I'm Rivelino

A Life in Two Halves

Andy Rivers

Published by Byker Books

Extract

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Andy Rivers

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To all the friends I made along the way...

I'm Rivelino - A Life of Two Halves

Foreword by Lee Clark

I was born on Tyneside in the Seventies and grew up surrounded by football and Newcastle United in particular. As you know I played for 'The Toon' and was proud to do so - always will be - and I felt I had a genuine bond with the supporters, being one of them myself. As the saying goes' If I wasn't on the pitch wearing black and white I'd have been on the terraces wearing it' and with that in mind I can relate to the stories in this book. Andy Rivers has told an entertaining tale about growing up and following 'your' team through thick and thin - I think most football fans will read this and think he could just as easily have written about their team.

I'm sure you'll enjoy it - whichever team you support.

Best Wishes

Lee Clark

I'm Rivelino - A Life of Two Halves

Punditry Bollocks

Roberto Rivelino made his name worldwide with his vicious cannon-like free-kicks, long range shooting and dribbling skills. One particularly famous move of his, called the elastic dribble, is still imitated today. He scored many times with this move often leaving his opponents open-mouthed and wrong footed in his wake.

He was twenty four when he won the Mexico world cup in 1970. That Brazilian team is regarded by many as the best ever and it displayed some of the finest football ever seen with Rivelino as one of the best players. He scored three great goals including a trademark thunderous free-kick against Czechoslovakia in their first match.

In his prime Rivelino was one of the greatest offensive midfielders in the world and, in a show of loyalty that most modern day players couldn't begin to understand, spent most of his career at Corinthians. The fans appreciated this and nicknamed him Reizinho do Parque (King of the Park). He retired in 1981 and is today a respected TV pundit in Brazil.

Andy 'Rivelino' Rivers, spent most of his football career at centre half for deeply average school teams, a cartilage injury when he was fourteen started the decline in his already mediocre record to the point where, at the age of twenty one and with two operations behind him, he finished his playing days at the heart of Westholme Farm Social Club's defence. The North Tyneside league never really knew what it had missed.

So there you have it, two men with spookily similar careers, the only difference being that one was a Brazilian international who was idolised by millions of people, played at the highest level and won the highest honour possible in his chosen career and the other didn't.

***In all other respects they could have been twins**...*

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.....STILL PLAYING.....

First Half

Welcome to the North

Flowers and Football Tops

I buried one of my best mates on Christmas Eve 2004, Col was thirty five years old and like me had never seen his club, Newcastle United, win a thing.

Driving up from my self- imposed exile in deepest, darkest Oxfordshire for his funeral two days before Christmas was a sombre affair. I was travelling on my own and had promised my wife I'd be back early on Christmas Day which gave me nearly five hours in holiday traffic with just my thoughts, memories and that irritating twat Chris Moyles for company.

Having a funeral on Christmas Eve appears to have some kind of celestial symmetry to it - you know, the birth of the main man, the end of the year and all that - it should make you think about stuff on a higher plane. But when you're seeing off one of your pals all you can think about then is drinking to his memory and saying goodbye. Particularly when that mate has shuffled off his mortal coil at such a young age with a lot of unfulfilled ambitions and dreams.

So I was in reflective mood as I nosed the car up the M1 and the smell of Yorkshire hit me. The stench of what seemed like cow shit and cabbage transporting me back to a far off land where it was always sunny, there was always beer to drink and me and Col always managed to have a good time no matter how many we'd lost by that day.

Glancing up I caught sight of myself in the rearview mirror and noticed a small smile on my face - that bastard had sneaked in when I wasn't looking.

Then I saw the sign indicating the Barnsley turnoff and I burst out laughing - my finest moment as the designated match driver. I'd managed to buckle the wheel of my employers sandwich van and get lost on the way home ... oh and we got beat...and it had been on the telly anyway. Col gave me stick all the way back from that one and never let me live it down - but the thing he used to say to me most, particularly on that day, stuck with me all the way back home for his send off.

'We should write a book Rivs...'

The funeral itself was by necessity a sad occasion, he was a relatively young man with a family and I didn't feel much like talking after but went for a pint with the rest of the lads anyway. It was about halfway through the afternoon and I was in a pub I didn't like much, just reminiscing about Col when it struck me that this was it. I had one pop at this life and I was already half way through it. As well as my own personal underachievement Newcastle hadn't done a great deal either during my lifetime and worse still it didn't look fucking likely from where I was standing. I stopped drinking after that as I wanted to get home for Christmas and I'd suddenly realised I had a lot to do.

I got up at about two in the morning on Christmas Day and got the car and my stuff ready for the long drive home. Waving goodbye to me mam I pondered the journey ahead - it was going to be a long one.

But then it already had been.

Awakenings

'I'm Pele.'

'Nah man I'm Pele.'

'Well I'm Kevin Keegan then.'

'Who are you Simon?'

'Me, I'm Kenny Dalglish.'

'Bastard, I wish I'd thought of that.'

'You swore, I'm telling Miss.'

That was Hardcastle, snivelling little grass. He was shite at football and claimed he didn't like it. Welbeck Road Juniors in the Seventies was no place for a lad who didn't like football and he had to play with the lasses most days.

'Who can I be then?' I whinged as six year olds did at dinnertime when all the good players were already taken.

'You Andy. You can be Rivelino.'

'Rivelino?'

'Aye man, he scored that free kick in the world cup. Me dad said he was deed good.'

'HA HA - you're called Rivers and Simon said you could be Rivelino. That means you're Riverslino. Ha Ha.'

'Piss off man Hardcastle.' Deka smacked him in the face and he ran off crying, looking for a teacher. Deka was my mate, which was good because he was massive...well for a six year old anyway.

'Reet then.' I said, happy at being thought worthy of a Brazilian nickname and knowing in my heart it was because all the lads compared my skills to the South American trickster's and not because my surname was vaguely similar to a little known ex-international.

'We're kicking towards the dinner huts and I'm Rivelino.'

Aye, them were the days. That's my very first football memory, probably Hardcastle's first taste of football violence as well. However, my first proper experience of professional football was in the '76 season, we hadn't long moved to Byker from Wallsend and Uncle Charlie took me to the match with him. I can vaguely remember us playing Arsenal, me and some other kid hanging about outside a pub for a while and then sitting on a barrier bored and it being absolute shite. Obviously that was me sold and set for a lifetime of misery, cheers Charlie.

At that age football consisted of watching 'Shoot' on a Sunday afternoon, for those of you who don't know this was a regional highlights programme that operated a strict rotational policy no matter which division your team was in. In practice this usually involved you sitting through an hour of Carlisle United (fucking Carlisle isn't even in the North East) versus Darlington and then at the end you got two minutes of Newcastle being twatted four nowt off some Cockney team. I once sat in and watched it all the way through while my mates played in the street outside, purely to witness the mighty Peter Withe score in a three one defeat to Brighton. In the interests of balance I have to point out that obviously as well as Shoot you also had Match of the Day on BBC One, but if you didn't support or want to watch Liverpool then this was utterly pointless, a bit similar to supporting Sunderland really, enough said.

Anyway, at the tender age of six there was no way I'd be going to the match on a regular basis and there was no way Uncle Charlie wanted to interrupt his pre match drinking to

take the nephew along so Shoot was the closest I got. The real football action at that age was in the street where as inventive, future bouncers, entrepreneurs, plumbers, butchers and drug dealing layabouts we created games that would keep us occupied for hours on end. The names trip off the tongue even now, Gates, Three Pots In, Headers and Volleys, Spot and of course Kerbs. You can stick your playstations, social networking internet sites and bedrooms full of DVD players up your arse, proper kids played these games, usually in packs of twenty or so and always with some blood and tears mixed into the equation.

During the epochal (well it was for me anyway) season when I saw my first live game and fell in love with the club that was to be my life for the rest of my life, we achieved something that has happened only twice since - we got to a cup final. Granted it was only the league cup and not the sexy FA version but we were there. We'd fucked up badly in the '74 cup final but I'd been too young to understand that. Now though at the age of six I was old enough to know what was going on. Actually, in this city, where Grannies who've never been to the match can tell you who's shit and who's not trying and even people who don't like football can tell you why we never win anything, I was probably old enough to have an actual opinion.

All I can remember of the game was that we lost and an alleged Geordie (Dennis Tueart - wanker) had scored the winner past us with an overhead kick. It didn't matter that we'd had a weakened team or that we had laid the ghost of the spineless FA cup final team from two years previous, we'd still lost. Now obviously as a six year old who knew that we'd been in a final not that long ago this wasn't the end of the world as obviously we'd be there again quite soon wouldn't we? All these adults that filled my house drinking Party Sevens and singing Blaydon Races were always telling me how we were the best team in the world so it stood to reason that we'd win it next year. Oh the innocence of youth.

Me and the lads were soon out in the street playing Cup Finals, the misery of losing at Wembley immediately forgotten, well unless you claimed to be Dennis Tueart, you soon got a clout if that was the case. Me, I was still Rivelino; Brazil had never beaten Newcastle in a cup final so that was alright.

Fast forward six years and Newcastle's fortunes had plummeted, the team's decline mirroring that of the city as the unemployment lines grew longer and belts got tighter. I had moved on to comprehensive education and had made new friends, my world consisting of playing schools football and keeping an eye out for the results of my, now second division, team.

The club itself seemed punch drunk, lurching from crisis to crisis (nowt changes eh) and ironically, as the country seemed full of them at that time, we really needed a striker. We'd been through a succession of nonentities, has beens and never will be's in search of a player to capture the imagination of an area in despair. Then in the August of '82 in the most audacious coup ever, my team, Newcastle United of the second division, signed the former England captain Kevin Keegan from Southampton and the place went mental. Records were released, thousands of words written in the press and many, many pints were sunk, but most importantly the whole city started believing in itself and it's footballing representative again.

For the first match of that season we were up against Queens Park Rangers, they were managed by the highly rated and relatively young Terry Venables and were expected to do good things that year. The match, so far as I can tell, was magic. The place was buzzing and the cameras had found their way to St. James Park once again (someone probably conned them that Liverpool were there.).

Where was I? I was in the house listening to the Radio because a mate's dad who had promised to take my eleven year old self to the match had stayed in the boozer leaving me with no option but to listen to the worlds shitest commentator.

In a moment of pure theatre, the kind of story you couldn't make up cos it would be too corny, Keegan scored the only goal of the game. I've watched it that many times since on video that I can describe it without thinking.

Craggs at right back knocked it up the wing, Keegan flicked it on, Varadi headed it into space for him to run onto and, as the crowd went into overdrive, the great man kept his cool and slotted it under Hucker the QPR keeper at the Gallowgate End. He was mobbed by dozens after that goal and probably learnt what Newcastle was all about in the minute it took him to break free.

We were a city that had suffered badly in the recession, probably more than most, and were desperate to hold our heads high again - the signing of Keegan allowed us that privilege and, more than that, the man himself, with his positive outlook and honest approach, gave us hope that things would get better.

He was exactly what we needed and lived up to all of our expectations...more than once.