



GREATEST GAMES
SOUTHAMPTON

**SAINTS' FIFTY
FINEST MATCHES**

ALEX CROOK AND ALEX SMITH

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Preface

IN the league table of the most successful clubs in English football – judged on major honours won – Southampton sit in joint 33rd place alongside unfashionable names like Stoke City and Oxford United, but that does not begin to paint an accurate reflection of the many memorable moments in their illustrious history.

While there is no doubt the Bobby Stokes-inspired victory over Manchester United as a then-Second Division side in the 1976 FA Cup Final is the club's single most significant result, there have been many more landmark matches for fans throughout the ages to enjoy.

In fact delving through old newspaper cuttings, hours of internet searches, autobiographies and television and radio clips to whittle it down to just 50 of the greatest games proved as big a challenge as Saints have presented to all of England's elite clubs down the years.

Within this book we have tried to document the most important incidents since the club was formed in the late 1880s; from the first south coast derby of note – and the most important subsequent skirmishes with bitter foes Portsmouth – to the first Football League game at The Dell, and indeed the last when tears filled the eyes of grown men on and off the pitch. From the maiden voyages into European competition to the historic first promotion to the top flight, the heartbreak of relegation and the climb back up the lower divisions to the Premier League via administration and near bankruptcy, thanks to saviour Markus Liebherr.

While Saints may not be able to claim the trophy haul of the likes of Manchester United, Liverpool and Arsenal, all three of those clubs plus many more high profile names feature prominently on the list of 'big' sides who have been left with bloodied noses by the team from the south coast.

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And when it comes to terrace heroes, Saints fans have had more than their fair share of superstars to marvel at; from the free-scoring Ron Davies, dubbed by Sir Matt Busby as the greatest centre-forward of his generation, to the mercurial Matt Le Tissier, whose name features more prominently than any other over the course of the 50 games.

Kevin Keegan, Mick Channon, record appearance-maker Terry Paine, cup-winning manager Lawrie McMenemy and club stalwart Ted Bates would all be worthy recipients of a star on a Hollywood-style Saints walk of fame and the fantastic five all have a starring role to play on our journey of discovery.

In more recent years players such as Rickie Lambert and Jose Fonte have etched their names into Southampton folklore by spearheading the remarkable rise from the foot of League One into the Premier League and, under the stewardship of Mauricio Pochettino and Ronald Koeman, back into Europe, culminating in the 2016 Europa League clashes with Italian giants Inter Milan, a period of the club's history the authors of this book have seen and reported on at first hand.

If they have played a pivotal role in shaping Saints' history they are sure to feature in one of the chapters so sit back and enjoy your ride down memory lane.

Up the Saints!

Alex Crook, 2 September 2016



v Manchester United 0-1

1 May 1976
FA Cup Final
Wembley Stadium
Attendance: 99,115

Manchester United

Alex Stepney
Alex Forsyth
Martin Buchan
Stewart Houston
Brian Greenhoff
Steve Coppel
Gerry Daly
Sammy McIlroy
Lou Macari
Stuart Pearson
Gordon Hill (David McCreery 66)

Manager: Tommy Docherty

Southampton

Ian Turner
Peter Rodrigues
Mel Blyth
Jim Steele
David Peach
Paul Gilchrist
Nick Holmes
Mick Channon
Peter Osgood
Jim McCalliog
Bobby Stokes

Manager: Lawrie McMenemy

BOBBY Stokes would not be the first name on the lips of many Southampton supporters when asked for a list of the club's greatest players, but he did score what is widely regarded as the most significant goal in their history.

It is true Stokes did not possess the panache of Matt Le Tissier, the goalscoring prowess of Mick Channon or the longevity of Terry Paine. But when fans were asked to decide after whom the hospitality suites at the newly-built St Mary's Stadium should be named in 2001, Stokes took his place alongside the three aforementioned heroes. Not bad for a lad born along the M27 in Portsmouth!

The record books tell us Stokes scored 40 goals in 216 games for Southampton, by no means a paltry tally but nothing to write home about when compared to Channon's impressive haul of 157 in 391 appearances in the red and white. However, with one swing of his trusty left foot, Stokes ensured his name would go down in history.

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“It is the only major thing Southampton have ever won, and was totally unexpected,” triumphant manager Lawrie McMenemy told the BBC some 32 years after his side’s Stokes-inspired victory over a United team expected to sweep their Second Division opponents aside. “I still get people stopping me in the street even now and talking to me about the day we won the cup.”

As Britain basked in a spring heatwave, McMenemy and his players could have been forgiven for breaking out in a cold sweat as they glanced down at the famous names on the United team sheet. Managed by charismatic Scotsman Tommy Docherty and led out of the famous tunnel by captain Martin Buchan, United had Steve Coppell flying down one wing and Gordon Hill on the other, with the irrepressible Lou Macari leading the line up front. In contrast McMenemy’s line-up was skippered by Peter Rodrigues, a veteran former Welsh international defender who was considering hanging up his boots to run a pub after being released by Sheffield Wednesday the previous summer. “As I was coming off the pitch on cup final day, the cameras panned down on me and the commentator said, ‘A year ago he was on the scrapheap and here is going up the steps to collect the trophy.’ You couldn’t have wrote that script,” Rodrigues said in the 2014 book *Southampton Match of My Life*.

According to Rodrigues, Bobby Charlton, the legendary former Old Trafford superstar and England 1966 World Cup winner, was so confident his Red Devils would swat Southampton away he predicted a 6-0 whitewash on the eve of the game. But such slurs only succeeded in making McMenemy and his merry men more determined to pull off an upset. An upset Rodrigues claims victory became more likely as the minutes ticked by. “Once we got past that 20-minute mark I thought to myself, ‘we are gonna win this.’ They had a load of youngsters and we had a good mixture of youth and experience, which won us the day.”

Those first 20 minutes were nail-biting for the thousands of Saints fans who made the journey to north London by any means

possible as goalkeeper Ian Turner took centre stage to stop United notching up a commanding early lead. “Ian had the game of his life,” says McMenemy. “For the first 20 minutes we were under siege but he stopped everything with whatever part of his body he could.” Turner had already denied Gerry Daly and Hill in superb fashion when Southampton broke against the run of play and Channon went through on goal only to see his dreams of Wembley glory dashed by Alex Stepney. A tight game appeared to be heading for extra time when Turner launched a hopeful punt upfield, which was played forward by Channon to Jim McCalliog, who found the onrushing Stokes with a delightful ball over the top of the United defence.

Chain-smoking Stokes, running short of energy at this stage, let the ball bounce over his shoulder before rifling an unstoppable first-time shot beyond a despairing Stepney and into the far left corner. As United’s disbelieving players appealed for an offside decision, Stokes was mobbed by his team-mates, buried in a sea of yellow and blue bodies. There were 83 minutes on the watch when the ball hit the back of the net and McMenemy admits: “The last seven minutes were the longest of my life.”

United were too shell-shocked to launch any meaningful recovery operation and Southampton saw out the rest of the match with relative ease before their travelling army of fans, and anyone who had taken up the bookmakers on their generous pre-match odds of 7-1, erupted with joy at full-time. After running the length of the pitch to celebrate with Stokes and the rest of his team-mates, walking the 107 Wembley steps to collect the cup and his winners’ medal represented something of a challenge for the aging Rodrigues but it is a moment he recalled vividly four decades on. “For the last ten minutes the excitement got me through and I kept looking up to the Royal Box and seeing the cup like a tiny dot on the horizon,” he said. “The next thing I knew I was walking up to collect it from the Queen. That was the last time Her Majesty presented it at the old Wembley so that was a very proud occasion.

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She did not have much to say to me, just, 'Congratulations, well done, did you enjoy it?' I said, 'Yes Ma'am.'

After partying the night away at a trendy London hotel, Southampton's cup-winning heroes made the return journey to Hampshire the next morning ready for an open-top bus parade through the city as 250,000 jubilant well-wishers lined the streets. "I have never seen so many people in all my life," remembers Channon. "There was even a man stood on the roof of a car wearing no clothes and dancing. It is a great memory for me; happy people and happy faces." The bus parade was followed by a civic reception at Southampton Guildhall after which Rodrigues and his team-mates were forced to replant battered flowers trampled by the throng of fans gathered outside.

But there would have been no bus tour, no meeting with the lady mayor and no cup final fairy-tale had Hughie Fisher not come to Southampton's rescue with a late equaliser in their 1-1 third round draw at home to Aston Villa on a grey and dreary afternoon at The Dell. Saints won the replay at Villa Park 2-1, then beat Blackpool in the fourth round before surviving another scare against West Brom in round five. After drawing 1-1 at the Hawthorns, the replay ended in a resounding 4-0 home win before McMenemy's team scraped past Third Division Bradford in a 1-0 quarter-final win.

Before playing their semi-final with Malcolm Allison's Crystal Palace, Rodrigues, McCalliog and Jim Steele were given a dressing down by McMenemy after escaping from the team hotel in Essex and embarking on a boozy drinking session. "McMenemy went absolutely mad," Steele told the *Southern Daily Echo* in a 2013 interview. "He told us, 'If I knew you were going to drink I'd have brought the reserve team up here!'" Luckily for the trio their late night escapades had little impact on their performance as Southampton defeated the Eagles 2-0 at Chelsea's Stamford Bridge to set up their Wembley showdown with United.

v Manchester United, 1 May 1976

The cup victory also handed Southampton a place in Europe for only the third time in their history and the following season they would go on to the third round of the now defunct Cup Winners' Cup, crashing out to Belgian side Anderlecht 3-2 on aggregate. Promotion to the top flight followed two years later by which time cup hero Stokes, having managed only a further 11 appearances and scoring just one more goal, had defected to bitter rivals and hometown club Pompey. No doubt the brand new car he won from sponsors for his Wembley winner was still parked up outside Stokes' Paulsgrove home for he could not drive, but he could certainly finish as he proved under the famous Twin Towers.



v Coventry City 4-0

28 April 2012
The Championship
St Mary's Stadium
Attendance: 32,363

Southampton

Kelvin Davis
Danny Butterfield
Jose Fonte
Jos Hooiveld
Danny Fox
Guly Do Prado
Morgan Schneiderlin
Dean Hammond (Jack Cork 37)
Adam Lallana (Jason Puncheon 82)
Billy Sharp (Steve De Ridder 76)
Rickie Lambert

Manager: Nigel Adkins

Coventry City

Joe Murphy
Jordan Clarke
Martin Cranie
Jordan Willis (Joe Henderson 72)
Chris Hussey
Carl Baker
Oliver Norwood
Conor Thomas
Gael Bigirimana (Shaun Jeffers 46)
Gary McSheffrey (Will Roberts 34)
Cody McDonald

Manager: Andy Thorn

SOUTHAMPTON supporters have experienced some stomach-churning, nerve-shredding and gut-wrenching final days of the season, but not many as emotional and tear-jerking as this.

Almost three years to the day after a ten-point deduction for entering administration consigned them to the third tier of English football Saints were back in the Premier League, and there wasn't a dry eye in the house.

It had been a long road to redemption for fans and players alike, from financial meltdown and near bankruptcy to a return to the elite, via League One, the Championship and Johnstone's Paint Trophy glory at Wembley.

As Roy Keane, the Manchester United captain, strode around the St Mary's Stadium goading the home faithful about the club's relegation from the top flight seven years earlier, following a defeat to Sir Alex Ferguson's all-stars, few could have predicted the agony and ecstasy ahead.

Southampton almost bounced back two seasons later as George Burley led them to the play-off semi-finals. But this club

rarely does things the easy way and, despite being the better team for much of the two legs, penalty shootout heartache at the hands of Derby County ended that dream.

Within 16 months Southampton were in administration, paying the ultimate price for their failure to reclaim Premier League status before the parachute payments afforded to relegated clubs ran out. Another inevitable demotion quickly followed and a failed takeover bid by a consortium including club legend Matt Le Tissier left major doubts over whether they would be forced out of existence. That threat was averted thanks to Swiss businessman Markus Liebherr, who bought Southampton out of administration and immediately appointed Alan Pardew, the former Reading and West Ham boss, as manager.

Despite starting the 2009/10 season with a second points deduction, Pardew guided Saints to seventh place in League One, only narrowly missing out on the play-offs, and to their first trophy since 1976, beating Carlisle at Wembley. Pardew failed to see out the first month of the following campaign before being replaced by Nigel Adkins, regarded as an innovative and forward-thinking training ground manager, who had performed well at Scunthorpe on a modest budget.

In truth Adkins did not have to do too much tinkering with the side he inherited from the unlucky Pardew, whose uneasy relationship with power-hungry chairman Nicola Cortese had more to do with his dismissal than performances on the pitch. Thanks to the goals of Rickie Lambert, the leadership of Jose Fonte and Kelvin Davis and the creative craft and guile of Adam Lallana – players who would go on to become integral parts of Southampton's future success – Adkins' team soared to promotion, defeating Walsall 3-1 on 7 May 2011 to confirm their elevation to the Championship. A fitting way to mark the club's 125th anniversary year.

The celebrations were tinged with sadness as Liebherr, without whom there may not have been a club at all, suffered a fatal heart

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attack the previous August. As Adkins and his jubilant players jumped for joy on the pitch, fans belted out a chest-thumping rendition of, 'There's only one Markus Liebherr.' It was a scene which would be repeated barely a year later and even as Adkins drank in the moment of glory his attentions had already turned to the following season.

"These are great memories, when you see the whole pitch covered in red and white supporters with great smiles on their faces. It's been great to sit back and look at people's faces and see how happy they are. Next year there will be additions, and we'll look to bring quality in to the club to join an already excellent group of players," the likeable Liverpoolian told reporters after the Walsall win.

True to his word Adkins recruited three new signings that summer, in the form of Chelsea midfielder Jack Cork, who arrived on loan, the fleet-footed Belgian winger Steve de Ridder and left-back Danny Fox from Burnley for a fee at the time reported to be as much as £1.8m – a far cry from Southampton's recent penniless past when they could not even afford to provide lunch for the players in the staff canteen.

Southampton were by no means favourites to clinch a second successive promotion in a division which included no fewer than 17 former Premier League clubs. In fact a predicted table by respected website *ESPN* expected Adkins' side to finish as low as 15th place.

Expectation levels among the St Mary's crowd were raised by an impressive 3-1 opening day demolition of Leeds United, with captain Dean Hammond's superb solo goal the highlight of a convincing victory. Southampton would go on to win all four of their opening league games for the first time in their history, a run which included another stunning display to defeat Ipswich 5-2 at Portman Road, with Lambert netting twice.

It was in front of their own supporters where Southampton were at their best and it took a 1-0 defeat by Bristol City in the

very last game of the calendar year to end a 23-match unbeaten home run, which had started during their promotion-winning campaign.

The first game of 2012 was nothing short of a disaster, a 3-0 defeat along the south coast at Brighton with talisman Lambert being shown a red card during an ill-tempered encounter. Three weeks later they were knocked off the top of the table for the first time since September following a 2-0 reverse against pre-season promotion favourites Leicester. It would be more than a month before they tasted victory again as fears began to grow around the stands that the promotion challenge was faltering.

Southampton needed a lift and Adkins provided it in the form of new signing Billy Sharp, recruited from his former club Scunthorpe and who made an immediate impact by scoring on his debut in a 2-0 defeat of Burnley. A tense and far from loving Valentine's Day meeting with promotion rivals West Ham ended in a 1-1 draw to leave Southampton a point behind the table-topping Hammers.

A 4-0 win over Derby in the next game saw Southampton return to the summit and they would stay there until a 3-1 home loss to Reading on 13 April, which saw them swap places with the Berkshire side.

There was still an outside chance of being crowned champions when Adkins and his players made the long trip to the north east to face Middlesbrough on the penultimate weekend of the season, but a 2-1 defeat to the Teessiders meant they could no longer overhaul Reading regardless of the outcome of their final day clash with Coventry, a match they needed to win to be certain of a place in the top two and automatic passage to the Premier League.

Southampton had been here before and scenes of supporters tuned into transistor radios and, in more recent years, mobile phones listening for other results which could affect their fate were commonplace during their numerous Matt Le Tissier-inspired relegation great escapes. In this instance it was the outcome of

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West Ham's game with Hull City, which would have led to more final day despair if Southampton failed to beat a Coventry side already relegated to League One.

A capacity crowd of 32,363 filled the stadium with every right to expect a comfortable home win but Southampton's late season collapse, taking just six points from their previous seven games, meant there was an air of anxiety.

The tension began to ease as early as the 16th minute when Sharp, whose goals since his mid-season arrival had been invaluable, stuck out a toe to divert Adam Lallana's volleyed shot into the back of the Coventry net. Within three minutes 1-0 became 2-0 as the imperious Fonte rose to head past visiting goalkeeper Joe Murphy.

When Jos Hooiveld, a Dutch defender with an eye for goal recruited from Celtic, made it three just shy of the hour mark the party really got started and it became a Grand Prix-style procession to the finish line after Lallana, who had stuck with Southampton throughout their dark times despite offers from Premier League clubs, fired in goal number four.

While Southampton's money men could start working out how much promotion was worth to the club, Lallana's goal left one local bookmaker counting the cost. "That fourth goal lost me £20,000 because loads of people had backed Billy Sharp to score first in a 4-0 win. It was my biggest ever pay-out and Nicola Cortese had to lend me money from the club safe to cover all the winnings," recalls Peter Higgins, owner of the Betting Room. One man's loss is another's gain.

It was like *deja-vu* when referee Anthony Taylor blew for full-time, a victory salute which prompted thousands of joyful home fans to invade the pitch and carry off their red-and-white shirted heroes on their shoulders. Once more cries of, 'There's only one Markus Liebherr' filled the Hampshire air. If only the great man himself could have been there to see his legacy fulfilled.