

Contrary to what Sky might have you believe, football existed before 1992. In fact the 1980s saw cultural and political change that shaped the modern game. But while football wasn't cool, some of us still loved it. **JON HOWE** looks back with nostalgia at the decade that football forgot...

A game you might have forgotten

October 12, 1988

Leeds United 3 Peterborough United 1, League Cup (Leeds won 5-2 on aggregate)

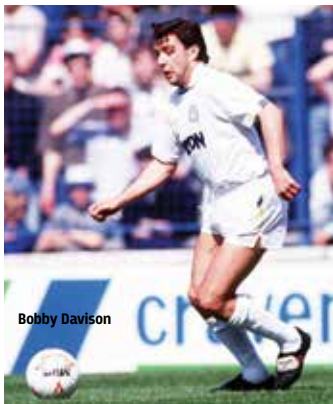
By the autumn of 1988 it was clear that Leeds manager Billy Bremner had failed to continue the upward momentum of the epic 1986/87 season, and the club was once again foundering helplessly in the wilderness.

Nobody wanted to admit that the club's ultimate hero wasn't quite capable of awakening the beast, but as Leeds started a seventh season outside the top flight, there were few fans able to apply logic to continuing the club's rudderless decline.

With Bremner sacked and the team managerless, the 1-0 home defeat to Watford on October 8 was followed by a 2,000-strong demonstration from irate fans in the West Stand car park, in which cars were damaged and answers were demanded.

Two days later the answer came, and it had been right under our noses all the time – or rather a mere 33 miles down the road, in the form of the brusque and militant Howard Wilkinson. The procession of former Revie heroes had failed and a new broom was deployed with a stiff and bristling technique that feverishly scrubbed at the foundations of the club and retained only what couldn't hold on.

Wilkinson's first game in charge bore little relation to the heady and super-charged occasions that swiftly became



Bobby Davison

de rigueur under his stewardship. Leading 2-1 from the first leg of a Rumbelows Cup tie, Leeds entertained Peterborough United in the second leg at Elland Road. The fact that only 8,894 were sufficiently curious to witness the first game of the new era, owed much to the Leeds public's indifference at both the club's plight and the uncomfortable anxiety at the final link to Revie's Leeds being severed.

In the event, Leeds won 3-1 with goals from Bobby Davison, Vince Hilaire and a John Sheridan penalty. With a lukewarm and apathetic start, the revolution was under way.



John Sheridan



Anyone remember... Vince Hilaire?

The late 1970s and early '80s saw the gradual introduction of more black players into the English game. The West Brom triumvirate of Regis, Cunningham and Batson had opened the door and through it followed emerging stars at other clubs such as Viv Anderson at title-winning Nottingham Forest, our own Terry Connor, striker Justin Fashanu at Norwich City, and Vince Hilaire at Crystal Palace.

Hilaire was a fast and skilful winger who was tipped for England honours as he helped a youthful and exciting Palace side to successive promotions in the late 1970s. However, he never bettered a handful of Under-21 and B international caps. After spells at Luton and Portsmouth, Hilaire was signed for Leeds as a 29-year-old by Bremner in the summer of 1988, with a tribunal finally settling his £190,000 fee.

While almost ever-present in his first season at Leeds, even surviving Wilkinson's brutal sweep of the Elland Road senior pros, Hilaire quickly fell from favour and made just two sub appearances in the promotion season of 1989/90.

Hilaire never possessed the physical endeavour that was so integral to Wilkinson's "dogs of war" approach and he was soon shipped out to Stoke City, first on loan and by the summer of 1990, permanently.

Nothing happened in the 1980s, apart from... **The Football Supporters' Association**

The year of 1985 is widely classed as "year zero" for football fans, with the word "fan" effectively meaning "hooligan". That year saw the Luton-Millwall and Birmingham-Leeds riots, the Bradford fire and finally the Heysel disaster. Law-abiding football fans had to deal with barbed wire, police dogs and crumbling stadia on a weekly basis.

Born in a Merseyside pub, the Football Supporters' Association (FSA) was originally a group of people determined to give football fans a fair and honest representation against the public condemnation and moral panic that had engulfed the game. Sadly, four years later things got worse and following the 1989 Hillsborough disaster, the FSA were virtually the only public body standing up for the 96 victims, with chairman Rogan Taylor (below) a lone and passionate voice of support.

The FSA grew to fight key battles for England fans' rights at the 1990 Italia World Cup, but later the might of Sky and the Premier League meant they lost ground in defending fans against rising ticket prices and inconvenient kick-off times. In 2002 the FSA merged with the National Federation of Football Supporters' Club and formed the Football Supporters' Federation, which today is a strong democratic body campaigning for safe standing and fans' representation on the boards of football clubs.

