

GRANDAD

WHAT WAS
FOOTBALL LIKE
IN THE 1970s?



RICHARD CROOKS

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Charlie, the Owls and the Bees

EIGHT YEARS old, living in Surrey, Charlie loves his football, playing for his local team, Albury Boys. ‘Defensive midfield my position, Grandad’ – this caused Grandad a little concern, given Charlie had moved back from his previous position of striker where he scored goals; Grandad had given him tips on how to strike the ball. The positional change was of no concern to Charlie who liked his new position and, most importantly, he was in the team.

Except not on this Saturday morning in February 2016; he had made the decision to forego an Albury Boys game to leave home at 7.30am and make his way, with his dad, to S6 to watch Sheffield Wednesday. He wanted to see his first home game of the season and his dad would take him up to the game by train – train to London Waterloo, across the capital by London Underground, and then to Sheffield from London St Pancras. Grandad lived in Hertfordshire and would drive up to see them outside the ground.

Why Wednesday? Simply, Charlie was born into a family of Wednesdayites – his father, grandad, great-grandad, great-great-grandad and no doubt generations before that. While the latter three had all been born and raised in Sheffield it

was a little more challenging for Charlie, 180 miles away in Surrey.

Charlie's first Wednesday game had been at Reading a couple of years earlier, a good 2-0 win for his team and expectations set high. Results of games he'd been to since had been 'patchy', which was no surprise to his dad or grandad who had frequently suffered the slings and arrows of fortune that beset any Wednesday supporter. There was added pressure from Charlie's mates at school and at his boys' football team, who supported more prominent Premier League teams, their clubs on television more, in magazines and whose player cards could be collected for various football-sticker albums.

Grandad was keen to help Charlie's support by ensuring that the Wednesday Superstore was the natural source for a range of goods that were necessary for Charlie's development – Wednesday kit, coat, t-shirt, pencil case, key ring and more besides.

Wednesday's home ground at Hillsborough was opened in 1899, is situated to the north-west of the city centre in a built-up area, and it is an all-seated stadium, with a capacity of 39,732. In the 1960s there was major development of the ground in preparation for the World Cup finals in 1966, which increased the seating capacity to 24,500 in a total capacity of 55,000.

The name of Hillsborough had become synonymous with the disaster that took place at the ground on 15 April 1989 when the FA Cup semi-final between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest was halted after seven minutes. There was substantial overcrowding on the terraces behind the goal at the Leppings Lane end of the ground where Liverpool supporters were situated, and such was the overcrowding it resulted in many people being crushed, and tragically 96 people lost their lives.

The subsequent government inquiry led by Lord Justice Taylor resulted in the Taylor Report, which among many recommendations required clubs in the top two divisions of the Football League to have all-seated stadiums. Hillsborough became an all-seater stadium for the 1992/93 season.

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On this Saturday the journeys to the ground were relatively easy – trains on time for Charlie and Dad, for Grandad the sat-nav in his car indicated it was a 145-mile journey which should take two hours and 32 minutes with no reported traffic problems. The M1 motorway was remarkably trouble-free; there were still 25 miles plus of roadworks on the journey north and a 50mph speed limit in that section, but good progress made in the circumstances.

Arriving early, Grandad scoured the Wednesday Superstore – he'd checked the club website and online shop the previous day to establish the merchandise on offer. Fully focussed in the Superstore, and making straight to the scarves and bobble hat section – a combined junior scarf and bobble hat on sale at £10. Items purchased, job done. It was one of the coldest days of the winter – the items would serve a dual purpose. Now time to wait for Charlie and Dad.

The Surrey-based father and son arrived in good time for a greeting between Charlie and Grandad with Charlie keen to see what was in the Wednesday bag Grandad held. The eight-year-old's eyes lit up – 'that's great, Grandad' – and quickly put them in place, sporting his blue and white colours. Grandad made an observation about Charlie's jacket – it was a light tan colour, and a little too close for comfort to the colours of the other team in Sheffield. Without hesitation, Charlie disrobed, although it was a little cold. Charlie said he didn't feel the cold and anyway he had his scarf and hat.

Dad had gone into the Superstore to collect the ticket for the game he'd bought for Charlie online – £11 for a seat in the North Stand as a Junior Member of the club (£11 for under-11s), 30 rows up and more or less on the halfway line. There was an additional fee of £2 for the privilege of purchasing the ticket using the club's ticket office telephone number (0871 900 1867 – the last four digits reflecting the year the club was formed).

Grandad and Dad had season tickets in the North Stand (£480 for the 23 games in the league season in the Championship, and priority provided for the purchase of

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away tickets). Charlie would spend the first half with Grandad, second half with Dad.

There were no security checks before going into the ground and entry was through the turnstiles on Penistone Road, with barely a queue at 2.30pm for the 3pm kick-off. The two season tickets – plastic and the size of a credit card – were screened by a handheld electronic reader by the turnstile operator (the season tickets had been in use for the previous season, and on renewal electronically updated for use in the current season). Charlie went through the turnstile with his paper ticket – the stub removed by the turnstile operator. We forewent the opportunity to purchase a ticket for the half-time draw – the 50/50 split (half proceeds of the draw monies to the club, half in prizes) costing £1 a ticket with just over £700 for the first prize.

No interest was shown in the large range of drinks and snacks at the refreshment bar save for a cup of Kenco coffee, cost £2 – coffee pre-prepared in the plastic cup, addition of hot water, transaction completed. Milk was available in small cartons, sugar in paper sachets. Betting on the result of the game or the goalscorers was available at the betting stall adjacent to the refreshment bar.

Sheffield Wednesday had categorised home games at the start of the season – essentially it provided the club with the opportunity to provide differential pricing for tickets based on the assessed popularity of the opposition. For the Brentford game it was categorised as Category C – and tickets priced:

- Adult Non-Members – South Stand £43; North Stand £39; Spion Kop £36
- Juniors Under 17 Non-Members – £20 in each of the above areas
- Juniors Under 11 Non-Members – £16 in each of the above areas

A member of the club could purchase any of the above priced tickets at a £5 discount. Membership for the 2015/16 season cost £30 for adults and £15 for juniors.

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Before the start of the season the Wednesday hierarchy had come under significant criticism for the hike in matchday ticket prices for 2015/16 – an increase of 50 per cent in prices for certain category games including the opening game against Bristol City, a Category B game (£39 to sit on the Spion Kop, £26 in 2014/15). Such was the furore that many Bristol City supporters – and that club were newly promoted – boycotted the fixture because of the cost.

Wednesday highlighted the savings that could be made on ticket prices if a membership was purchased, and emphasised the need to be able to compete in the transfer market for players which required funds to be raised.

At the start of the season it looked as though Wednesday were potentially on the brink of a new era – the club had been purchased during the previous season by a consortium headed by Thailand businessman, Dejphon Chansiri. Little was known about Mr Chansiri, apart from that he was the head of the largest producer of tinned tuna in the world – Thai Union Frozen Products Public Company Limited – and at the time of the purchase the outgoing owner and chairman, Milan Mandaric, had fully endorsed the new owner as someone who had the best interests of the club at heart.

Mandaric himself was the financial saviour when he purchased Wednesday four years earlier, when the club appeared to be on the brink of financial ruin. Mr Mandaric, as chairman, had the singular accolade in my 50 and more years of following the club of having his name regularly sung and applauded by the supporters.

In the club programme for the home game against Cardiff City in February 2015, when Mr Mandaric confirmed the sale to Mr Chansiri, the chairman commented, ‘I made a pledge to you all that I would take care of your club, sort it out, clean it up, and make sure it was in the right hands for the next chapter. I am at the point now where I can look you all in the eye and say I have done what I promised to do and I will leave you with your club in good shape, financially strong and in good hands.

Mr Chansiri is absolutely the right person to take Sheffield Wednesday forward.'

Mr Chansiri's arrival produced changes – the creation of a new 'football committee' of three to oversee the football direction of the club was introduced. This was a 'first' for Wednesday, with most supporters unsure, and wanting to see the benefits of such a structure.

As the new season approached, Mr Chansiri had made a good start for the supporters – his vision was to have the club back in the Premier League for its 150th anniversary, 2017/18. He had invested a reported £1m in a new pitch at Hillsborough; the pitch had suffered ever since the 2007 floods in Sheffield, when the River Don – running alongside the South Stand – breached its banks, and put the ground under ten feet of water.

A more high profile impact was the change of head coach at the club – Stuart Gray, who for most Wednesdayites had made progress with the team in his 18 months in charge, was replaced by Carlos Carvalhal, from Portugal, who was to all intents and purposes an unknown for the vast majority of the supporters. The brief summary of Carvalhal's career – 14 clubs in 15 years, most notably spells at Sporting Lisbon and Besiktas in Turkey, raised more questions than it answered. And his appointment was the first of an overseas manager at the club.

There were transfers aplenty in and out after the appointment, with 14 first team squad players joining by the turn of the year.

The programme for the game cost £3 – the home programme unchanged in price for the eighth consecutive season. It was published by O Media and Productions – this company produced programmes for 19 out of the 92 football clubs in the top four divisions, as well as programmes for rugby union and rugby league clubs.

The front cover carried logos in the top corner for Sky Bet Championship, Chansiri, Heineken and Sondico. Of the programme's 84 pages – in colour throughout – 14 were devoted to adverts, most for national brands and businesses

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including betting companies, Sky Betting and Gaming and BetBright, as well as for Zebra Claims which highlighted, 'Getting you the compensation you deserve.'

Two pages were devoted to the kit sponsors for each player – mostly local businesses and supporters, including the Blunkett family, and the Hattersleys (David Blunkett and Roy Hattersley both keen Wednesdayites and Labour Party politicians). Nine pages of the programme were focussed on the visitors Brentford.

Prominent on the back page of the programme – as it had been for many seasons – was a column titled 'Emergency Procedures'. Given the tragic events at the stadium in 1989, this was a key piece of information, which was supplemented with announcements over the public address system about safety procedures.

The programme featured the 'new' Wednesday badge which had been introduced the previous month by Mr Chansiri, who saw it as the most appropriate badge for next season, and the club's 150th year. The badge was from 1956 and reflected that historic perspective. No doubt there would be commercial opportunities with a new badge, and in time the club's merchandise would sport this 'back to the future' badge.

Both the new, and the soon to be old, badge featured an owl at their centre – the Owls being the nickname of the club, and deriving from the district in Sheffield where the ground was situated, Owlerton. Brentford were known as 'the Bees', their name apparently derived from students at Borough Road College who had gone along to a Brentford home game and shouted 'Buck up Bs'. So the Owls against the Bees this afternoon, and that amused Charlie.

'Who are fastest Grandad, owls or bees?'

The question came out of nowhere, 'It must be owls Charlie.'

'That's good Grandad.'

Grandad had made the assertion with no facts; he was reassured to learn later, after checking information on the

internet, that his grandson had not been misled. Owls were indeed faster than bees.

To the football and the two teams' squads were highlighted on the back cover of the programme – the Wednesday squad comprising 31 players, and 25 for Brentford. Four of the Wednesday group were on loan at the club. Of the Wednesday players, ten were English, and 14 other nationalities were represented – four being Portuguese. The numbering of the Wednesday squad ranged from 1 through to 45. The Brentford numbering ranged from 2 through to 47 – their first-choice goalkeeper identified at number 27.

Above the squad lists were head coach Carlos Carvalhal for Wednesday, and manager Dean Smith for the visitors. Smith had been appointed a couple of months earlier in late November; the Bees' boss at the start of the season, the Dutchman Marinus Dijkhuizen, had lasted only nine games before being replaced by the Irishman Lee Carsley for a ten-game interim stint in charge, ahead of Smith's appointment. Smith was a popular ex-Wednesday player, appearing for the club a decade earlier.

At the start of the day Wednesday were in sixth position in the Sky Bet Championship, the second tier of English football, and Brentford 12th. Charlie was confident that Wednesday ought to be the winners of the afternoon's encounter – based on recent results (they had won four and drawn one of their last five games at home), and the respective league positions. It was only Charlie's third game at Hillsborough – his previous two games had ended in draws.

This game was being played on Saturday at 3pm – the traditional day and time for football games to start. Four scheduled Saturday afternoon home games this season had been changed to accommodate the requirements of live screening on Sky Sports.

Before taking his seat, Charlie asked, 'Will we have to stand up to watch the game, Grandad?' His question was based on his experience at every away game, where, despite the stadiums

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being all-seater, the Wednesday followers all stood up to watch the action. Grandad assured him this would not be the case – for home matches supporters sat down and watched. Charlie was relieved as, sitting down, he would be able to see the game being played, standing up and he would have to stand on his seat and look between the spectators in front of him. For Grandad, sitting down was a whole lot better.

At 2.56pm, a clear and resonant announcement came over the public address system, asking the crowd to welcome today's teams – 'our visitors Brentford', and then with heavy emphasis, 'Sheffield Wednesday'. Cue the roar from the crowd.

Both teams came out on to the pitch from under the retractable cover at the end of the players' tunnel – they walked side by side, led out by the referee and his two assistants. They walked between a V-shaped guard of honour – ball-boys with blue and white flags outstretched, welcoming them on to the field of play.

The officials wore green shirts, black shorts and socks (the hue of their garments seemed to vary from game to game – earlier in the season the officials had worn yellow shirts, as well as the more traditional black shirts). The players lined up facing the directors' box, the Wednesday players went down the line, each of them greeting the officials and their opponents with a handshake before turning to run towards the home end, the Spion Kop. They were accompanied by three Wednesday mascots – aged eight, ten and 13 – described in the programme as 'VIP Mascots'.

After a collective photocall with the referee, his assistants and the two teams' respective captains, and after the coin had been tossed to decide which end the teams would attack in the first half, the mascots departed.

Alongside them were two oversized Owls in costume plumage who had been the club mascots for several seasons – their primary duty to perambulate the outside of the pitch, and amuse the youngsters, which they achieved with some aplomb.

The managers were in position in what is commonly referred to as the ‘dugout’ or the ‘bench’ – in fact they are rows of padded seats and backs. The manager, or head coach, mostly standing in the technical area marked out in front of the dugout. A fourth official was positioned between the two technical areas – his role to assist the referee as required, to display on his handheld electronic board the numbers of the player being substituted and his replacement, and to hold up the board at the end of each half, indicating the minutes of added time the referee would play.

Wednesday were in their home kit, blue and white striped shirts with the sponsor’s name Chansiri featured prominently on the front, and Sky Bet Championship logos on the shirt arm. Brentford played in an away kit of black with the sponsor’s name of Matchbook.com (an online betting company) on the front of their shirts, and the same Sky Bet Championship logo on their shirt arms. The Brentford home kit is red and white striped shirts – there would be no clash of colours with Wednesday if those colours were worn today. No chance of that; their normal away kit was royal blue, so a third kit was on show.

Immediately prior to kick-off the public address system played the customary Jeff Beck record, ‘Hi Ho Silver Lining’, enabling the home supporters to substitute the words ‘silver lining’ in the chorus for ‘Sheffield Wednesday’ – three sides of the ground joining in with gusto, including Charlie, his Grandad was pleased to see. At the Leppings Lane end of the ground, in the upper tier of the West Stand, the Brentford supporters had no interest in the song. The number of away supporters was low, confirmed later at 445 in a crowd of 20,921 (the lowest away following for a Saturday game at Hillsborough that season). Tickets for this section of the ground were available to Brentford supporters only. The lower tier seats – which had replaced the Leppings Lane terracing – were not in use.

After five minutes came the first major incident – Yoann Barbet, the Brentford defender, was penalised and sent off

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for upending a Wednesday striker just outside the penalty area, when he was clean through on goal. The red card was immediately brandished by the referee. Wednesdayites were pleased to see the dismissal, with many helping Barbet on his way with a loud, short burst of 'Cheerio, cheerio, cheerio, cheerio, cheerio'. Goals came quickly for Wednesday in the first half against the ten men of Brentford and they were 3-0 up at half-time with Charlie standing up from his seat, clapping and cheering vigorously after each goal.

Grandad was keen to point out to Charlie to look at the scoreboard in the corner of the ground, showing replays of the action immediately after the goals were scored. 'Scoreboard, Grandad, what scoreboard?' 'There in the corner of the ground, look.' He did, 'That's not a scoreboard Grandad, it's a big video screen.' Charlie was right – while it displayed the score of the game at Hillsborough, and of other games taking place, there was no doubt that Grandad's reference to it being a 'scoreboard' was a throwback to an earlier age, and did not reflect what was shown on the large colour video screen. Technology had moved on!

Half-time, change of seats for Grandad and Dad, Charlie and Dad demonstrating a strong Wednesday bonding with arms up-stretched on meeting, quick 'high-fives', 3-0 up and all looking good. Charlie was keen to check the half-time scores but there was disappointment at the news from Doncaster – the red and whites from Sheffield were leading 1-0.

On the pitch at half-time a supporter seated in the South Stand had been invited to take part in a competition to score a goal from a penalty at the Spion Kop end against the goalkeepers, the two large-costumed Owl mascots. Whether or not the goalkeepers could see readily as the ball was struck is open to conjecture – goal scored, prize £100 free bet from Sky Bet, sponsor of the competition.

A Wednesday favourite of yesteryear, Mel Sterland, was invited pitchside to make the draw of numbers that would confirm the winners of cash prizes in that day's Wednesday

50/50. The ambient noise in the ground prevented us from hearing the details – given that we had not bought a ticket this was little hardship. Meanwhile the video screen in the corner displayed highlights from the first half, the latest football scores from around the country, and various supporter announcements. Excepting the first half highlights, Charlie had little interest in what was taking place on the screen.

In the second half, with Wednesday in control, one further goal came from Portuguese international Lucas Joao, on as Wednesday's third and final substitute, to clinch a 4-0 win. 'That's excellent Grandad,' said Charlie as he searched on his Dad's phone for the other Championship results, before confirming excitedly that Wednesday were up to fifth in the table.

Wednesday's goals had been scored by Hooper, Joao, Lee and Forestieri – their numbers in the squad were 14, 18, 20 and 45 respectively. The goals could be seen again later that evening on the free-to-air commercial television station, Channel 5, and the subscription television station, Sky Sports. Additionally, goals from all that afternoon's games could be seen on those broadcasts.

One further important task needed to be completed after the game – a walk outside, round the ground to more or less opposite the players' entrance, at the John Sheridan Gallery, named after the Irish international who had played for Wednesday in the golden years of the 1990s, and notably scored the only goal at Wembley against Manchester United to win the League Cup in 1991. The gallery was a wall of bricks with citations for individual supporters on each brick. Grandad pointed to three bricks with the following inscriptions – 'Ben Crooks Wednesdayite'; 'Richard Crooks Wednesdayite'; 'Norman Crooks Wednesdayite'. Charlie knew the first two names, not the third. It was his great-grandad.

The bricks were purchased ten years previously through the Wednesday Superstore at £25 each for supporters who wanted to be part of the 'fabric' of the club. There were 292 inscribed bricks in the John Sheridan Gallery (I counted them!), and there

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were other galleries of bricks where supporters showed their commitment to the club. Obligatory photographs followed, at Grandad's request, of Charlie pointing to the bricks.

Then it was back to the car located in the car park of Owlerton Stadium (cost £5), home of speedway and greyhound racing, about ten minutes' walk from the ground – Grandad keen to point out to Charlie the house on Broughton Road as they walked past, where his great grandad and great-great grandma had lived. They were all Wednesdayites.

The journey to Sheffield city centre was spent listening to BBC Radio Sheffield's *Praise or Grumble* programme – the first supporters' phone-in show in the country when it was introduced in 1987. We listened to the managers of the local teams, and selected players who talked about that afternoon's games. Given the results that afternoon there was a general feeling of bonhomie and positivity across the airwaves.

They reached Sheffield Midland railway station for 6pm with the train to London scheduled to leave at 6.26pm. With a fair wind they'd be back home by 11pm – a 4-0 win to help them on their way. And if Charlie and Dad wanted to check details of the game on their way back home they could look at the BBC website or the respective clubs' websites for the comments of Carvalhal and Smith.

Carvalhal's view, 'I think that red card was clear as Hooper was through on goal one on one,' was countered by Smith's, 'For me, I don't believe the referee can make the decision. I think he guessed. He was directly behind it, 40 yards away. I thought it was a poor decision. I don't think Gary Hooper has the ball under control. He's gone down so easily.'

Statistics were available on the percentage of possession by the respective clubs, shots made on target and not, corners and fouls. An incident-by-incident account of the game produced while the game was in progress available for reference. For Charlie, 4-0 was the key statistic and fifth position in the Championship.