

FOOTBALL'S LOST DECADE

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 27, 1982

Newcastle 1 Leeds United 4 (after extra-time)

Most Leeds fans spent the 1980s waiting for a sign that the tide was turning, one single event that meant the former glories that weren't too long ago could be recaptured.

On such occasion was this remarkable League Cup tie at Newcastle United, where Leeds staged an unlikely comeback which, after years of decline, reignited the sense that this was a club of proud stature.

Trailing to an Imre Varadi goal from the first leg, the task seemed a forlorn and familiar one when Jeff Clarke breached our stunned rearguard in the second minute, before many of the Leeds fans, delayed by traffic, had even entered the ground. A 2-0 aggregate deficit may have prompted many to turn round

and go straight home.

However, in a thrilling end-to-end game, Leeds gradually wrested control, and seemingly from nowhere, turned the game around. It took a Wes Saunders own-goal on 32 minutes to offer some belief and Leeds' attacking endeavour was rewarded 20 minutes from the end when 34-year-old player-manager Eddie Gray defied the years and sent in a perfect cross for the diving Frank Worthington to dispatch. This brought extra-time and the knowledge that away goals would count at the end of it, although Leeds



Aidan Butterworth
and (left) Frank
Worthington

ignored that and went for the kill anyway.

At half-time in extra-time Gray replaced himself with 19-year-old Terry Connor, and the change proved a masterstroke as with stunning execution Connor ripped through the tiring Newcastle defence, which featured a certain Peter Haddock. Aidan Butterworth side-footed Leeds into an aggregate lead, and in the last minute of extra-time an intricate passing move involving Worthington and Hird sent Connor clean through to delicately chip the Newcastle keeper. The Leeds fans behind the goal were delirious and the standout moment of Eddie Gray's tenure at the helm was complete.

As a giddy youngster bowled over by a stunning victory I remember being allowed to stay up for the rare treat of watching the highlights on television later that night. It felt like Leeds United were back. Then we lost 1-0 at home to Huddersfield in the next round...



Terry
Connor



Anyone remember... Terry Connor?

Leeds' first black player since Albert Johanneson immediately ingratiated himself to the Elland Road faithful in fairy-tale fashion. The 17-year-old, plucked from the juniors the day before, came on as sub for Paul Madeley in November 1979 against West Brom and scored a late winner at the Kop end which won over the embittered Leeds crowd.

Fast and strong, Connor regularly scored goals when selected but was in and out of the side, particularly under Allan Clarke, and was often the victim of being at a struggling club who had no time or patience for the inevitable loss of form that comes with young players.

Relegation hit the Leeds-born Connor very hard, and eventually he was offered to Brighton in a swap deal with another striker Andy Ritchie, and Connor himself admitted he regrets not having the confidence to stay and fight for his place.

Connor is now part of Mick McCarthy's backroom staff at last Tuesday's visitors Ipswich Town.

Nothing happened in the 1980s, apart from...

The end of regional TV highlights

On Sunday afternoons in the early 1980s, tucked neatly between the *Emmerdale Farm* omnibus and Harry Seycombe's *Highway*, was YTV's *The Big Game*. It had begun in the late 1970s and remained a singular source of Leeds United exposure at a time when attending matches wasn't always possible and there was little other media coverage.

The Big Game was Yorkshire's answer to LWT's *The Big Match*, with the ITV network split across the country, offering local football for the Anglia, Tyne-Tees and Granada regions, among others.

For football fans in Yorkshire, Leeds United had dominated the coverage since Yorkshire Television first broadcast in 1968, with few other teams in the region even breaching the second tier. Fred Dineage was the usual presenter in the early days with Martin Tyler making waves as a fledgling commentator, later to be replaced by John Helm.

Bafflingly, ex-Wolves striker Derek Dougan later became a presenter despite having no connections whatsoever



to any clubs in the region, but at least helping with impartiality.

By the 1982/83 season YTV had no top division sides in the region and the ITV network began to concentrate on live football.

Regional highlights programmes soon disappeared and so the only route for fans to see goals became the 10-second clips shown on either *Look North* or *Calendar*.