getting ready to go out. An all round top bloke who I'd spend many a night with in years to come, watching Rambo in his flat drinking cans of Kestrel. Until usurped when my uncle Jimmy brought a Chinese home with him after a night out (an act of unparalleled exoticism

in my young eyes) he held the title of “Coolest Man in the World” and I loved watching him putting on his best clobber and splashing on his Brut. Suited and booted, he’d then inform me he was off up town to “do a bit”. Christ!! Why couldn’t I do a bit? Even though I hadn’t got a clue what bit it was I wanted to do!!!

5) Manfred Mann’s Earth Band - Davy’s On The Road Again 1978

For the lyrics alone, this will always be my uncle Michael. Neer do well, prolific liar and petty thief of my football shaped moneybox. Almost put my nan into an early grave when he made the front page of the local rag for “making funny phone calls to a woman in the flats opposite”. Highlights include finding him hiding in the coal hole, hooking for Swinton Rugby Club and his claim, upon my enquiry as to the health of my two cousins, that “our Andrea works in a sewing factory in Ince.....and our Lisa’s a linguist with the United Nations”. Last time I saw him was again on the front of the local paper. Thankfully, no lewd phone calls this time. He’d won a pie eating competition to raise money to send a disabled child to Florida. He probably ran her over in the first place.

6) The Hollies - I’m Alive (Twenty Golden Greats 1978)

Another album I remember vividly. To her credit, my mam never had any time for the Beatles. It’s a view I share and genuinely believe they’re the band Gerry and The Pacemakers could have been if they’d had the courage to take drugs. She was bang in to Gene Pitney and The Walker Brothers. Then there were The Hollies. She loved The Hollies and I know the words to every single song on this brilliant album. Thanks mam. It wasn’t all bad I suppose.

7) Lindisfarne - Run For Home 1978

This will always be my mate Paul whose dad was in prison. High on illicit viewings of “The Sweeney”, we fantasised his dad was some top armed blagger who’d gone for one last big job and went down in a blaze of glory, only getting nicked after taking out 12 coppers whilst still getting his pants on. The amount of black eyes sported by his mam on his release meant the truth was probably less savoury. Paul never came into school one day as it transpired he and his two sisters had been taken into care for their own protection one night. I’ve never seen him since.

8) Michael Jackson - Rock With You 1979

Probably the coolest track on here and certainly the only one I’ve played in recent memory. My aunty Jean used to send me to Causey’s Records in Pemberton with a list of 7 inch singles and I bought this alongside Cliff’s “We don’t talk anymore” on the same visit. She was fantastic my aunty Jean and straightened me out when it got really bad for me later on. She also had good taste in music (Cliff aside) and drunkenly let slip one night that she’d been asked to go back to the hotel with one of either the Four Tops or The Temptations after a gig but had to decline as she was driving the 5am staff bus the morning after.

9) ELO - Don’t Bring Me Down 1979

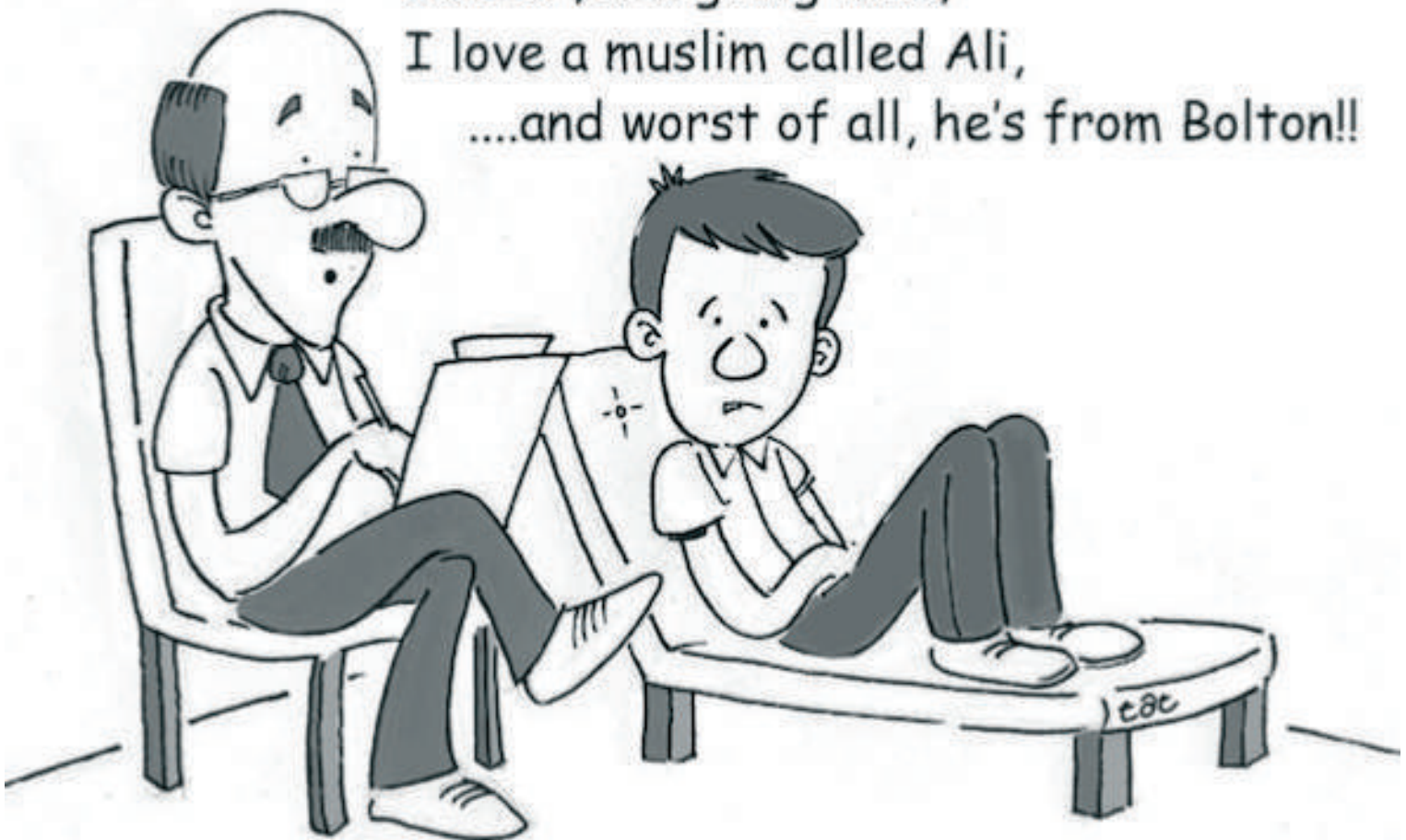
Seeing as my mam married an absolute bastard, I spent a lot of time with my granddad. A squat, rough, tough no nonsense man, possibly of Brazilian extract (it’s a long story) who’d been a miner after the war but was now on the wagons. One of the few tracks he didn’t instantly label as “bloody shit”, it always seemed to be playing at one of Radio One’s roadshows I insisted on listening to as we trundled up and down the country together. To be fair, he was more a Mantovani man. I also remember his best mate on the wagons, a rum cove called Ernie who had an abundance of chest hair, glasses like the old bloke out of Brotherhood of Man and a caravan which we borrowed to go to Cala Gran in Fleetwood, my one and only holidays of the 70s. My granddad died weeks after retiring aged 65. He collapsed at the bar of his local boozer one Sunday afternoon and I’m told still had his pint and a smouldering Capstan Full Strength in his hand as he hit the deck. It’s what he would have wanted.

10) Freda Payne - Band Of Gold 1970

Bit of a cheat timings wise but worthy of inclusion because it was around this time I decided that I did know better than anyone else musically after all. Though released far earlier, this one will always be Tiffany's Under 18's during the early 80s. It was a strange period musically. Wigan Council was yet to rue its decision to (allegedly) burn down the Casino, Northern Soul was yet to undergo one of its' many revivals and Russ Winstanley was marooned in some bizarre musical hinterland playing unadulterated shite to a bunch of kids. In amongst tracks like "Summer Holiday" and German oompah music, he'd drop Northern standards like this one, Martha Reeves' "Third Finger Left Hand" and The Invitations' "Ski-ing in the Snow" to a largely apathetic crowd more interested in who was getting fingers and tops round near the burger bar. Funnily enough, I'm yet to hear Russ drop German oompah music on his weekly show on Radio Lancashire. He has played the theme from Joe 90 though. Which is bad enough.

- Finton

Doctor, I'm going mad,
I love a muslim called Ali,
....and worst of all, he's from Bolton!!



Survival Day Showdown

So, we bloody well did it. And on Super Dooper Survival Sunday. Again! A 7th season in the bestest league in the whole wide world beckons for Wigan Athletic. The club with not even one fan at any of their home games. The club founded in 2005 with absolutely no history. A team riddled with foreigners, stealing sporting opportunities from salt of the earth, local lads. The club with no drive or ambition, because it won't bow down to the corporate slugs that have infested the game. Oh how I envy West Ham United!

It was pretty much touch and go throughout the season. Even as a self-proclaimed Bob super fan I occasionally doubted whether his way of doing things could keep us in such a ruthless and cut-throat division. I must have been asked 50 times from numerous people whether I thought we could stay up, and each time I genuinely could not give them an honest answer. I just couldn't make my mind up. It was the sheer scale of differing opinions that left me without one of my own. I always knew I was pro Bob regardless of the outcome of the season as I knew how much he cared for the club. I believed in his philosophy of seeing the bigger picture. But could his style of play, calm and collected demeanour, positive and trusting attitude keep us up? I had my doubts as I'm certain most of you had. But he said we'd stay up and we did so that pretty much blew any slight doubts I had out of the water. Obviously it took till after Stoke for it to become a reality, but like I said, I just couldn't make my mind up. I think we all needed the season to be over with and have a little time away after what has been a campaign riddled with fantastic ups and some equally awful downs. I hope that now we can look forward to the new season with renewed optimism, installed by a man that deserves the opportunity to take the football club that he loves, forward. Many wanted that taken away from him last season, which seems unimaginable now. But I'll leave that debate to the TNS posters!

As I mentioned earlier Stoke was, as we all know, our second time coming through the other side of a Super Dooper Survival Sunday Extravaganza. The day when the media pack their pages with expert opinions on who will stay up and who will slip in to the depths of footballing oblivion, never to return to the top of their perfect and untouchable world of sporting hierarchy. The day when SKY cream themselves at the thought of three clubs being left devastated by relegation (tears look even bigger in 3D you know!) And the day when The Prem(ier) League finally gets rid of the clubs that don't improve their bank balance enough. With this in mind I decided to put our two final day escapes up against one another. Bramall Lane vs The Britannia Stadium. Both terrific occasions in their own right, but in true top flight football style, one is always better than the other. So how can we judge which was better? Let's keep it simple. Five specifics of each day will be scored out of 10 and the one with the most points wins. Easy. Obviously there will be similarities and differences between everyone's days, so I will try to keep the five as open ended as possible. Then hopefully you can score the days based on your own personal experience.



Pre-match nerves. Second season syndrome well and truly kicked in for Wigan Athletic during the 06/07 campaign, so Bramall Lane had the feeling of a 90 minute, all or nothing season. Of course I was shitting myself at the prospect of going down but at the time it seemed a case of, 'well, we've had our 15 minutes, so let's do the polite thing and buggery off to where we belong.' Despite that, it still didn't remove much of the tension, especially with our opponents being in the same boat. The nerves simply echoed around the stadium. So with that it has to be a 9. Stoke had a different feel to it. We'd matured as a club and with Bob at the helm, were looking to the future rather than going in to

seasons hoping that pure adrenalin would pull us through. There was a definite feeling that we were (and are...) building something exciting as a club and relegation would have been disastrous to those plans. That made for a different type of tension that would have undoubtedly resulted in an 'if only' reaction. Obviously Stoke had zilch to play for apart from protecting a very proud home record, so I suppose the end of season atmosphere that they generated helped us a little. I also spent the majority of the day nursing a hangover acquired from a sportsmans dinner on the Friday and Haydock races on the Saturday, so a little of my attention was focused on not throwing up all over the lad in front of me. So with that, I reckon a 9 again would be fair.

Atmosphere. Sheffield United was fantastic for this. The thrill of being in the Premier League was still there and the fans there that day wanted to make sure the journey didn't end. Obviously the numbers we took helped and it made for a party atmosphere that I hadn't experienced before at a football match. But saying that, I believe we were still gelling as a group of supporters after coming up. This didn't take anything away from the atmosphere that we generated that day but there was the feeling that we were still feeling each other out. The whole experience was simply new to a lot of us including myself. Again the home support deserved a lot of credit for creating a unique atmosphere. 9 out of ten. Stoke was a turning point for me. It was the first time I'd realised how far we had come as a unit. Unlike Bramall Lane there was a bond that I hadn't noticed before. The older lot were now mixing with the young lads and girls. We had banners. Three or four of them. A player had given us all our own flag to show how much he appreciated our support. Jonesy punched the air with his fists after coming out for the second half. 'We shall not be moved' we sang. I even think the fact that there were so few of us helped as well. We looked like a single unit all crammed in one small corner. The 'us against the world' feeling was back and it made for an unforgettable atmosphere. Again Stoke having little or nothing to play for played in to our hands. We could out sing them and surely that could be heard on the pitch. 9.

The game. Sheffield United was quite simple. Only a win would do and the players knew that from the start. The emphasis was all out attack and it worked. Two first half goals in an away game is a very good return in any match, so to do it when it mattered the most was just what we needed. Obviously a draw could have enough for them so they can't be blamed for being a little tentative, but they still went out there looking to score goals, creating chances of their own and sticking one away. The second half was all about who could hold their nerve at the back and obviously that had an



affect on the quality. The game was still enthralling though. I can imagine it being bloody fantastic for the neutral and it wasn't too bad for us apart from the fact that we were all cackin' it. It had everything so it has to be a 9.5. Stoke wasn't the best game of football I've ever seen. The occasion got to everyone apart Ali in the first half and we were pretty awful. Stoke threatened on several occasions and we were lucky to go in for a brew at nil, nil. The second half was far more even. We settled in to the game and started to do what we do best and knock it about. With us needing a goal so desperately you sensed we would get one eventually. It was keeping them out that was the problem, with the convict looking particularly dangerous. It was that touch of quality that we've seen in parts throughout the season that brought about the goal and it topped off what had been a much improved second half performance, so a 7.5 from me.

The goals. Scharners finish was the type that he must fantasise about in his own little world when he is playing centre forward for Barcelona. The ball in wasn't Bainsey's best so for him to catch it so well on the half volley, skidding off a wet surface and planting it in the corner was pretty special.

Unsy's pen was one of the best I've seen under the circumstances. He even made the little skip as he hit it look cool and again it was right in the corner. You just aren't going to get down to them. A special mention must also go to the celebration, which was pure class. Nothing like a wet pitch for a knee slidey celebration. 9.5. I don't think it would be fair to score this based on amount of goals so don't worry Hugo; you won't be marked down for only sticking the one away! Ben Watson's involvement in the goal at Stoke was top class, shrugging off a couple of players and picking the right pass out to Fig (or Charlie as 90% of the match reports I've read or heard say). How many times this season have we seen Fig get the ball down the flank, close his eyes, swing that gorpy left foot at it and see the ball fly 50 feet over the bar? But not this time. This time he completely skinned their full back and sent a beautifully lofted cross in Hugo's direction. And Hugo simply wanted it more than their centre half. 9.0.

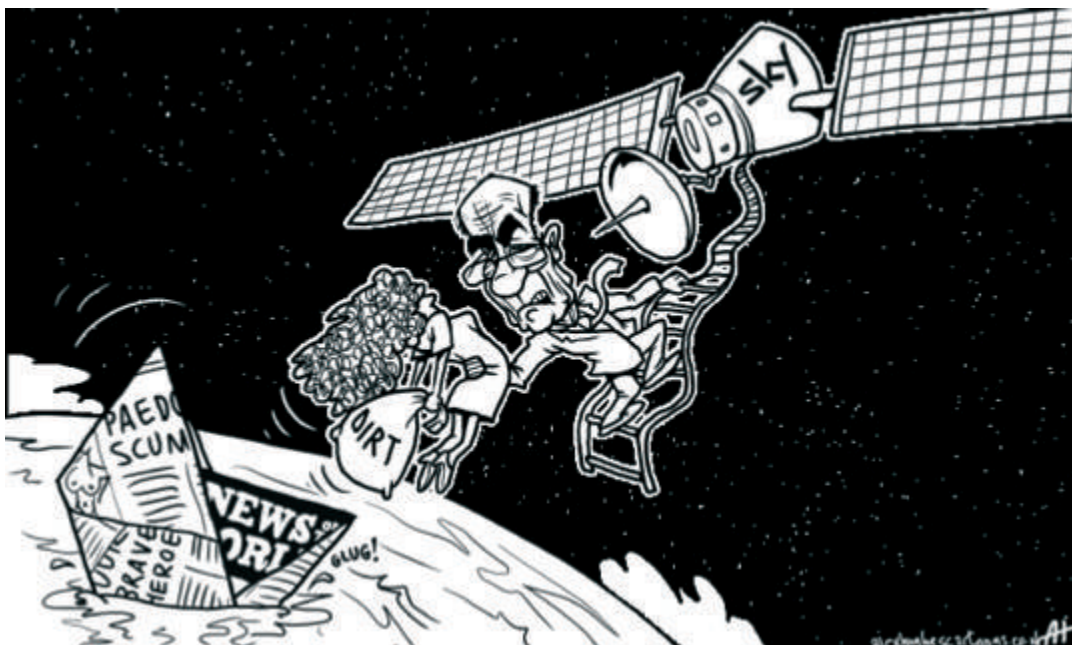
Post-match antics. Now in 2007 I was a spring chicken. Just 19 years of age and able to go out on the lash; have 5 hours sleep, a load of stodge and start again. So after the game it was a couple in the pub then in to town wearing the blue and white with 'Boyce 17' proudly plastered on the back. That night was one of the most memorable I have ever experienced. The highlights include asking Polly did he want a drink and him replying, 'no lad, I'll get them in!' Denny Landzaat shouting me over and telling me that I would be Boycey for the night, as he'd gone home to the missus. I'm not sure he would be happy being played by a pasty teenager. And singing a song to Bainsey (one that never really caught on!) at chucking out time when the lights had come and the music had gone off and him and Ryan Taylor looking at me like I'd gone mental. That somehow [found its way on to the internet](#). Yes the pillock with his arm up is me! The celebrations poured out on to the street to finish off what had been a top night. 10! Unfortunately I'm not as young as I used to be and at 23 hangovers are a fackin' killer. So after the two day bender I wasn't in any state to touch a drop after the Stoke match. So it was home to watch the game again but this time as a shattered but happy and relaxed man. So only a 6 I'm afraid.

So the winner with a grand score of 47 is Bramall Lane! One of the most memorable days and nights of my life. Will it be bettered? I bloody well hope so. Because it's those occasions that make it all worthwhile. Give it a go yourself.

See you next season.

- OPM

*Just a final note. I think I speak for most of us by saying good riddance to the NOTW. Your lies and corruption have gone too far this time. You will not be missed.



Union Deportivo Lanzarote on the march to Segunda B



Those who know me personally know that I spend quite a lot of time over in the Canaries at the moment after family moved over there in 2009 and with the departure of the father figure in my life it means the father and son trips to the football are generally a rare occurrence these days.

So on a recent trip over to the fire island of Lanzarote, we had the opportunity to reconvene on those days as Union Deportivo Lanzarote was playing their final home game of the season.

At this point it's worth passing on a little bit of background information on U.D Lanzarote or the Rojillos as they're known locally and if you look closely there are quite a few similarities with our own Wigan Athletic.

U.D Lanzarote were formed in 1970 and remain one of the youngest clubs in Spain, their reputation was formed as cup giant killers as they fought their way through the regional leagues making their debut in the Spanish 3rd division in 1980. For the best part of the next two decades The Rojillos stayed in the 3rd division for the next eighteen years bar one relegation in 1994. Come 1998 U.D Lanzarote were promoted to the Segunda Division B, where their reputation was to be firmly planted. Segunda Division B (the equivalent to League one) is a tough league featuring many legendary names of Spanish football but as we'll learn later on its even tougher to gain promotion to this league so it was with an amazing achievement that a club as small as U.D made their debut in the Segunda Division B in 1998. It was only a brief appearance for the Rojillos as they were relegated that season but returned in 2000/2001 as their reputation as cup giant killers came to the fore.

They were drawn at home against Primera Liga side Tenerife in the Copa Del Ray with the visitors the overwhelming favourites. U.D Lanzarote proceeded to give Tenerife a footballing master class as they came out 5-1 winners in front of over 5000 Lanzarote supporters, their reward was once again a home tie against the grandest of opposition possible - Real Madrid. Casting our minds back to that 2001/2002 season it's important to remember just how strong the side that Real Madrid had at that time, featuring the likes of Zidane, Figo, Raul and Roberto Carlos in their ranks alongside a lonesome scouser by the name of McManaman.

This truly was Madrid at the height of their 'Galactico' period and here they were on the smallest of the Canary Islands to play one of the smallest teams to grace the Copa Del Ray, over seven thousand packed out the Ciudad Deportiva in the islands Capital Arrecife hoping for the impossible. A full strength Madrid side lead through a 30th minute goal but on the stroke of half time part time waiter Oscar Vladamir equalized for Lanzarote. Unfortunately the home side couldn't hold on and succumbed to two further Madrid goals in the second half but this performance proved that U.D could hold their own against the top sides in Spain. In the ensuing seasons U.D Lanzarote's stock continued to rise as they finished in 3rd and reached



the play offs to compete for a place in Segunda A (championship) and faced many more Primera Liga sides in their quest for cup glory. Most notable of these were narrow defeats against Atletico Madrid and Seville as U.D once again proved their worth, the club saw its stock continue to rise until relegation came in 2009/2010 which saw the club return to Division Three.

Going back to the present and my first experience of Spanish football, U.D Lanzarote came into this game requiring a win to stand any chance of reaching the play off's to compete for an instant return to Segunda B. U.D were facing a side with little to play for in U.D Tijarafe.



So with a must win game ahead and the prospect of witnessing something other than a relegation battle it was with anticipation rather than trepidation that we headed into Arrecife. If you don't know Lanzarote it's a small island of three main resorts, notably Playa Blanca, Costa Teguise and Puerto Del Carmen (where my parents are based). Arrecife is the capital of the island and around a twenty minutes bus journey from Puerto Del Carmen, arriving at the ground early it's easy to see why U.D have such a strong home record in this division, the Ciudad Deportiva is an imposing location, a mixed use stadium along with playing host

to U.D's home games it is also home to Lanzarote's local rivals C.D.O Maritima and the local athletics club. On arriving at the ground we purchased our match tickets a lowly Five Euros is all it will cost for you to see a game in Lanzarote whilst Season Tickets work out even better value than our own at Latics, with Fifty Euro's getting you a seat throughout the season. Games are usually played on Sunday mornings with a 12 pm kick off, offering enough time to travel to the capital and enjoy a pre match beverage or two as we did - well it was a match day.

Terraced seating surrounds three sides of the stadium with a capacity for seven thousand, estimate's placed the crowd at the around 1500 for our visit, sizeable enough to make a fantastic atmosphere. The game itself saw Lanzarote completely dominate and make their experience pay against the side from Las Palmas, a goal on the 28th minute and another on the stroke of half time saw Lanzarote go into the break with a comfortable 2 goal lead that would eventually see them return to the top of the league. The second half was much the same and despite further domination from U.D Lanzarote they couldn't break down a resolute defence and had to settle with the 2-0 win. Following on from this U.D Played a further two league games before finishing the season as Champions.

Due to the complicated playoff system installed by the Spanish F.A becoming Champions of the Spanish 3rd division doesn't mean automatic promotion to Segunda B and as a result U.D Lanzarote faced a further two games before promotion could be considered, sadly they fell at that hurdle. Facing a strong side backed by over 10,000 supporters from the Castilian region of Spain, Lanzarote led by 2-1 from the first leg of the play offs but travelling over to the North Of Spain to face a strong side in C.F Burgos showed the side from Lanzarote just how far they had come and how far they had left to go eventually losing on aggregate 5-2.

The following week they were given another opportunity for promotion as they were placed in the second round of playoff games and drawn against U.D Almansa from Albacete, the side from the Canaries must have still been feeling the effects of the defeat against Burgos as they came out of the stops second best and were on the receiving end of a 2-0 defeat. The following week needing to win and win handsomely in the return leg back in Arrecife, Lanzarote took the game to Almansa only for disaster to strike as the home side went behind after 30 seconds. Needing four goals to draw level

U.D Lanzarote fought but it was a fight in vain as Lanzarote faces another season in division three before they can fight for a place in Segunda B once again.



The two games I saw were competitive and of a much higher standard than expected and for five euro's I would highly recommend it if you ever find yourself in Lanzarote keep an eye out for the information posters for up-coming fixtures or better still visit the website mercancialanzarote.com which provides up to date information on fixtures, results and merchandise.

When you see the scouting that Roberto and his team put into the Spanish lower divisions you can see why, so many gifted players reside in this country but if much like England you're not featuring for one of the glamour clubs you're on the whole ignored. If another Momo Diame can be sourced from the Spanish lower division's its well worth a look and when you consider the current star of the Spanish national side and indeed Barcelona's

attack hails from Gran Canaria in David Villa it puts even more emphasis on football in the Canaries.

Who knows with our very own Spanish connections we may one day see Wigan Athletic heading out to face U.D Lanzarote, now that would be a friendly to attend - if the club tell us in the first place!

• SEAN LIVESEY



THOSE WE HAVE LOST

Recently, Mudhutter was asked to contribute to a piece on Old Grounds. It has to be said that although Springfield Park has often been mentioned within these pages, not many people have sat down and written a piece all about it and it certainly gets the emotions flooding back.

Whereas we can often be accused of 'living in the past' when we go down this route, we should also celebrate our former home, and consider this an open invitation to all contributors and readers of Mudhutter to send in your own memories of Springfield Park

I am also indebted to Bert & Bernard producing the great website all about the [History of Springfield Park](#).

So here is that piece, as featured on the excellent [200% website](#) (look under 'Those we have lost' for more superb Old ground memories).

SPRINGFIELD PARK

It is with considerable shame that I come to admit the manner in which I first gained entry to Springfield Park. You see, immediately behind the Town End there was a run down all weather pitch which used to serve as a place for the Junior Latics to play five a side on in the early Eighties before the game. The only problem with this was that by the time myself and all the other young urchins had scaled the perimeter fence, it was often closer to ten a side.



It only happened for a year or two to be fair after which I got a season ticket. I was taken to one of my first legitimate games by a friend of the family who used to play for Wigan and as we sat high up in the Main Stand, I realised where the real fun was to be had as the chanting emanated from under the ramshackle St Andrews Drive Stand (or Popular side as it was known).

I wouldn't expect anyone who wasn't a Wigan Athletic fan to look back at Springfield Park with any kind of fondness and deep down most Latics fans knew that the old place had its limitations but nevertheless to us, it was home. A place to watch our heroes every other week and a place which had every bit as much character as any other ground in the country in our eyes.

THE HISTORY OF SPRINGFIELD PARK

Let's get the story out of the way before I revert back to sentiment though. Springfield Park was built many years before Wigan Athletic were formed way back in 1897 by the marvellously named Wigan Trotting and Athletic Company whose aims were to create an 'athletic and cycle club'. Whereas initially there was no mention of a football club, there had already been one separately formed under the name of Wigan County who played the first competitive game of association football at Springfield Park on September 1st 1897, a 1-1 draw with Burton Swifts. By 1900, in what was to sadly be a familiar theme, County had folded, to be replaced the following year by Wigan United who also shared the ground with the Wigan Rugby League Club.

Wigan United were booted out of Springfield Park in 1904 following the expiration of their lease and by 1905 Wigan Town became the third football club to play at Springfield Park again lasting no more than three years before going the same way as their predecessors. Springfield Park continued to host different sporting activities such as cycling and wrestling, without ever generating large attendances and it was only after the conclusion of the Great War in 1919 that another club - also called Wigan United but no link to the previous club of the same name bedded down at Springfield Park and they also failed to last longer than a year. They were followed by Wigan Borough in November 1920 who met with greater success and were accepted into the Third Division (North) in time for the start of the 1921/22 season.

So the first league game at Springfield Park took place on 3rd September 1921 where a crowd of around 7,500 turned up to watch the hosts lose 4-1 to the visitors, Nelson. Wigan Borough existed for ten years as a league club before being forced to resign from the League and enjoyed fleeting periods of success and struggle during that time and hold attendance records that stand to this day. Towards the end of the decade Wigan Borough drew the current Football League Champions, Sheffield Wednesday, in the F.A. Cup



and provisions were made for the tie. On the day of the match, January 12th 1929, the gates were opened at 12 o'clock and the official attendance was given as 30,443. The largest attendance for a Football League match at Springfield Park was recorded on April 1st 1929 when Borough overturned Stockport County 4-0 before a crowd of 15,500. Both gates stood when the ground was demolished in 1999.

Nine months later and Wigan Athletic were formed after two local gentlemen purchased Springfield Park for the sum of £3,500. The team played their first competitive fixture on August 27th 1932, a 2-0 defeat against Port Vale reserves watched by a crowd of around 5,000. Wigan Athletic survived for many years where it's predecessors had failed but league football was to elude the team and Springfield Park until 1978, no doubt the club being punished for prior failings in the town's attempts to establish a football club. During this period Wigan Athletic carved itself out as a giant in non league circles and also forged a reputation as a famous FA Cup giant killer.

Springfield Park as far back as 1953 hosted an FA Cup first round tie between Wigan and Hereford which attracted a crowd of 27,526, the biggest ever crowd between two non league sides in the FA Cup and a record sure to stand forever in a game the Latics won 4-1. They went on to acquit themselves valiantly in the cup that year, going up to St James Park to get a 2-2 draw with Newcastle, Jackie Milburn an' all and only lost the home leg in front of over 26,000 at Springfield by the odd goal in five. When league football was finally attained in 1978, league crowds inevitably picked up and for several years until the mid eighties were considerably larger than the rugby league team across town.

PERSONAL MEMORIES

The biggest crowd I ever saw at Springfield Park was a then-capacity 12,500 for an FA Cup quarter final against Leeds United in 1987. Leeds were at best a mediocre second division club at the time

and we were in the then Third Division and they were very beatable playing against a young, raw Wigan team who had already knocked out higher division opposition in the form of Norwich City and Hull City in the previous rounds. However, the game was a poor one on a windy day which Leeds won 2-0, our best chance coming when the legendary Bobby Campbell hit the post. As a wide eyed 14 year old, I spent the entire game sat on a crush barrier to get a proper view, unable to find my friends and unable to take my eyes off those notorious Leeds hooligans crammed into the Shevington End, half expecting them to steam over the fences and into our end at any moment. Leeds went on to lose to Coventry City in the semis, the team of the Keith Houchen diving header in the final fane.

The away end, known as the Shevington End was famous for it's grass hill; there was a little shed at the back which provided cover for a few hundred and terracing right at the front separated by a grass bank. It could be treacherous on a wet day and in 1989, with a mudbath of a pitch and a mudbath of an away end, a large travelling support from Sunderland decided to confront the elements head on. The spectacle which followed has now been resurrected and immortalised on youtube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3XamdnyLvl>) as the daft Mackems firstly tried to keep their balance while navigating the slope and then progressed to full on mud-diving whilst being cheered on by their fellow fans.

The home fans' side was known as the Popular Side which had, low covered stands and was very close to the pitch. Many a time the crowd would surge forward to give the linesman or opposing winger some fearful abuse and even though the home support was small in number, they couldn't half make a racket, particularly at night games. The aforementioned Sunderland game was watched by around 7,000 but as atmospheres went the place was absolutely bouncing and Springfield Park could be a very hostile place to visit when the home crowd were up for it. Like many grounds which had a 'side' as their main 'end', the crowd would gravitate to whichever end the team was attacking which usually meant shooting towards the away fans in the first half and the Town End in the second. The first half was usually occupied with a generous sprinkling of away fan baiting over the perimeter fencing, whereas second half just the naughty boys would remain in a cluster, indicating their interest in post match activities.



Around about 1990, a new stand was built over the top of the old one which went right up to the edge of the pitch and I remember the day that the first half of it opened for a home game against Northampton Town. Even though there were less than 3,000 on, we piled underneath it and made a noise like I've never heard before or since. At the same time, images started to appear on the front of the programme showing pictures of what the 'new, redeveloped Springfield Park' would look like with three other new equally identical stands. I can best compare it to QPR's Loftus Road but of course, finances dictated that we never managed to complete more than the one stand.

Down the far end, the Popular Side also possessed that rarest of spectacles, an outside toilet, and taller spectators could peer over the top of the urinals and continue to watch the match whilst relieving themselves. This particular corner was also overlooked by a couple of trees, one of which offered an excellent vantage point for those currently excluded from entry or lacking a few bob to actually pay in. Others would stand behind the goal in the second half on the Town End, another uncovered end open to the elements which went all the way around to the Main Stand (Phoenix Stand).

The Phoenix Stand was a big, imposing stand in comparison to the rest of the ground and was the first thing you'd see as you walked towards the ground from First Avenue. There were three main

streets which approached the ground, imaginatively named First, Second and Third Avenue and all three opened up into a large car park and a view of the main stand with 'Welcome to Springfield Park' emblazoned in large letters on it.



To the left of the Main Stand was the magnificent Wigan Athletic Supporters' Club: a warm, welcoming clubhouse open seven days a week, serving cheap beer and every single wall adorned with pennants from football clubs far and wide. From the inside of the ground there was a small serving hatch you could access to buy chips from and

next to it was the Junior Latics caravan which made the cover of a book about the club entitled Pies & Prejudice a few years later but several years earlier than the Stuart Maconie book of the same name.

THE FINAL YEARS

As with many grounds, it fell into disrepair in the early 1990's and with the football team languishing near the bottom of Division Four large parts of the ground were sectioned off by the local council with no money forthcoming to carry out repairs.

In 1995, along came Dave Whelan who bought the club and immediately talked about a ten year plan to take the club into the Premier League to much hilarity, part of this plan being to build a new multi-purpose ground on the other side of town. Initially the stadium was built to be shared with Orrell RUFC not as is thought the Wigan Rugby League club who were in the process of selling their own ground and considering sharing the Reebok Stadium with Bolton.

On the field, a modest investment saw the club climb out of the basement division in 1997, helped in no small terms by the goals of current first team coach Graeme Jones and midfield maestro Roberto Martinez and the all new JJB Stadium started to take shape in the distance. The final league game at Springfield Park was played on the 8th May 1999 but there was to be an encore as Wigan Athletic had secured a place in the League One play offs. The first leg of the two legged tie was played on Saturday 15th May 1999 against a then-third tier Manchester City side. The last ever game at Springfield Park finished as a 1-1 draw with City winning the return leg 1-0 with a very dubious Shaun Goater 'hand of Goat' goal. Stuart Barlow scored the last ever goal for Wigan Athletic at Springfield Park with Paul Dickov replying for Man City to score the last ever goal in front of what was at the time a near capacity crowd of 6,762.



The last home game of the season was traditionally the cause for a pitch invasion and this time was to be no different as home spectators poured on to the pitch and started grabbing bits of turf, seats, even advertising hoardings. One lad took the subs bench home with him and another picked up the sound mike from behind the goal, prompting an appeal on Granada Reports several days later asking for it's return. Sadly after the last game, the main stand was set on fire by local vandals and had to be demolished earlier than intended.

Springfield Park eventually made way for a large housing estate, the only token nod to it's former home being the name of one of the main roads, Lyon Road, named after the legendary

non league goal machine Harry Lyon. As a gesture to the club's former home the 'West Stand' of the new DW Stadium was recently renamed the Springfield Stand in another tribute to the club's spiritual home.

- Jimmy T (@mudhutter)





The Mudhutter has recently been voted one of the top football fanzines in the country by influential lifestyle website Sabotage Times. As part of this rundown, ST asked Mudhutter editor, Jimmy T for his comments on the evolution of fanzines at Wigan and in general and this is reproduced in full below

The article in it's full glory appears on the [Sabotage Times website](#). And if you're not on Sabotage Times already, then why not? Anyway, here's the interview

How did you get into editing the fanzine?

I was always fascinated by fanzines, I used to go the old Sportspages in Covent Garden and in Manchester and buy about 30 different ones in one go. It was the only way you got to read the views of other clubs' fans and what they were saying about us in the pre-Internet days.

I came very close to starting one myself as a 14 year old, I even did a four page sample one which I was going

to photocopy and give out at the turnstiles but the Cockney Latic was started up soon after as a fanzine by London based Latics including the Godfather of Wigan Athletic fanzines and independent writing in the town, Andy Vaughan.

I used to love reading it and occasionally would contribute bits anonymously and carried on contributing to the Latic Fanatic which emerged in the 90's when the Cockney Latic folded. I was having a pint with Vaughanie one day at Macc away in the 1998/99 season where he was on about re-launching it and did I want to contribute. I went away, did some scribbling but the sly fox sensed my youthful enthusiasm and quickly managed to pass on the editorial duties onto me, although he continued to write half of it for several years in fairness

We had a few problems too complicated to go into a few years back and rebranded as The Mudhutter and I've now done 6 years as Cockney Latic editor and going into a 7th as Mudhutter editor. As with all fanzines, it wouldn't happen at all without the whole operation of many others who help to write and sell the thing.

What's was the main motivation then and how has that changed over time?

It started just as a newsletter encouraging London based Latics to meet up coupled with some football writing in it in the late Eighties and then it came back to Wigan when the original editors did. Like many fanzines, it just started getting longer and longer between issues and eventually died. Another fanzine emerged called the Latic Fanatic in the 90's for a number of years which although very different, was a cracking read and won several awards but then that stopped I think due to the editor Andy Werrill starting a family.

We were a bit opportunistic when we re-launched it. We were moving to the DW Stadium and the Latic Fanatic had folded so after that conversation in the pubs of Macclesfield that day, we had another crack at it and I've been editor of Cockney Latic/Mudhutter for 12 continuous years now.

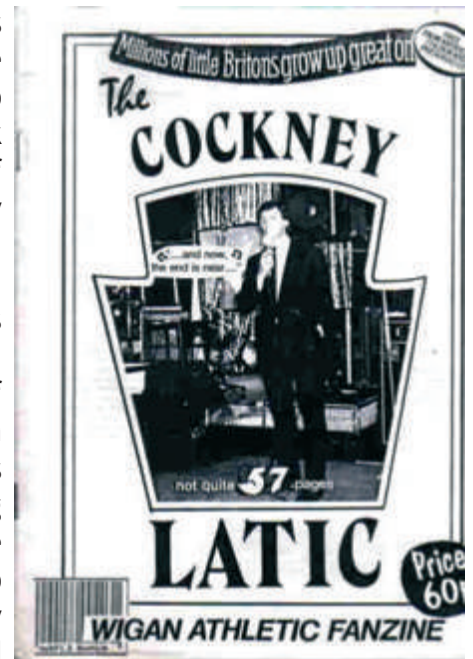
For many years, all of the fanzines were read by the majority of our fans but now it's read by a minority. A mix of the changing face of fans, the emergence of the internet and us upsetting too many of them I guess. We sold more fanzines at Springfield Park with 4,000 on than we do now at the DW with 20,000 on. Being completely honest, we've burnt a lot of bridges and never been afraid to take the piss out of our own fans. For years, we took the piss out of Wigan Rugby when they were getting huge crowds because all their fans claimed they used to be there when they got relegated to Division Two and were struggling to get 3,000 on. All of a sudden we were the club getting 20,000 on, ten times what we'd managed at Springfield Park and many of them didn't have a clue about fan

culture and consequently we upset a lot of people with reams of articles coming in giving those most regularly termed as JCL's terrible stick. They didn't seem to get why we covered music, clothes etc and accused us of being hooligans because there was a teeny bit of nostalgia about the bad old days. With hindsight, we probably printed a lot that we shouldn't, I'm man enough to admit that we need all the fans we can get now but a lot of our older fans at the time got pissed off with folk who turned up, acted like they owned the place even though they'd always been a United or Wigan Rugby fan at school. We've still got a bad reputation now because of it even though we've mellowed. And as ever, I've took all the flak for it even though, it's generally been lots of different people opining their views.

We get praise from that minority who still love to read it nowadays and they are the motivation for us keeping it going. Then there's the other 90% of Wigan Athletic fans who ask if it's the programme, who don't like it or don't get it (in either sense of the word) or just think we're a bunch of smartarses. We get massive praise from fans of other clubs whereas with our own, it's more of a clued up minority who appreciate it. They are the ones we keep it going for.

How important do you consider a physical product when there is so much online these days?

I think there's still a traditional hardcore - and I'm definitely one of them - who prefer to read material in print form, and not just on the bog. I still buy miles more football books, magazines and fanzines than I can ever hope to find time to read, the latest of course being The Blizzard. There seems to be a bit of a rebirth going on at the minute which is great. It's great to see people are still willing to stick their neck out and put stuff in print, not only does it cost money but you also have to convince people to spend their hard earned these days in an era where everyone seems to want everything for free, no more so in Wigan. You have to produce something different which is also of good quality to survive though if you're going to fork out for printing it. You can put any old rubbish on the internet, there's no risk - it costs very little to do and you're only a press of a delete key away from making it disappear.



There's lot of quality online as well, particularly many of the blogs we all know and love but you have to push a hell of a lot of sh*t to one side to find it sometimes and the crap stuff shows no sign of diminishing. It seems with this Twitter, Facebook, Message Boards generation everyone's a writer or even a journalist now and it's so hard to sift through the drivel to find the good stuff. It does my head in to be honest.

Aside from physical product do you guys do anything else?

It's spawned a number of books by me and Vaughanie about the club over the years, there were hardly any about the club before we got into the Premier League, and we've run our predominantly non-football website [Mudhuts Media](#) for a number of years. If I'm honest it's dated a bit now but the podcasts we did over the last few years - of which I had little to do with, nor were they much to do with football - were absolute quality and went down a storm for their risqué content. They were just three lads talking about growing up on a council estate in Wigan and giving their own take on current affairs, you can still seek them out there if you should so wish.

As a result of the quality over quantity thing mentioned above, we merged our Mudhutter website with two other Wigan Athletic sites a few months back who have a similar outlook at [This Northern Soul](#). Even for a small club like ours, the online content level is saturated so it felt the right thing to do. We also do a Summer Special which we purely produce online and make it available as a free download, the last one got 1,500 hits. Even though that's not quite a 'fanzine' in my book, it's still more of a fanzine than a hundred other things out there which people seem to describe as a fanzine these days!

Press to Kick

Are you bored of the cricket? Despairing of the golf, Woeful of Wimbledon? Yes the close season can seem a long time to a football fan especially when there's no World Cup or Euro's to watch. Well here's an idea why not have a root round in the attic or take a trip to a local car boot sale and you might pick up some of these classic board games to keep you happy in these rain soaked summer days!

Bobby Charlton's Casdon Football



Used to love this game though it was more like bagatelle than football. Plastic players would swivel when you twiddled your knob (Ooer Missus!) The faster you turned the knob the harder they would hit the ball bearing ball into the net. I have to admit this wasn't mine but I borrowed it from a mate for about six months. Our friendship nearly came to an abrupt end when my curiosity got the better of me one day and I took the back off the game to see how it worked. Inside it was a pulley system of strings that fell apart when I removed the base. It took me ages to get it back in working order. My suspicious mate never let me borrow it again and my knob twirling days were over... sort of.

Waddington's Table Soccer

This board game was like tiddlywinks and I was a good winker. This was probably my favourite football board game and that's probably because I was pretty adept at it. The players were like Subbuteo men but they had flat bases instead of rounded ones. You scored by flicking the tiddlywink into goal and you could get some power into your shots by pressing hard. It was like a football version of Ice Hockey played on a cardboard pitch. Sadly the little plastic footballer's didn't last very long and broke quite easily but it was a fantastic game while it lasted.

Subbuteo

Now the purists will probably go mad here but this was never my cup of tea funnily enough. My friends would soon get fed up of playing this game with me as I was a stickler for the rules and any infringement would be seized upon in a Howard Webb style fit of pique. It was the flicking you see, it had to be done in the correct manner and I wouldn't allow any old flicked goal to stand. Needless to say I spent many an evening playing this game on my own and even fell out with myself. Plus the ball was way too big for the players... and the pitch was always creased. Oh you get the idea I was crap at this game.

Soccer Dice

This was another favourite of mine. Five coloured dice each with instructions on each face. You could pass the ball, win penalties, shoot, score, be offside etc etc. I worked out a handicap scheme and would play out FA Cup games, European Cups and World Cups. The higher your league placing at the time the more throws of the dice you would get than a lower league club. Except in Latics case of course and we enjoyed many a European Cup Winners Cup sortie after being granted special permission to enter after a successful Lancashire Cup season. I bought some of these from Ebay a while back but the magic has gone now.



Magnetic Football

Now this one is a bit of a hazy memory as it must have been the first football game I ever had. The football pitch was slightly raised so that you could fit your magnetic control arm underneath it. The players had magnets as their bases and you moved them round the board in a very laborious fashion. God knows how you scored a goal it was hard enough moving the players around. Don't think it would attract much interest today, geddit? "attract" "Magnetic game" Oh please yourself.



Blow Football

Another perennial favourite around Christmas time, usually a present from an Aunt who couldn't stand you and bought you this alternating with Draughts every bleedin' year. If you ever want to see a child go blue in the face then this is the game for you. I'm sure my Aunt was hoping I'd blow myself into the next world but I never quite managed it. Two straws, a pair of goals and a couple of static keepers and that was it. All you needed was a forceful set of lungs and you could be a world beater. Mind you my Mam was never keen on the spittle that inevitably covered her formica topped dining table after a game. Today it would be endorsed by Sam Allardyce.

Logacta

This dice game is one of my favourites and I'm surprised it's not been updated for today's market, mind you with all the electronic devices kids have nowadays they'd probably turn up their noses in disdain if you asked them did they want to play a game of it. Either that or tell you to eff' off. It was out in the 70's and

advertised in the likes of SHOOT magazine, it wasn't available in the shops I don't think. A statto's delight you could play in 3 European competitions, the League and even the World Cup. Great fun and a childhood favourite of Mr Migs before he found out he could have more fun breaking things...

Super Striker

This came out in the early 70's and it was a bit too late for me to justify buying it as a 17yr old, pity because the TV adverts were really enticing. A lad at work had one though but he was a bit immature, he even read comics at break time. Mind you I'm still reading them yet. Anyway he would come in work and tell me he had been playing Super Striker and I was one of the teams. When I asked him who'd won he'd always say "me" with a smirk. Good lad though for a Wigan Rugby fan.



The great thing about this game was the realistic kicking action. Well I say "realistic" how many football players have you seen kick the ball after a giant finger had just pressed down on their head? No me neither.

So there you have it just a few suggestions for passing the close season with ease. See you at the car boot on Sunday.

• Tony Topping

P.S. Keep a look out for our retro computer football game guide coming soon!

An Objective Lesson



I started writing this article back in May. It was meant to be my end of season piece for This Northern Soul, but then, after having every bit of IT I own rebel against me in some kind of half-arsed attempt at recreating Judgment Day, it got delayed. But like Arnie, I was always going to be back, and what's the point of wasting good words? So here they are. It might help if you put yourself back in that mind set, imagine that you're still in the days after the Stoke game before reading this. Then again I wouldn't want the insurance claims after putting you through that stress again, so best not.

The football season, eh? Thirty-eight games, a rollercoaster ride of Super Sundays and Moribund Mondays, lost weekends and even more weekends where we lost (again). Nine months of agony and ecstasy, of hangovers and hang ups. Three quarters of a year spent with unrealistic expectations, overwhelming expectancy and (if

you're one of the lucky ones) a small dose of elation at the end of it all.

That's pretty much your average fan's season, it's our job to care about the whole thing after all, but is that what the real season is about? For all the highs and lows between August and May, for all the gloating or the 'woe is me' dismay, the real season is much simpler, you start off in alphabetical order and, a small bit of luck aside, end up round about where you deserve based on your ability, with a bit of luck on the side. Anything in-between is just entertainment, hype and emotion.

It might be tough to hold your nerve at times, but for the most part the job of a football manager isn't that much different from mine or yours. They sit down with their bosses at the start of the season and agree their objectives for the next nine months, where they want to be at the end of the season and how they want to get there

Success? It's a fairly subjective concept really isn't it? Whilst most of us were on cloud nine celebrating another year in the top flight, I managed to find a couple of Leeds fans who thought the idea was pretty dismal and a few of our own fans still obsessed with the idea that Latics should somehow, magically, by now be challenging in different parts of the table. Of course you'd hope for more out of your football life, but when the title is out of reach of three quarters of the division (if you're generous) then what hope is there?

But that takes away from the fact that the last seven years' worth of achievements are really something special for a club like Latics. When it comes down to it, all success is relative and any football club has to set its own targets against which their own performance can be measured. It's a fairly safe bet that "chuck a load of my money down the drain and make a push for the qualifying stages of the Europa league" wasn't included in the list of objectives that Uncle Dave set for Bobby last summer, but we can have a pretty good guess of some of that list, for instance:

- * Manage down the cost of wages
- * Develop players towards being saleable/profitable assets



- * Achieve Premier League status for another year and
- * Show a year on year improvement.

are fairly unarguably examples of what would/should have been asked of the man from Balaguer. So how did he do against them?

Manage down the cost of wages

This is probably the hardest of the targets for us to judge from the outside. Steve Bruce had overseen a massive increase in Latics wage bill, up to £42m from £28m in 2007 and indications are that Bobby started to turn that tide last season with a relatively small, but in the right direction drop of just short of £3m.

You'd assume that the movement of assumed big earners, Melchiot, Bramble, Koumas and Scharner will have helped get things to an even more manageable level, but what price a South American top scorer and a Chelsea reject? Still, although we'll not know how things balance of until the next set of accounts are released, the reduction in average age of the squad has to be a positive sign though, as indeed it is for the next objective.

Develop players



This is one area that Latics haven't been that great at in the past. The trail of wasted youth started with the signing of a promising Welsh talent back in 1998 and stopped off at many stations in between, with only Leighton Baines bucking the trend.

This year, for the first time in donkey's years Latics have sold a product of their youth set up, but more importantly we've actually seen another in first team action. Even more so there are four or five other youngsters under the age of 25 in the starting line up or on the bench, that are going from strength to strength with a

second string of younger players making big strides amongst their peers in the reserve league.

So the foundations are being laid and you can see the "get them young, and sell them on at a profit" lining up for the next few seasons. The difficulty is selling the players at the right time and with rumours of £20m or so landing on Dave Whelan's table for James McCarthy and Momo Diame at some point this summer, it's clear to see how we could end up the victims of our own success in this area.

Keep our Premier League status

What is less clear is how much our business model relies on staying in the top flight. Of course it helps you keep your players (although, on history, you have to wonder), it helps attract players in and adds a few million onto the transfer fees that those who don't want to stick around. On the other hand, even with the TV money, the lower wages could make it easier to balance the books in the football league than it is in the Premier League. Once you've shed the big time Charlies (or good footballers as they are otherwise known) and accepted that you may never challenge for top flight football ever again.

But the debate about whether that's a better position for Latics to find themselves in is a fairly moot one right now, because the bottom line is we did it, it was a scrape in the end but we are going to find out what the seven year itch feels like. That's all there is to say really, if you target survival and get it then you've hit your target, unless, that is, there's an hidden sub-clause about achieving

it without putting the chairman under increased risk of breakdown or making sure you satisfy every one of your fans, all the time.

Show a year on year improvement.

So, heading into the final straight, we've hit at least 2 ½ out of 3 objectives. The fourth one has caused no end of debate over the last nine months. You can take the subjective line and either support or renounce the aesthetic principles of plan B(obby), but this is more important than an debate about the "right" way to play football. It's about getting a proper foothold in this division, putting down roots and getting an infrastructure that can be built on so that maybe the target of maintaining top flight football can become something else.

2009-10 may not have been the highest benchmark. But more wins, more draws, less losses, more goals, less conceded and six more points on the board is an improvement whether you put the previous inconsistency down to the manager's failings or to the inevitable consequence of trying to turn around a club that had ended the previous term in decline and been knocked for six over the summer.



If the improvement on last season is obvious, then what's less so is how this season fits into the context of Latics life in the top flight.

The first thing that jumps out is the defeats column. Those fourteen losses aren't just lower than last season, they're lower than any of the last six. Unfortunately that's balanced off in the draws column surely proof of that *FACT* we now hear all the time that Bobby's team doesn't deliver enough goals, well actually [puts on nerdy voice] the 1.1 goals we scored a game this season is more than any of the last five and only bettered (in the top flight, at least) by the madcap adventures back in 2005-06.

So the flip must be true, it must mean that we concede too many. The season stats don't look good, a -21 goal difference and 61 goals conceded don't look pretty by any stretch of the imagination and yet there's still a but. Within two games Latics were 10 goals down on both counts, take those away and the stats are at least comparable with our other seasons. It would all be ifs, buts and maybes, if I were trying to do anything other than point out that Latics were only one or two results away from a, comparatively, very decent season.

Yeah, I know. I can't help but be a glass half full type, but I just find it hard to argue that last season didn't end up as a step in the right direction. If those last 135 minutes had fallen differently then my points would be futile, but we're still here and no matter how difficult you might find it hard to keep the faith all the way through September to May that's the main objective for any Wigan Athletic season. Unless you happen to know a friendly multi-billionaire.

- Neil Rimmer's Perm

Why do Wigan Rugby hate Latics so much?

I started by calling us Latics because that's what they call us. And what's wrong with that, after all it's our nickname? Well you see that's not the reason they call us 'Latics' - the real reason is that they simply can't bear to call us Wigan Athletic because they want Wigan to themselves and as we shall see below, they always have done.

The recent emergence of a [Facebook "banter" page](#) has provided a vehicle for teenagers of both persuasion to hurl foul mouthed badly spelt abuse at each other and personally I just don't get it. I will provide you with my take on matters below. I can understand why Wigan Athletic fans of a certain age hate Wigan Warriors, as we shall see their incessant playground bullying of the little club across town was implicit for years. But as to why Wigan Warriors fans hate Wigan Athletic, well that bit has always puzzled me. Even more so that some of these rugby kids out there who hate the football club are barely in their teens - and the same can also be said about some Latics fans to be fair. It can only have been passed down through generation as there simply is no reason why the two can't exist together and yet the hostility burns stronger than ever.

There are always reasons behind hatred, or so you would think. A Latics fan much more erudite than me once scrawled on a message board:

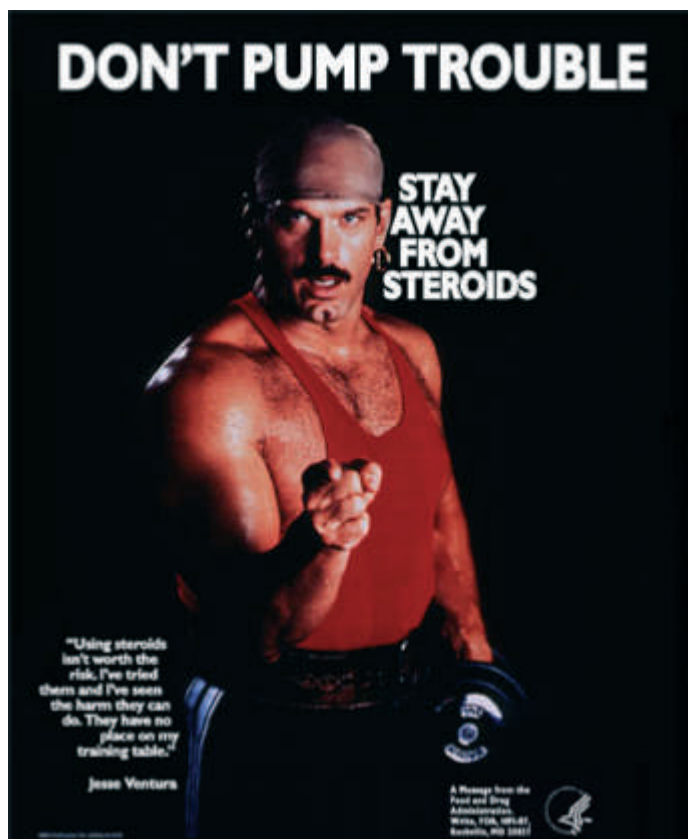
***We hate them because they tried to kill us
They hate us because we exist***

It's a bold statement and one which rings true with many Wigan Athletic fans who lived through the Eighties and Nineties but the trouble is that the one thing there is a lack of abundance of in all this is facts. It's also fair to say that neither party can agree in many cases who started the war, and some of the excuses younger Latics and Rugby fans come up with are flimsy to say the least. You could argue that half of them don't even know why they hate each other.

Clearly I am a Latics fan so my words may be taken immediately as biased, but I'd like to write this without taking sides. I will relate my personal experiences and understanding of the situation from as far back as my memory will take me to current day. I will also try and understand why the rugby lot hate Wigan Athletic as well. Will this solve anything? I doubt it!

However, as a keen football scribe, I know that the one thing that baffles fellow football fans and journalists up and down the country is why the two sets of fans don't get on. You don't hear about the animosity over the Pennines in Bradford, Leeds or Hull. Nor is there massive conflict in Leicester or Northampton where the Union code has a strong presence. These are all much bigger places than Wigan and you could argue that maybe as these other places, with the exception of Northampton are all cities, they have a more outward looking mentality than our own fair town and there probably is a lot to be said about that.

Surely we should take pride in the fact that we are a much smaller town than the above five examples and yet have a better football AND rugby team? There is a minority who feel that way in Wigan and support both, and God bless their cotton socks but how on earth did the other 90% or so develop such animosity? Time to delve into it.



I'll start as far back as my memory goes, not that this is the start of the story. There is no doubt that the sport of rugby was borne out of the sport of football but unlike many other towns, the Wigan Football Club actually played the sport of Rugby and was formed out of Wigan Cricket Club. The first recorded actual Wigan football club in Wigan was Wigan County in 1897 (and I'm sorry if you're confused but there's no way I'm using that horrid American term "Soccer" to describe our game like so many rugby people do) Wigan Athletic of course did not exist until 1932.

So when it comes to who got here first then of course rugby wins and Wigan Athletic are a bunch of Johnny Come Lately's. Some rugby fans actually use this as a modern day excuse for hating Latics: "We are the town's true club - Ancient & Loyal" they say, not that they were very loyal when they were struggling to pull in 3,000 most weeks in the late 70's/early 80's mind you but this is seen as a valid reason for not supporting the town's football club: "We were here first". The trouble is that the people coming out with this guff weren't around in 1932 (unless they were at least 80) let alone 1872 when Wigan Rugby were formed.



And weren't they formed out of a cricket club anyway? So cricket got here first. And football was played before rugby anyway in Wigan because football existed before rugby because rugby was created when a fat lad sat on the ball? But then wasn't football in the older days not much different to rugby anyway? Does any of it matter? No it doesn't, there has been a football club in the town for nearly 80 years now going under the name of Wigan Athletic and being there first matters very little otherwise Notts County (formed 1862) would be the biggest football club in the world. Remember that Manchester United were just a bunch of workshy railway yard workers until the turn of the century.

There is evidence to suggest that right from the beginning there was animosity towards football in the town from the Rugby League fraternity and I believe that a forthcoming book about to be published about Wigan Borough details the rivalry and hostility between the two codes was alive and well in the 20's. You can look at this two ways:

Football failed to establish itself in Wigan several times and therefore we can conclude that there was never any interest in the sport; or The fact that there were so many attempts to prevent football clubs from thriving in the town not only shows that the interest were there but also implies that there was a co-ordinated approach to prevent football from establishing itself within the town by the powers that be within the town who have always had close links to the rugby league fraternity

What? A conspiracy theory? Don't be ridiculous! Surely it was just that no-one was interested.

This has been the stock response from the RL community presumably from back then right up until the present day but we all witnessed the way Wigan Athletic were left to die in the 80's and in the 90's and with that in mind, let's bring the history up to date.

There were two catalysts for much of the animosity: the first one occurred when Wigan Athletic were elected into the Football League and the second followed several years after during the glory years of Wigan RL's Challenge Cup run in the 1980's.

For the six years between 1976 and 1982, Wigan RL were barely on the radar. Their average crowds dipped below 5,000, they often struggled to pull in just over 3,000 and they were



relegated into the Second Division of Rugby League, something which would be practically impossible now. Wigan Athletic however, with their newly found league status started to pull in the sort of crowds which matched and then eclipsed the rugby team.

It wasn't an issue at the time. There were a body of sports fans in the town who went to both throughout this period and I am proud to say that I was one of them: Latics on the Saturday, rugby on the Sunday. It was that simple: supporting our town at whatever it did.



As Wigan Athletic were still very much a lower division side, many football fans in the town had a second team as well, usually a Division One side with coaches leaving from the Gas Showrooms for Old Trafford, Anfield and Goodison every weekend, some would alternate between watching top flight football one week and then Latics at Springfield Park the next. Football was cheap and affordable and the concept of having your own team and a 'big club' to follow as well was common up and down the country. Indeed many had a Scottish team they'd follow as well, usually brought on by religious persuasion and Scholes was a hotbed of Celtic fans.

So what went wrong? Two words: Maurice Lindsay.

Now there is in no way that Maurice Lindsay can be blamed for everything that happened between Wigan Athletic and Wigan Rugby but it's fair to say that he was a figurehead for a cartel of public bodies who served to bully the football club across town throughout the Eighties and Nineties.

Ed Jones summarises it perfectly in his book 'A Northern Soul' when he says that the animosity was always implicit not explicit and it always enabled the rugby club to maintain the moral high ground but speaking as someone who lived through it, I can confirm that what they did to the small, struggling football club across the town was nothing short of an outrage.



Throughout the late Eighties, Wigan Athletic had an exciting young side brought together by Harry McNally and Bryan Hamilton and hopes were high that the club could reach the lofty heights of Division Two (that's the Championship to you youngsters). Across town the rugby club were also re-emerging as a force to be reckoned with after several lean years, including time spent in the Second Division.

Wigan RL emerged from the doldrums of the early 80's to reach a Challenge Cup final in 1984 losing narrowly to Widnes and then returned the following year to beat Hull in the final and end an exodus from major honours. Many Latics lads were there that day and had a whale of a time, in 1985 with Wigan Athletic also winning the Freight Rover Trophy, it was a good time to be a sports fan in Wigan.

The warning signs were there and so the story goes that both clubs were approached in 1985 to do a joint photoshoot to foster cross sport harmony in the town upon which Maurice Lindsay was rumoured to have said we don't want anything to do with them.

Rather than offer the hand of friendship to a neighbour, thus began a co-ordinated campaign to wipe out football in the town of Wigan forever. Wigan RL went on to secure a league title in 1987, enjoyed a famous night at Central Park beating Manly in the World Club Challenge and a record breaking seven Challenge Cup wins in a row and ten years of domination and a return to the pinnacle of rugby league for the famous old name of Wigan RLFC.

Personally I had severed my ties at this point, the decision was made easier by the death of a family relative who had always encouraged me to take interest in rugby league but the other thing this relative taught me was that bullying was wrong. And my God were Wigan Athletic bullied by Wigan RL and their cohorts within the council, the local press and the Police throughout the next decade, all under the spell of their chief puppet master.

Of course, as I have previously mentioned you will not find a written agenda in some dusty cabinet of their actions but those of us who stuck by the football club in the town during what was a very difficult period know differently. We can of course produce evidence of Chairman Mo's finest hour but even that isn't absolutely blatant: it's not so much the words he says but the way he says them but even that can't incriminate him:

[Check out this snippet, for proof](#)

"They took 15,000 but **we** took 40,000"

"They've **chosen** the backyard of Rugby league to do it in"

In other words, they're not welcome around here

The trouble is I had to add that bit.

Oh come now. That was over 20 years ago, and although Maurice has never outright apologised for them, when he took his place on the Wigan Athletic board four years ago, he made it clear that they were comments made in the past and what's the big deal, again turning the situation on it's head to make out that Wigan Athletic fans were the bitter ones for holding a grudge for so long. He then comically went on to justify his place on Wigan Athletic's board by saying 'I'm a massive soccer fan, I was a Bolton Wanderers season ticket holder for years...!!'



Maurice's very public statement of ridicule was very much in evident across the town of Wigan. I remember getting abuse for wearing my Latics shirt when catching the bus to football training 'what you doing wearing that puff's shirt? Play a proper sport!' On the playground's across town, kids wore rugby shirts or big club's shirts and Latics fans were spat at and laughed at by the RL fraternity, keen to show us up as pariahs in our own town. Visitors to the town enquiring where the football ground was were frequently given directions to Central Park by hilarious wags who would respond to a mention of Wigan Athletic with a token 'Who?'

Indeed a glance of the RL forums now still sees the insulting terms for football of 'puffball', 'wendyball' are in common use, this despite taking such a keen interest in Wigan Athletic to the extent that numerous groups on Facebook were started 'Wigan Athletic 2011 Relegation party' whilst at games towards the end of the season their fans were singing West Ham and Stoke songs.

They would never openly admit the hatred but it was cultivated across their fans that the football fans were a bunch of hooligans and their club was not welcome in the town. A read of a WRLFC programme of the time reveals it was littered with patronising digs towards Wigan Athletic, most prominently from a columnist called Doug Stand, who was also the Sports Editor of the local Wigan newspaper at the time.

"Why is ringing a Latics fan like phoning Australia?"

"You have to wait three seconds before you get an answer"

And that was one of their better ones....



Throughout the 80's and 90's the local press literally plastered their daily and weekly papers with rugby league news and features and barely gave Wigan Athletic a mention, no doubt influenced by Lindsay's cosy relationship with the editor of the time. It seemed that the town of Wigan wanted to take revenge on the nation's obsession with the more popular sports of Football and Rugby Union, often complained about amongst Rugby League fans by choosing to barely acknowledge Wigan Athletic and Orrell RUFC in the town and the public milked it. Match reports were a rarity, usually provided by the legendary "Post Reporter" i.e. a press association because they couldn't be bothered sending

anyone and during the week Latics at best warranted a small column.

The exception of course being on occasion where there were outbreaks of trouble at the football when all of a sudden Wigan Athletic became front page news. It became en vogue to run scare stories be it trouble at Springfield Park (and no-one is denying there was) or even on the national stage, there would always be the flimsiest attempt to link it to Wigan Athletic.

The public needs to know these things of course, the only problem was that Wigan town centre was much more frequently a battlezone when Wigan RL played the likes of Warrington, Saints, Leeds and Hull with pitched battles being fought most weekends the length of Standishgate between rival RL fans, yet these bloody, regular exchanges were strangely absent from the following week's papers.

On the odd occasions they felt obliged to report anything, the reporters were always keen to point out that it was 'football hooligans' on the rampage and nothing to do with their sport. It was almost as if they were trying to protect the image of the sport as a family game whilst any outbreaks of violence involving the football club across town were further evidence that this nasty little team didn't belong in the town.

This also translated into police victimisation as the local plod had clearly read the script and many Latics fans suffered at the hands of the local police force for the heinous crime of watching their team with batons drawn at every opportunity yet across town mass outbreaks of violence were passed off as exuberant spirits never to be mentioned again, even when famously hundreds of Hull & Leeds fans were fighting on the pitch at Headingley a few years back.



It always tickles me to hear of RL fans moaning that their sport doesn't get the coverage it deserves in the nationals, the token answer is always that the public isn't interested in it, although it is of course a chicken and egg situation as if you don't get the coverage then how can you increase the interest. This was clearly the approach taken the local press in Wigan towards football right up until around about 2005. They certainly got their own back in the town with regard to disproportionate coverage nevertheless using that same excuse to deny Wigan Athletic any sort of coverage in the town.

All this bleating that rugby league doesn't get the coverage it deserves and it's not fair that it's not being allowed to thrive and prosper in the country by Southern based editors with an RU bias unwilling to give airtime to the less popular code. Funny how they weren't so keen to lend a hand to the less popular sports club in Wigan and actively sought to discredit Wigan Athletic at every opportunity. Still it's fair game when the boot's on the other foot isn't it?



What of the local council? Well as the old song used to go 'all the council's had a go', councillors getting freebies to Wembley, trips to Australia and failing to invest a penny in football in the town as many of us were forced to play in run down facilities and dilapidated pitches meanwhile public money was poured into rugby league and many schools refused to even play football whether there was interest or not.

It became routine for the council to close large sections of Springfield Park for the slightest reason and more than once threatened to close down the ground

altogether - believe me, they would if they could - yet the same council increased the capacity of Central Park for a one off game versus Manly by over 10,000 at a stroke of a pen. Meanwhile the newly erected Popular Stand at Springfield Park, the only covered standing area at the football ground was restricted to just 378 fans due to inadequate crush barriers. Make those pesky football fans get wet, even though they don't need to, keep breaking their resolve and they'll go away. Needless to say no money was ever forthcoming for ground improvements from Wigan Council and when Wigan Athletic finally landed a money spinning cup tie against Liverpool in 1990 and asked if they could use Central Park for a one off game, they were met with a flat 'we're not letting that lot in here' and Latics were forced to play both legs at Anfield.

Even after moving to the JJB Stadium, Wigan Athletic were told they would not be allowed to have more than 10,000 spectators on 'as it was a Saturday and it would cause too much congestion for shoppers and an access road would have to be built' Yet strangely Wigan RL were never hampered by such restrictions, even though the Robin Park and Asda complex is equally gridlocked on a Sunday since seven days a week opening.

So there you have it, that was the 80's and 90's in the town, if it's purely paranoia in the case of football fans in the town then I'm sure you'll agree that Latics fans have a pretty vivid imagination.

As part of the 25 year celebrations of pivotal football fanzine When Saturday Comes, they have recently been reproducing classic articles and managed to pull out [this gem](#) which seems to validate a lot of the above.

Why the hatred then? Particularly from rugby fans towards football fans:

What had Wigan Athletic ever done to hurt Wigan Rugby?

Well that is where I really am struggling. If I was into dramatizing the situation I would liken it to Thatcher's crushing of the miners in the Eighties. We were a small but proud body of people who just wanted to get on with our lives and every section of the establishment were slowly turned against us until we were perceived as the enemy, yet unlike those miners we wanted nothing in return, just the opportunity to get on with our lives where we lived. Looking back, it is a miracle that the football club survived after wave upon wave of attack from the various establishments in town, some of whom were supposed to protect and represent us.



I wonder what your average rugby fan thinks if they have made it through the previous five pages or so? Will they feel ashamed of the bullying tactics and attempts to eradicate a football club which never did any harm to anyone? Or, more likely, will they again, pull on their rugby shirt and claim it is the delusional rant of a football fan telling porkies. Well I lived through it mate, no porkies here.

Just to prove that, I'd like to point out that Wigan Athletic fans are not completely blameless. Since the football club started it's upward momentum, there was inevitably going to be a backlash. Most rugby fans you speak to will have a tale of getting abused by Latics fans: called names and spat at, even though there seems to be an almost cut and paste uniformity about these tales, I've seen it happen so I'm not about to deny it. Of course, 'the town is turning blue' was a popular chant when Latics secured the Second Division Championship and can be perceived as rubbing rugby fans' noses in it.

Two wrongs don't make a right and I'm not about to justify any of that but it is easy to equalise these two crimes:

Maybe if rugby fans weren't too busy calling Wigan Athletic fans homosexuals for following the round ball game in the Eighties, then maybe Latics fans wouldn't have felt the need to call rugby fans a bunch of fat egg chasing idiots.

Maybe if Wigan Athletic fans hadn't spent the Eighties being laughed at and having the words 'it's a rugby town' continually rammed down their throats for the best part of decades, they wouldn't have felt the need to crow about 'the town turning blue' when their team endured a period of growth and success.

There's only so many jibes you can get rammed down your throat before you learn to spit a bit back out, and after being the victim for so many years and surviving constant attacks from those in authority and those who took their view to be the authority, well you couldn't really blame Wigan Athletic fans for giving a little bit back, you reap what you sow, whether you agree with it or not.

Of course, in more recent times Wigan Athletic, or more specifically Dave Whelan have also incurred the wrath of rugby fans for asking them to move a few fixtures around to accommodate the football club's fixtures. First there was a play off game which Wigan Warriors were forced to play at Widnes as Wigan Athletic also had a pre-scheduled home fixture in the Premier League.



Now most rational sports people would naturally conclude that the Premier League, one of the richest's leagues in the most popular sport in the world may take precedent over a Super League play off game, especially the residents of that particular town but the uproar at the time further created a wedge between the two sports' clubs with rugby fans threatening to arrange protests at games, road blockages for Latics matches and plenty comments on message boards along the lines of 'Hope you die soon Whelan'.

One of the more moderate views was expressed by a local MEP, Brian Simpson, who opined that he felt that Rugby league fans in the town were

'being treated like second class citizens'. Hello, Mr Simpson, care to read the previous six pages!!

For the record, for the whole of the decade of the Nineties, Wigan Athletic played at home just once on Boxing Day, playing away nine times out of ten in order to accommodate the traditional Saints derby and the one time they did play at home was subject to a twelve noon kick off. Did Wigan

Athletic fans threaten to go around to Dave Whelan's house and chain themselves to his railings and fling excrement at him? I don't think so.

Whereas I can understand Wigan Rugby is a passion for many people in this town, as I said right at the beginning, Wigan Athletic have existed in the town for nearly 80 years. If Rugby League fans were fair minded sports fans, as are the natives of Bradford, Hull, Leeds, Northampton or Leicester they would indeed appreciate and support their town's football team and recognise that to have a Premier league football team in such a small town is some achievement and want it to thrive and prosper not actively hate it. Both teams are at the behest of Sky Sports ultimately who have been more pivotal than any sports' official body and shuffling fixtures around.



Yet still the hatred flows. I've seen Wigan Athletic referred to as Africa Athletic on RL forums when there's only been one African player in the squad. Make into this what you will, I would say it's outright racist given the number of black faces we have in the squad, many of them French and - shock horror - English and as someone who cheered on Ellery Hanley and Henderson Gill in a past life (Green Vigo was just before my time) wearing the cherry and white I find it truly appalling but it's still all about anything to discredit Latics and pass them off as outsiders in the town.

From the other side of the coin, the fact of the matter is that when Wigan Athletic reached the Premier league in 2005, the rugby league club became barely an issue to most football fans. There was a period of time where Dave Whelan attempted to bring together an admirable 'two teams, one town' concept, and brought the aforementioned Maurice Lindsay onto the board and this was understandably scoffed at by many Latics fans after all the suffering and hatred aimed at them over the years from the rugby and Lindsay in particular. As soon as the football club are the main draw in town, they finally come to us and talk about a partnership?? When we were truly in need and didn't have a pot to p*ss in, they laughed in our faces.

The psychological bit



Like many people, I struggle to forgive and forget, I don't like bullies and whenever I see someone in town wearing the colours of Wigan Rugby, I see someone wearing a shirt that represents a group of evil bullies who tried to wipe out their town's football club so that they could have the town to themselves. Quite how they continue to portray this brainwashed image that they are the good in the town and Latics are the bad and should be treated with derision is beyond me after everything that has gone on. I do find this largely unforgivable but life is short you know and if there ever was the opportunity to bury the hatchet, then I would indeed bury it.

The only reason I feel animosity to any Wigan Warriors at all nowadays is because of the animosity their fans show towards the town's football club. If there was a pact tomorrow I would genuinely buy into it, no matter who the aggrieved were in the past, we co-existed fine when I first started watching sport in the town and it's not inconceivable we could do again.

There are a small minority of people, no more than 5% to 10% of each team's fanbase who do watch both sports or at least support both teams, many of whom I consider to be my friends. It is my wish that somehow we can hold these people out as shining lights of how to be a sports fan in Wigan. If they were the majority not the minority then we would have something very special in the town indeed.

As it stands, no-one looks at Wigan and admires the town for it's sporting divide: they just don't understand it. I have in the above lengthy piece tried to provide a narrative of the history between the two and maybe I am biased but for me the hatred always flowed one way, then ebbed back a little but since Wigan Athletic arrived in the Premier League most fans barely directed any vitriol towards the rugby league team whereas the rugby league fans continue to hate Latics, [even singing songs about Latics on match days](#)

Needless to say, I haven't heard anything like this at a Wigan Athletic football match for years, the colours of Wigan Rugby are worn by many people at Wigan Athletic games on a regular basis and no-one bats an eyelid, I am reliably informed that if anyone turned up in the South Stand wearing Latics gear, they would be met with threats of physical violence which apparently are common place anyway on a Friday night.

Again, what did Wigan Athletic ever do to hurt you and what can we as a town do stop this prejudice? The fact of the matter is that as it stands neither team sells out but both can boast a 16,000 average in a 25,000 all seater stadium. There are occasions during the cross over period where over 30,000 people watch sport in the stadium in a single weekend in a town of 80,000 people yet neither day is it full. There is a greater good here staring at us all straight in the face but it is going to take a lot of olive branches to make it happen and may indeed prove futile.



We seem to be in a 'who blinks first' situation at the minute, where many rugby fans believe that it is only a matter of time before Wigan Athletic get relegated/go bust and they will again reclaim the town for themselves. Most Wigan Athletic fans know that without Whelan in the future it may well be bleak. Wigan Rugby are resurgent after a lean period and have finally made the DW Stadium home with flags, banners and a cracking atmosphere but sadly they still set aside some of their passion for their own team to find room for hatred for the town's other team. Whereas the smart money would be on Wigan Rugby being the one with the greatest longevity, is there any need to continue this rivalry now both teams are roughly at parity (it's true - they are even though both sets of fans might not like reading that)

Both teams have had halcyon days in recent years and instead of sharing in each others' success it has simply increased resentment which considering many people live and work together in the same town is nothing short of pathetic.

But of course THEY started it....

Who started it?

Oh never mind, it was just an idea.....

- Scholes Control

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO.....

We all like to pontificate at great length about the disappearance of many things such as floodlight pylons and gruesome away ends from football grounds and it has become clear just how many staple items of our football diet have now been consigned to the footballing graveyard in the sky. Now I'm not going to reverse down the well trodden road of stating how football isn't as good as it used to be as it's been done to death, I'll simply point out a few things that have simply disappeared or become obsolete over time and I'll let you draw your own conclusions as to whether it's for the better or not. So here are my **TEN THINGS YOU DON'T SEE AT FOOTBALL ANY MORE....**

Crush Barriers

For a static piece of metal, crush barriers were fascinating to look at. Depending on their shape and pattern, they could look like a smiley or angry face staring back at you or if the terracing was particularly steep, they could resemble a giant game of Space Invaders.

Outside Toilets

A sadly missed feature of Springfield Park and elsewhere including Rochdale to name but one. A 'toilet' was something of a generous description for what was usually a mouldy wall with half an upturned drain pipe running along the bottom. Fortunately if you were particularly tall, you could peer over the top and continue watching the game.

Klaxons

Yes I had one of these, purchased for the princely sum of £4.99 from Halfords on Market Street. I think I only ever took it to about two games but I will never forget the apprehension before using it that first time. However, I was pleased to find a smattering of clapping and a reasonable chorus of 'WIGAN' at the end. The funniest instances were always when a big assertive blast of the foghorn petered out into a whimper before the end of the traditional tune that was blasted out.

Manual Scoreboards

These were often rendered completely useless unless you bought a programme and even if you did, you still needed a degree in Algebra to try and fathom out what was going on. In theory, there would be a series of letters going from A to whatever letter of the alphabet they could fit on the scoreboard and a corresponding set of fixtures in the programme enabling spectators to receive score updates from elsewhere. Typically these updates didn't involve a GPRS enabled WAP phone but a little old fella with a flat cap and a transistor radio and a penchant for getting scores horribly wrong!

Nose Strips

This phase must have lasted all of a month. I'm fairly certain that the first person to wear one was Robbie Fowler, closely followed by dozens of others in a craze which expanded at a rate only matched by its disappearance. Designed as an aid to more efficient breathing and also apparently had the side effect of reducing snoring, which must have pleased Robbie's room mates on away trips.

No Man's Lands

Some football grounds had a natural point of segregation, thereby making them easy on the eye when you watched Match of the Day later that evening. Others just didn't look right at all, when the TV camera used to home in on goal at somewhere like Molineux or Vicarage Road and all you could see behind it was a big, ugly centre parting of the crowd with terrace solely populated by a couple of stewards and policemen with dogs.

Holding back the away fans

It was almost standardised whether you were at Carlisle or Exeter: 'We've got a message for the visiting Wigan Athletic supporters. Could you please remain in the stand at the end of the game for a short period of time after which you will be escorted to your coaches.' The last time I recall it happening at an away game was naturally, at Cardiff a few years ago when not only did we get to applaud the subs who were winding down but Sam Hammam came over for a spot of good natured

Sock Tie Ups

Modern shin pads normally come with their own straps and socks are now sufficiently elasticated that if you asked Charles N'Zogbia for his sock ties after the last game of the season, he would probably reply with a blunt and confusing 'Non'. Again, embarrassment time for me, as I confess to once successfully procuring Ian Griffiths' tie ups after one game during the eighties.

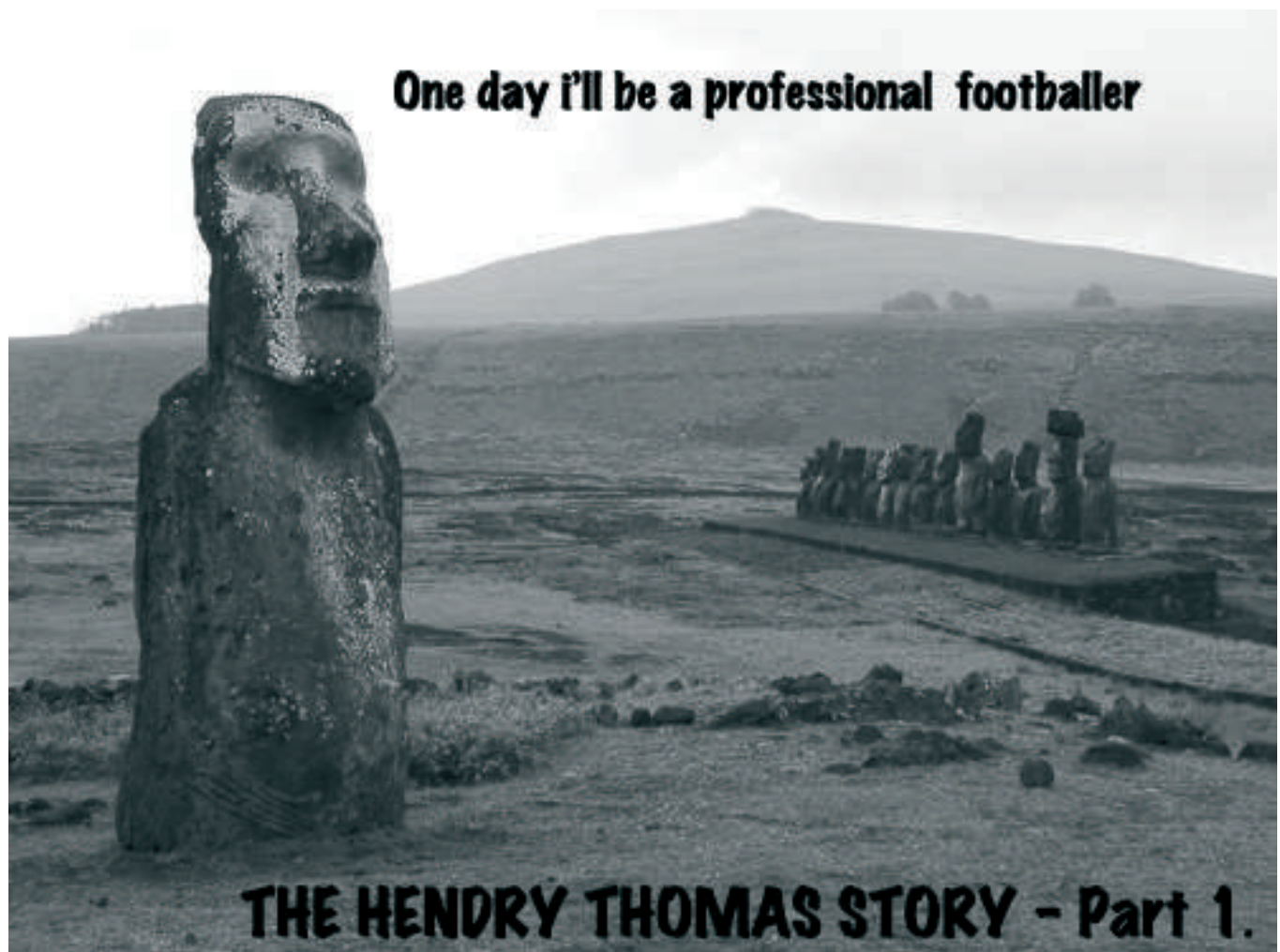
Toilet Rolls

Of course we still have toilet rolls in the cubicles provided within the washroom facilities, but when was the last time you saw one being hurled onto the pitch? I'm unsure as to whether this trend simply went out of fashion or that modern tissue dispensary facilities make it extremely impractical to relieve the Gents of loo roll in order to provide a more spectacular entrance or goal celebration for your heroes on the pitch.

The Football Pink

There were frequent queues outside the adjacent chippy and pie shops but there was only one time of the week where a collection of gentlemen would be crammed into my local paper shop on Gidlow Lane forming a patient line. Six o'clock on a Saturday night and these sports fans were eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Football Pink. No internet in those days just bizarre nonsensical match reports cobbled together frantically minutes after the game to hit the news stands. A fantastic read nevertheless!

And I never even found room for the old boy outside Springfield Park with his 'Repent Your Sins' placard!!





Talking shite

with Will
Philkinson

Friends and colleagues

I'm sure by now you've all read the news stories and the allegations that have been made against me and the newspaper I work for. In my position as chief Rugby league Reporter / 3am girl I feel it is my duty to make my position clear in all of this and inform you of steps which need to be taken.

When the first wave of phone hacking allegations first arose in 2005 we sacked Alan Petespinnall and Jeremy Shytepayne, two Pulitzer Prize winning journalists much lauded for their work in covering the BARLA leadership contest of 1983. However, they were the first to admit that hacking Andy Farrell's phone and deleting voice messages from the Saracens chairman was wrong. As was the "Farrell Must Die" page they created on Facebook. When it further transpired they were implicated in the "Lydon Dressgate" affair in the mid 80s, the company was left with no option.

Since then, as far as I am aware, the Rugby League department has done its utmost to be beyond reproach. I'd like to go on record here and now and state that I knew nothing of any of the allegations brought against the newspaper this week. If anything, we've tried to distance ourselves from sordid rumours. When Henderson Gill was rumoured to have been having an affair with the Princess of Wales, we didn't print. Similarly, we knew of the Superinjunction taken out by Andy Gregory (which has since been lifted) to prevent the reporting of his allegedly simultaneous affairs with Ryan Giggs, John Terry and Rio Ferdinand's respective wives but we never acted upon this information.

So to be told this week that the police had a list of 4,000 prominent Rugby League figures that have had their phones allegedly hacked is a shock. As were the revelations that the victims may well have included those not directly in the public eye, like Gareth Hock's cocaine dealer, Sean Long's bookmaker and the bus driver who nearly broke Feka Paleasina's fist with his jaw. Furthermore, I genuinely believed the £100,000 paid out by myself to senior police officers in the Wigan area was helping to fund crucial areas of police business, like new video cameras to film the Pathetics away followers. Naturally, I cannot comment on any ongoing police investigations taking place or give any clues as to their nature. However, once "Operation Gatefix" and "Operation Doris" are complete, I will respond in full.

Despite all of this, it is with great regret that I have to inform you of the decision made at board level. A decision which, I've been told I must point out, was NOT influenced in any way, shape or form by Micron Video's bid to take over BSkyB thus securing broadcasting rights for Superleague for the next 3 years. The "Wigan Observant" is shutting down. After 168 years of groundbreaking journalism and being at the forefront of all world affairs concerning Rugby League, next Tuesday's will be the last. Except for the 48 page special in August celebrating the life and times of the enigmatic Mick Cassidy. Or the limited edition gold embossed Grand Final Special in October.

Personally, I shall be taking a short sabbatical. I've spoken at length to my manager cum batman Maurice who's had great experience in distancing himself from calamitous situations entirely of his own making.

I have been offered a position on the board at Wigan Athletic which I shall be taking up immediately with special dispensation to handle the FA.

See you all in August.



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