

SPORTING MEMORY

I'll never forget the excitement of my Dad, a Unitedite, taking me, a 10 year old Wednesdayite, to Bramall Lane in the Winter of 1960. A cold, damp day. United were playing Wednesday in the FA Cup Quarter Finals. The kick-off was always 3 o'clock on a Saturday afternoon and the match always finished at twenty minutes to 5.

Tension building in my chest. My Mam wrapping me in blue and white scarf, woolly hat and gloves and my "big" coat.

Queueing for the bus outside St. Catherine's church, Woodthorpe. Feeling the anxiety. Would we get on? It was always packed like sardines! Big, gruff men with deep voices, hands ingrained with blue dirt from the pits or steelworks. Talking about Hodgkinson, Springett, Joe Shaw and Finney.

Getting off the bus at the bottom of Granville Road. Jogging to the ground. Dad always walked like a KOYLI on a route march. Weaving in and out of the bodies all heading the same way. Dad, quick, nimble, protective. Making sure I was alright.

The crowd was heaving outside the ground. Would we get in? More anxiety. Big, shoving, excited men squeezing through the turnstile, up the rough hill to the top of the Kop.

Dad bought me my first rosette and had made me a special wooden step to stand on at the match. We got a place half way down the Kop, just above the aisle crossing the heaving, swaying, noisy crowd. Blades and Owls fans packed together. 60 thousand of them! No trouble. Men ensuring the kids were safe and sound.

The game was a blur of excitement, tension, ooohs and aaahs, wit and wisdom from the many headed beast. A cacophony of noise. A young lad, a Unitedite, stood by my "step", struggling to sepe the action. I invited him onto my platform. We smiled at each other and shared the thrills.

As the game progressed I found myself usurped, standing half on my "step" clinging on precariously. Then Wednesday's winger, Wilkinson scored. He scored again. My discomfort didn't matter. I was ecstatic!

My new friend and land-grabber was miserable but we didn't fall out. Dad was disappointed but happy for me, his lad. He was philosophical having seen it all before.

As the game ended we mingled with misery and elation, trudging or stepping contentedly back to Pond Street bus station to board a crowded bus. I knew this was my first day of real triumph and felt the particular satisfaction you get from seeing your team, Wednesday, win. Naïve about what would come in future. Many days of disappointment, frustration and "if onlys" that's inherent in being a football fan, Wednesdayite! With an occasional glimpse of glory.

Back home in front of a roaring fire, with bacon eggs, tomatoes, followed by Mandarin Oranges with Carnation cream and Hopalong Cassidy in black and white on our 14" telly! Sheer bliss!!

John Douglas Longstaff

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