

# Once a Blue Always a Blue

The Autobiography  
of Richard Edghill



**Dante Friend**

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# FOREWORD

**A**CTIONS speak louder than words and Richard Edghill's record speaks volumes. I first saw Richard play at 16 and it was obvious to all he would be a top player. He was technically good, very athletic and very competitive.

He went on to have a great career at a great club. Richard showed tremendous character as captain of City during challenging times for the club he adored and showed loyalty to the club through very difficult times.

He helped the resurrection from League 1 back up to the Premier League. Taking a penalty in the play-off final especially showed great bravery. I felt that was really a defining moment in his career as he was someone not particularly recognised for being a goalscorer but he took on that responsibility when there was so much riding on it and he would have been under extreme pressure.

Let's not forget the pressure got to some of our fans that day, many of them had already left the ground, but bravery is when you are under extreme pressure and you are still prepared to step forward. We knew the pressure on our players and I knew how nervous they were. The team's strength of character, epitomised by Richard, is what got us through.

I know Richard struggled with injuries and he didn't become the England player I had expected, but maybe he will enlighten

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us in his book. Working with him was a joy as he worked hard and wanted to learn. I am sure with these qualities he will be successful in whatever area he decides in the future. He played an important part in a fabulous history of a real people's club.

**Willie Donachie, former Manchester City full-back and Scotland international, and assistant manager to Joe Royle when Richard Edghill was City's club captain.**

# DRAGGING ME DOWN

**M**Y name is Richard Arlon Edghill and I was born in Oldham on 23 September 1974. That particular year saw Oldham affected by boundary changes. The Local Government Act saw the birth of Greater Manchester, and Oldham – a proud major cotton mill town during the industrial revolution which made Lancashire so famous – was no longer officially part of the red rose county.

Around the time of my birth Manchester City had just beaten Liverpool 2-0 in front of 45,000 at Maine Road with goals from Rodney Marsh and Dennis Tueart. This was then followed by a real thumping at Middlesbrough's old Ayresome Park ground, 3-0, before by a 0-0 draw at Brunton Park against Carlisle United who were in the top flight at the time. A totally mixed bag of results in the week of my birth.

Yet isn't that City all over? The time period around my birth illustrates that. City were the only Manchester club in the top flight at the time having despatched the neighbours into the second tier while I was growing in my mother's womb! It was

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also the season Franny Lee came back to the club and scored the winner for Derby County at Maine Road with an amazing shot from the edge of the box, a famous goal which gave Barry Davies one of his best commentary moments, 'Look at his face...just look at his face!' City's loss was Derby's gain. They won the league that year.

Manchester City traditionally have always been a rollercoaster club and I feel I was born to take part on that ride. My own career was a rollercoaster in itself. Plenty of highs, plenty of lows but things were never dull at the country's most topsy-turvy club.

I was born into a large family with four boys; Matthew, Mark, Lewis and myself.

In terms of my own family, my mother and father have been huge influences on my life. My mother is called Benedetta and she was born in Genoa in northern Italy. She has a crazy, zany side and settled over here in Coppice in Oldham after the war. My father Colin was from St Lucia in the Caribbean. He was a big influence on me and my brothers.

Mum's home area is the home of Genoa FC and Sampdoria – two good teams. I've never been there but I've heard its very nice. My dad has been even though he's got absolutely nothing to do with the place! Almost all of the family – on my mum's side – were over here already so I have not really had a reason to go over I suppose, only curiosity.

There was some kind of split in the family. My mum's mum was already here, my mother and her sister Angela too, and then there was my uncle Guilio who had links to the Granelli ice cream family.

Matthew is my oldest brother. He became a father at the age of just 16 and moved in with his partner Melanie. Mark is the second-oldest and moved out a year later.

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Matthew, Mark...you'd think the next two would be called Luke and John given our strict Catholic upbringing but no, Lewis and myself made up the foursome.

Our grandmother was very religious and made us go to church every Saturday when we were very young. We would always call in and see her as we were walking home, usually to try and pick up a bit of pocket money, but then she would drag us down to church and said we had to go, no excuses! She was a very strong-willed woman too, very strict and believed in discipline.

That song 'Our House' by Madness. I can relate to that. 'There's always something happening and it's usually quite loud.' Growing up in our house wasn't bad, it was just stressful at times because we were forever getting under each other's feet and treading on each other's toes.

Secondary school for me was St Augustine's in Oldham. I wasn't particularly academic. To tell the truth I absolutely hated school. The highlight of the day, every day in fact, was being able to have a kickaround at lunchtime. The only other subject I vaguely enjoyed was craft, design and technology...a chance to use my imagination, making things with Mr Glennie!

I still have some friends who go back to my primary school years, from St Patrick's School in Oldham. One of them, Kevin, came to my wedding. I lost touch with most of the guys from primary school and indeed secondary school really because I was always playing and training by the time I got to a certain age and they were all starting to go out on the razzle in town. They went their way, I went mine.

When I was just five or six years old I discovered a mole on my right arm. I found it to be cancerous and had some deep skin grafts to remove it. You do daft things when you are young. There was a scar there, as big as an egg. It would be dressed in

plaster from my shoulder down to my right hand but one day when I got home from school it was itching like hell so stupidly I picked up a metal coat hanger and started to scratch it to ease the itchiness.

This burst all the stitches and made a complete horlicks of everything on the inside of the plaster. Everything was matted together and I then had to go and have all the stitches removed which along with the major injury I suffered at Elland Road in 1995 was just about the most painful thing I can ever recall in my life. Touch wood, the cancer has never come back but I am always paranoid about moles.

Typically, my mum and dad would come in from a day's work and a typical scenario might be Matthew standing over Mark holding one of the rings from the oven about to drop it on his head.

Mark was expelled from school for fighting. He wasn't mischievous, he was just very tough. These days he probably wouldn't be expelled. Much worse goes on now. I know, I do some coaching in schools and have seen how some of them behave. Other kids used to have a pop at my brothers all the time because they were different, they looked different and also because they were big strong lads so instantly they became targets.

Matthew was 6ft 4in for example and that in itself offered a challenge to certain people. My brothers would look out for each other so that would end up bringing some conflict as more and more people were occasionally dragged into confrontational situations.

Mark loved doing ju-jitsu and other types of martial arts. He was a fitness fanatic back in the day and even did ballet classes to help keep his legs supple. Mark was a dancer on *The Hit Man and Her*, the famous programme that was on ITV late at night



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at the weekends which gave an insight into what was going on out in clubland. He would only be 18 or 19 at most and there he was touring the country and dancing on stage with the likes of Peter Waterman and Michaela Strachan...well perhaps not Waterman!

Lewis lost an eye in a crossbow accident when he was very young but unfortunately and understandably that tragedy has had a really negative impact on his life. He was out playing football with friends one day and on the way home came across a crossbow. Boys being boys they were daring each other to do things and fire things at each other and unfortunately for Lewis he lost the sight of one eye at a very early age.

In my opinion this terrible accident affected his self-esteem during his formative years. It's hard enough being a teenager at the best of times but when something like that has happened at such an early age you are perhaps bound to turn round and say, 'Why me?'

By the time he reached 18 he was entitled to compensation which was designed to help him get through the next stage of his life. Unfortunately, be it peer pressure or a feeling inside that he had to prove that he could be a fun guy to be around, the fact he had a few quid brought him into contact with a new set of mates and they helped him blow a lot of his money.

He had anger. I understand that and I love him just as I love all my brothers, but he has had brushes with the law from time to time and you can't help but wonder how things might have been had it not been for that accident. Having lost an eye he was always an easy target for people looking to get a reaction out of him. It's easy to pick on someone like that and to entice them into 'dares' which as well as taking unnecessary risks generally can only breed more anger, resentment, and bitterness I suppose.

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Put it this way, Lewis was a very good footballer. Even with one eye he was a good Sunday league player. Football certainly kept me out of trouble and enabled me to keep my feet on the ground. There's a fine line in life and sometimes once fate has dealt its hand then that's that.

Those of you familiar with Oldham's stadium Boundary Park might know the Blue Bell pub in the vicinity of the ground. When I was about 14 or 15 I went down there one night as there was a massive fight between Chadderton and Royton gangs. Mark was involved and picked on. Some of the Oldham hooligans of the time were involved and some of them had far-right tendencies. I wasn't involved as such, more a spectator, but I could see plenty of jumping around and I quickly learnt that Mark could look after himself. I was called a 'black bastard' by someone or another.

Mark had been in the same school as me and was expelled for fighting. However I was never bullied or picked on at school. Maybe people knew I was part of a big family and had lots of brothers. Maybe it was my size – smaller than my brothers which meant I wasn't on the radar for people.

Outside of school in my early years I experienced a little bit of racism. You'd get the odd remark on the street and where I was brought up there were various areas, predominantly white areas, Asian areas and so on. You were told don't go across certain roads. You don't know people in those areas and they tend to stick together. Most people in Oldham are absolutely great and get on with everybody. There was and still is I suppose a bit of an edge around the place at times, like in the town centre at night where there are rival gangs from various areas that tend to end up in the same place at the same time.

My father Colin is an absolute giant of a man. He is black and he had learned to stand up for himself in life. He always used to

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say to me, 'If someone is picking on you, you need to deal with it yourself,' and he would leave all the brothers to work out our own individual problems. Yes he could have intervened but didn't want us being seen as weak in any way so the message was drummed into me as a kid, 'It's not me they are picking on, it's you. Stand up for yourself and go and sort it out.'

I was quite shy really up until the age of about 17. The progress I was making at City seemed to give me more confidence in life. I liked girls but I wasn't that bothered about them. I didn't go chasing them. They kind of approached me! I was besotted with football, there was nothing else really in my head. I was football crazy!

There was a well known rollerskating rink up near us and we'd go in there at weekends or after school. There was the Roxy cinema in Hollinwood. Having older brothers and walking in at the same time with them meant I would be able to sneak in to watch some of the older films. We'd go round the arcades like the other kids. I'd have girls coming up to me, 'My friend likes you, do you want to go out with my friend?' However I was quite laid back about it all. I wasn't even bothered.

You see, girls, gambling, drinking, breaking the rules...it was all boring compared to football!

Even at primary school we would play football every single lunchtime. I was always kicking a ball about. People commented you wouldn't see me without looking down and seeing a ball seemingly attached to my foot. Lunchtime was the only time really at school I could get properly enthusiastic about because I knew I would just be playing football.

I was the best behaved out of all of the brothers and really football saved me from getting into more trouble than I did. I wasn't bothered about doing homework but I was able to avoid getting in with the wrong crowd because I had so much

on the go sports-wise. I played a bit of rugby briefly and quite enjoyed that but it wasn't really on the agenda because of my size. Other lads were far more physically developed than me. I was also very good at athletics and I was a very quick sprinter. I would have a go at anything sporty. I loved it. It's a kind of escape from reality, from the boredom at school and maybe that's how it was for other kids who end up making the grade in professional sport.

I wasn't particularly tall but I was athletic, really athletic, and I could jump far higher than people who were much taller than me. I was great at running and this has stayed with me right throughout my life. Later on I used to beat Ian Brightwell in training – that's Ian Brightwell the son of Olympic athletes Anne Packer and Robbie Brightwell I might add...and of course from then on I got the nickname Said Aouita!

Sundays meant playing for my team Slumberland Rangers in the Oldham Sunday League. Playing in midfield at the time I suppose I was spotted more easily but I had lots of tricks, I could go past people and express myself, I was good on the ball and off the ball.

Funnily enough I didn't get the chance to watch a lot of football at home. My dad used to have the front room to himself so of course what was on the television was down to him. Often I'd pop my head round the door and my uncle would be in there with my dad, smoking and drinking cans of Red Stripe!

'What do you want to stay in for?' he'd say. 'It's the summer holidays, go out and play,' and that would be that. Out of the house at 10am and back in around 6pm. With three of us in the same bedroom we got under each other's feet at times so my poor mother was often shouting at us all. There were constant riots especially with the two older ones and arguments over not sharing toys around.

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At Christmas we never got everything we wanted but we kind of accepted it. I would ask for *Star Wars* toys and I would get them. I asked for a bike but I never got one. Only Matthew got a bike. We had to all borrow our brother's bike if we wanted to ride.

My mum had a good job with a firm in Manchester which handled stocks and shares. My dad did a lot of lorry driving work. With four children in the house I suppose there's only ever so much money to share around.

Football became a bit of a constant in my life even at that early age. It was the outlet I needed to express myself at that particular time and threw myself into it. When I was younger my dad would say, 'You're young, you've got a football, just go and play football!' I would play outside all day with my three brothers throughout the summer holidays. Practising our skills, kick ups, shooting at goals, practising keeping the ball up.

Little did I know that chief scout Terry Farrell had been to watch me a few times. I never knew he had been down to watch me when I was playing for Slumberland Rangers – there were always rumoured to be scouts there so you would just take things all in your stride, you never really knew where these people were from.

Then one day I was asked whether I would like to come down to Manchester City and have a trial. Well of course I would! However with my dad always being busy and my mum being unable to drive I had no way of getting there at all. There was nobody to drop me off and nobody to pick me up. A family friend, Kevin Walker, and his son Paul, took me down to Platt Lane in those early days.

When I first went down to City I would have been 12 or 13. Between the ages of 14 and 16 when I was on schoolboy forms with the club they tried me in a whole range of positions

which gives you the confidence to feel you could play anywhere. Joe Royle and Willie Donachie used to say to me when I was a professional that I could play anywhere. In the youth team set-up I actually started at centre-half.

I would play once a week at City but to get to Platt Lane without transport took planning of *Italian Job* proportions. In fact I would have been a good advert myself for GM Buses as it was then. I would have to get a bus from my house to Oldham town centre after school and then get another bus from Oldham to Manchester Piccadilly. From there I'd seek out the number 41 and head to Rusholme, getting out at the old Finglands bus depot at the corner of Platt Lane. This would be early evening.

The famous 'Toast Rack' building would be in the distance and the students would all be going out for the night, perhaps off to The International 2 to see The Stone Roses, James or one of the other great Manchester bands.

The Birch Villa pub (latterly Hardy's Well) was on the corner of Dickenson Road and always seemed to be heaving. It was a very adult world and in Manchester the pace of life was a lot quicker than in Oldham. It was OK in the summer months because it was light but in the winter it would go dark early so that's three bus rides and about two hours of travelling before I'd even kicked a ball.

In those early days I got that lift from one of my father's friends and he would run me back home but when I was 14 I had to endure this long journey on my own and not only that, I had to get all the way home again. This was an era without mobile phones. Yes there were phone boxes on the streets but they were only useful if it was working and you had some money to put in the machine!

After playing at City it would often be very dark or going dark and to be honest I was a bit scared. This was where my

standard of fitness came in useful. Platt Lane was poorly lit and there were always a handful of alcoholics no matter what time of day it was hanging about the corner of Platt Fields park near the electricity sub station. I understand nothing has changed on that score even now!

So I would run as fast as I could up Platt Lane until I reached the 'safety' of Wilmslow Road and by that I mean there were more street lights. I would be in my City tracksuit but I would be paranoid about someone wanting to talk to me about football, so rather than stand at the actual bus stop I used to stand in the bushes near to the bus stop so no one would speak to me and as soon as I saw the bus approaching I would race out and appear out of nowhere and startle everybody in the bus queue! They would all look at each other and go, 'Where did he pop up from?'

Once I got back into Manchester there were more people about but then I would have to get a bus into Oldham town centre which at that time went from the Arndale bus station, later to be demolished. Back in Oldham the last bus back to near my house would have already departed which left a four-mile run to get home. I would be desperate to get home as soon as possible so what I would do is time myself with my digital watch and try and beat my previous personal best. I was always relieved to get back home but all the extra walking and running probably helped in the long run. I was naturally fit.

When you are a 15-year-old you soon realise that you need a few quid in your pocket. I saw my brothers in work and earning a few bob so I thought I'd better get stuck in. Mum said, 'Get down the market and get yourself a job.' I would walk round asking anyone and everyone if they needed a hand. Then that summer I found a bit of work at Tommyfields Market.

There was a group of lads knocking out 'Madchester'-style clothes. Baggy shirts and bell bottom jeans. Lots of people were

walking round dressed in Joe Bloggs clobber, colourful t-shirts and most of the lads around Oldham were wearing Inspiral Carpets t-shirts, the popular local band.

I got a few quid packing and unpacking a van on a Saturday morning making sure the good folk of Oldham had their 'Madchester' t-shirts. During the season I would be at the ground performing ball boy duties at Maine Road. This was just before I started my apprenticeship. I never had a paper round. I never cleaned any cars. Every spare minute I had I would be out playing football, perfecting my skills. Everyone would know where I would be – just out on the field playing football.

Both my parents influenced me in different ways. There were four of us in a council house so there would always be incidents and my mum could hand out rollockings and give good advice just as much as my dad.

When it came to football – nobody forced me into it, they just let me go at my own pace. They saw I enjoyed it and realised it was something that I wanted to do. So they encouraged me.

Mum and dad came to watch me regularly for Slumberland Rangers and Terry Farrell picked me up the day we played in a final at Droylsden FC.

Terry did a great job for City but was one of the staff sacked in 1997 along with Colin Bell and Neil McNab in a big clear-out. Terry had been great for my career and when that information came into the public domain it was sad that we were washing our dirty linen in public.

These days I see friends taking their kids to football practice and I see them shouting and screaming, pushing and pushing but with me it wasn't like that.

No one said to me, 'You've got to go out and play football.' It was more something inside me which said, 'Yeah, I can do it.' I had an inner determination to do it. Nowadays you get a lot



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of very pushy parents, especially when there is a scout or two around from a football club. In the 1980s it was never as bad as it is now. These days parents want their kids to be footballers because of the money involved with it. Simple as that.

I think for me it was definitely about enjoyment. I had this thing for football, everything was about football for me.

By the time I was 15 I really did live for football and my whole mindset was based around ensuring that I was going to get my next contract at the club. Remember at this time there were no such things as academies in football. You would just go there for a bit of training.

I knew that the school side of things wasn't going too well. I didn't want to revise and my grades were really poor. The only thing I wanted to push myself at, that I felt motivated about, was playing football.

Instead of revising for exams I would be out at the youth club in Shaw, listening to music, playing pool and talking to the girls...usually about how I was going to be or at least hoping to be a famous footballer with Manchester City!

Daft little things stick in your memory. There was a window cleaner from round our way who was a bit of a bully. He had an English bull terrier and I was frightened to go near his house.

After a bit of egging on I would knock on his door and then run away and he'd go ballistic. I wasn't a bad lad at all but sometimes peer pressure dictated you'd hang around with the wrong crowd.

One night after going down the youth club I was waiting for the late bus from Shaw going back to Oldham with some other lads. One of them had a hammer and decided they were going to shatter all the glass in the bus shelter with it. Why? God only knows but anyway they set about the bus shelter and someone must have called the police.

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I stood out on a dark night because I had a white baseball cap on and the eyewitness walking on the other side of the street was able to give the police a description of me. The other lads were wearing dark clothes so they weren't readily identifiable. I was the prime suspect, the only suspect in fact!

I was arrested and taken down to Chadderton Police Station. My mum came to pick me up. I said, 'I didn't do it mum.' She knew I hadn't done it. At the time I was waiting for my YTS contract with City. It was kind of make-or-break and if they found out about this it may have ended any chance of carrying on. As school had been a disaster, not getting a contract with City would have been a kick in the teeth and a catastrophe for me personally. There was no proof that I had done it of course. No finger prints on the hammer. No DNA, but I was scared. I went home thinking my dad was going to batter me. I had nightmares about the police coming back to the front door all the time. I had nightmares that a phone call would come from City saying, 'We are sorry, we are going to have to let you go.'

I never did find out whether anyone at City actually knew about the incident but a few days before I was due to hear about whether I would be getting a YTS contract at City I got a call from the police. The charges had been dropped. The next week I was with Terry Farrell signing a two-year deal. The date forever etched in my mind and my heart... 15 July 1992.

In the months leading up to those two decisions – the possible court case and the possible contract – somehow I managed to put everything to the back of mind. Maybe they didn't know. Maybe they did. I knew I was innocent and I also knew I wanted to play for Manchester City more than anything else in the world so I just got on with it.

Looking back there's so much that could have gone right or wrong. I could have gone out and been in a fight, been out

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with the wrong crowd, or picked up an injury at that stage. That would have been the end of my dreams.

At school we would play in the school yard on concrete. I would be going past everyone at 100mph. I was always going at full throttle not even thinking about getting injured. I'd have run through a brick wall at the time.

Getting that YTS contract was one of the best feelings of my whole life. I was on £29.50 a week for the first year and £32.50ish for the second year. The money was irrelevant though. I was moving forward with my career. I had a chance of making it as a professional footballer and was determined to grasp this opportunity.