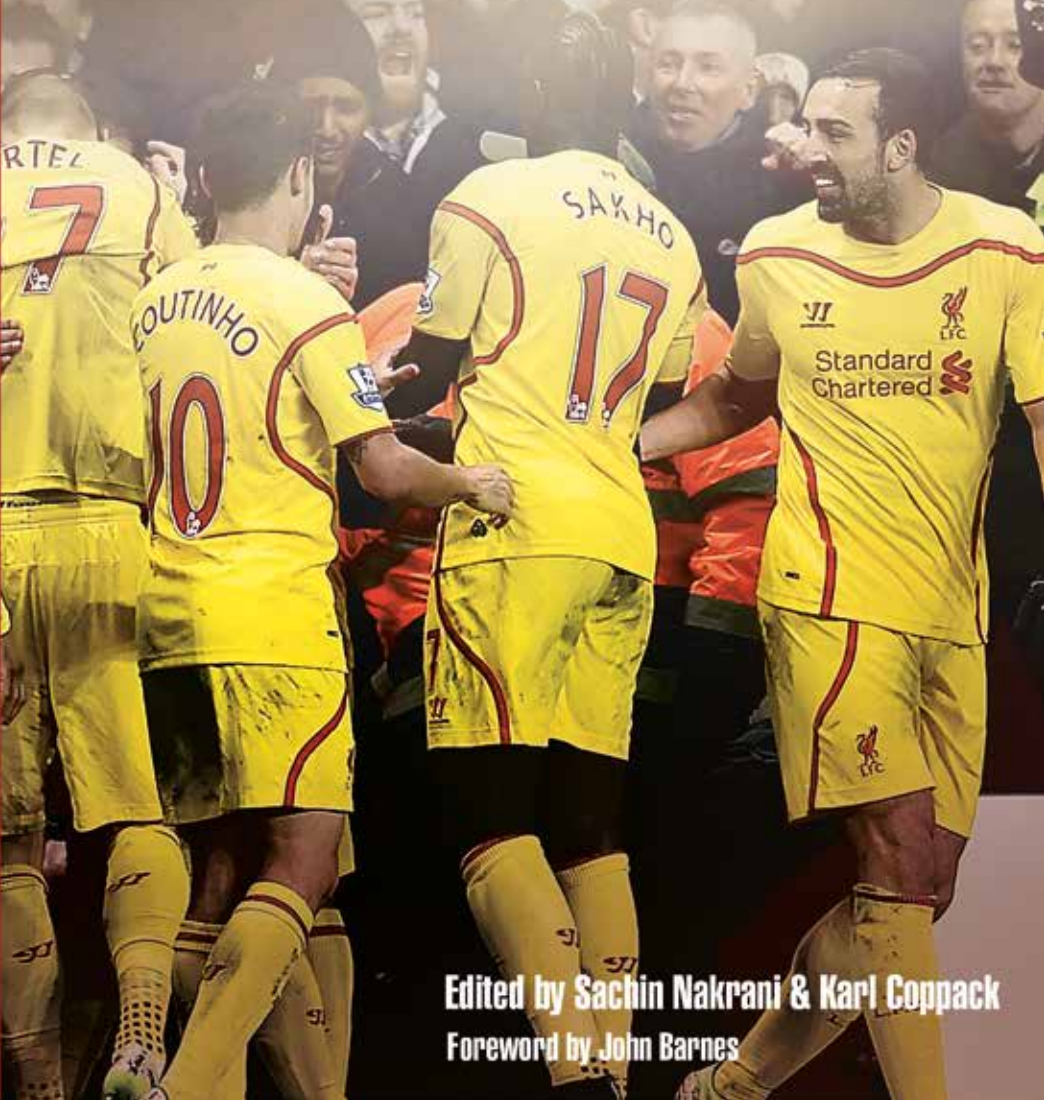


# We're Everywhere

Us: **Liverpool's 2014/15 season**  
told through the stories of fans and foe



Edited by Sachin Nakrani & Karl Coppack  
Foreword by John Barnes

# We're Everywhere, Us: Liverpool's 2014/15 season told through the stories of fans and foes

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# Introduction by Karl Coppack

## *Welcome to the 2014/15 season*

I hope you've enjoyed the almost inevitable rise to Premier League victory/cup win/unbelievable Champions League campaign/disappointment/scrape with relegation and are still celebrating/recovering/slowly beginning to fight the urge to smash your head against a wall for several hours. It can't be good for you, that.

I write these words 11 days before the start of the season so you'll have to bear that in mind. Also, this introduction is somewhat suspect. I should have watched every nanosecond of the pre-season and scouted Emre Can, Lazar Markovic etc, but the truth is I haven't seen a thing. This bit has nothing to do with insight.

There are a number of reasons for this but the main one concerns football exhaustion. I'm still recovering from the madness of last season. Seriously, I'm a broken man. At Upton Park last season I found myself shaking an hour after the final whistle and that was a game we won. No, I needed time off before the madness reignites itself once more in the same way that heavy drinkers need a few days off before going at it again. I'll enjoy the next 11 days because, once again, life changes and the horrors and joy will return.

Liverpool are ready for me even if I'm not quite ready for us.

I've no idea what to expect this time. Not a single clue. Last year I predicted sixth place, 66 points and a runaway Chelsea league victory. I also said that we would take Andre Wisdom to our hearts and sing his names to the skies. Now here I am trying to predict the future again with a pretty awful track record in soothsaying.

I know what we should be doing, but that isn't quite the same thing. Liverpool should be targeting a league win. That's what should be happening. That may sound mad despite last season but I'm going gung-ho these days. I always hated it when Gerard Houllier would concede the title in August. Let's have some ambition, man! We start level after all.

Yes, we've lost Luis Suarez and half of the team haven't met, but if 2014 showed us one thing it's that unpredictable and poetic football is back. We could win the league or we could finish seventh, but where's the hope in setting the bar low. Shit or bust, that's what I say. I'm going for shit, if you see what I mean.

At the Cardiff game last year, when we were 2-1 down, my mate Andy said to me, 'We're going to need four goals here.' We got six. We destroyed Arsenal and Tottenham, beat Manchester United home and away, watched Suarez beat Norwich on his own and were only a penalty away from putting five past Everton. Me and my 66 points didn't see that coming. I'd like to think that anything is possible. I'm expecting everything. If a game is called off due to a meteorite storm I won't turn a hair. I like it like this.

Of course, we're without Suarez. Sachin will talk about him in a forthcoming chapter so, as he seems to be carrying some scars from his departure, I'll leave the whole farrago to him. But it's impossible to assess next season without considering the loss of a genius. The bites and his sulks aside, and wherever you are on the racist argument, he was simply the best striker I've seen since Kenny Dalglish. I thought we wouldn't see another Fernando Torres for another decade but he eclipsed even him in a matter of months.

It wasn't just the goals or the endeavour, it was the poetry, the romance of his performances and his sheer doggedness. My favourite goal last season was Daniel Sturridge's header keepy-ups at Stoke but following that it was the first Suarez header against West Brom. Shades of Steve Nicol at Highbury in 1988 maybe, but in some ways it wasn't even the goal itself that made it so glorious. It was the fact that he thought about doing it. No, it's more than that. It's that he expected no other outcome. If I just run at this full pelt it'll go in. The distance is irrelevant. I have willed it so and that's enough. It was the type of goal that you don't leap about to. You just stare at it and wonder if everyone else saw the same thing.

How do you replace that? Well, you can't. You've got the benefit of hindsight here and could be laughing at me in the future – 'This fool has no idea about Raheem Sterling's 70 league goals' – but he's not going to be Diet Suarez, nor is his mate Daniel. Suarez will be missed so Brendan Rodgers has to just find even more different ways to win. We did well last season when Suarez was on his ban so there's no need to panic just yet. Certainly not 11 days before the season starts. That's what I keep telling myself, anyway.

I know little of the new signings. This is deliberate as I don't want to pre-judge them. I'd rather the unnecessary fretting be put on hold for

a while. I'd rather wait until Southampton before the rage/joy comes out. I hope they're good. Top insight there.

The day after the Newcastle game, the final fixture of the 2014 season, I was asked if I would take 84 points next season. Too hungover to form rational arguments, I waved a tired arm and said yes, even with Suarez in the team. I'd still take it now. I still think we could win the league and do it with that points total. I also think we'll be top at Christmas. Next season won't/can't be as mad as last season, but the foundations are there and the young players have tasted a title near-miss. Sometimes you have to go close and lose so you can win later.

Look at United in 1992 at Anfield, losing it at the worst possible place. Look at them losing it to Manchester City when they'd brought their ribbons all the way to Sunderland – they absolutely walked it the following season. That's the single-mindedness that should burn in Rodgers's men even at this early stage. Even if I'm not involved yet.

Then there's the captain. He's a year older and frustrated with the events of May. It wasn't his fault. From the second half at Norwich away we had nothing in the tank thanks to a squad that needed Victor Moses and Iago Aspas to relieve tired legs. He'll redouble his efforts. He'll be booed at more away grounds because of the World Cup debacle and he won't care. It could be his last complete season.

Actually, you can't blame anyone. You can look to Simon Mignolet for the City goal in December but he also won us the game against Stoke. You can blame Jordan Henderson for his sending-off but who got us the winner at Swansea? Football doesn't work like that. Liverpool will make mistakes next season. There's no such thing as a perfect season. It's what makes the game so great.

And finally Europe. Again, predictions are difficult. At this stage I'd be happy to just get out of the group stages, but then you think about 2005 and just wonder if the madness of 2014 can stretch to other stadia on the continent. Sod it, we'll win that too. Why not? I'm game.

I'm aware you're wincing or smiling from the future at these words. Liverpool could implode as much as explode. Great, isn't it?

This book is more about the fans rather than the games themselves. I wanted to find a scientist in Antarctica and hear how he/she is struggling to see or hear extra time in a League Cup game. I wanted to know about a Red who is crossing an ocean with little more than a crystal set and a rough idea about the kick-off time. This is everyone's story – not just those who can make it to the games. We're everywhere us, and it's not just the 90 minutes that unites us.

Thanks and enjoy. I hope it was quite a ride.

17 August 2014, Liverpool 2 Southampton 1

*‘My mum gave him a bacon butty.  
He still talks about it today’*

**By Karl Coppack**

**W**ell, here we are again. It’s new season time and I’m more than up for it. It’s been a long summer of World Cups and Commonwealth Games but that’s all done now. That was merely the undercard. This is what we’ve been waiting for. The real fun is about to begin. This is it.

The day augurs well. Liverpool are already ahead of Manchester United before a ball has been kicked. Their 2-1 defeat to Swansea led to some pretty swift volte-faces on Radio 5 yesterday, from saviour to sally in one game, so we’re already smirking. On Radio 5 Danny Mills was talking about how confident Louis Van Gaal looked and how David Moyes always looked a bit nervous. This is completely the opposite to what he said last season.

Spare a thought for Ashley Young, though. I wouldn’t want to wish that on anyone.

Anyway, sod them. Today’s all about Liverpool. It’s about seeing my mates again and getting back into the matchday routine.

I’m looking forward to seeing one mate in particular. Today I’m going to the game with my mate Gerry. This is a big deal for the both of us. We’re finally going to Anfield together. This is something that’s been planned for 34 years. Let me explain.

In 1980, Gerry and I started at the Liverpool Institute. We arrived as milk-coloured first-years – all blazers and uncomfortable ties. We were both 11 years old and excited and petrified by the smells, the noises and the sheer grown-upness of a new school. Following years of junior school we had to start again – making new friends, fighting people for



the sake of status and talking about 'break' instead of 'playtime'. Gerry and I became mates simply because our surnames fell close together in the register. Sometimes that coincidence is enough to begin a lifelong friendship.

The Liverpool Institute. It sounds grand, doesn't it? The Liverpool Institute. The Liverpool Institute High School for Boys, to be exact. You're probably picturing boaters and school songs along with hampers from home and pupils called Chaudley Minor. You'd be wrong. The name and history of the school were in stark contrast to the reality of what went on there in September 1980. The building fell into the L1 postcode bracket but if you crossed the road at the back of the schoolyard you'd stand in the shadow of the Anglican cathedral in L8 – Toxteth.

Us 'newts' (first-years) were thrown slap bang into the riots. It was the second year of an unwelcome Conservative government – a government that would soon discuss cutting the city off and allowing it to fall into 'a managed decline'. By the end of our first year the area went up in flames. That said, it wasn't all bad. We were made aware of the benefits of looting. There was an awful lot of stolen Mars Bars going around the yard back then.

Talk about growing up quickly. From *Willo the Wisp* and *Blue Peter* to petrol bombs and police cordons. This isn't what our parents wanted. This was the Institute. This was about possible Oxbridge entrance. Two Beatles went to the 'Inny'. Charles Dickens gave readings there. The headmaster wore a cloak at assembly. We did Latin. You could do Russian – Russian! – in the third year.

In reality, though, the place was falling to pieces around our ears. The teachers were, well, unusual. One had a car engine next to his desk. Another was about 300 years old and would let you walk out of the lesson and play football if you were bored. Our science teacher once told us that he fully expected to be dead by the end of the school year. We were 11 years old. This was far removed from *Goodbye Mr Chips*.

In 1985, my O Level year, the school closed down. Gerry had long since gone by then. He made it through a part of the opening term of our second year but just disappeared. One day our form teacher told us that he'd gone to Breckfield Comprehensive School. There was no farewell from him. No phone call. No nicety. School kids don't betray things like that. There must always be a cruel detachment. I was not to see him again for another 31 years.

I was disappointed. Our little gang was a man down but by then we were older and picking on the new intake of newts, so life moved on. Every now and then Gerry's name would come up but that was about

it. Several years later I was on a bus when I saw him crossing Sheil Road, but didn't get off to say hello.

I would often go to his house when I made my way to school, travelling from Croxteth to Kensington. We'd walk through Edge Hill and the back of the hospital. For years I never made the connection between Gerry leaving school and the haunted look he threw over his shoulder at his dad and stepmother when he left the house. See, I was never invited into the house. He'd hurry out of the door and would gulp quietly, as if shaking off a demon or two. Then he turned into Gerry again – laughing, punching me in the arm for no reason other than that he could and just generally being an irritating pre-pubescent child. I just assumed that his family were as poor as mine and would rather not share stories. My dad had been made redundant from the Liverpool Docks and Harbour Company a year earlier and work was difficult to come by. I knew that Gerry's dad was working, but maybe he too was struggling. Maybe it had something to do with his stepmother. Gerry had hinted that his stepmother was a bit of a harridan, but he'd soon change the subject.

One thing we did have in common was football. Gerry could play. I could fake. He played for the school team and I could watch. Liverpool would end that season as European champions and all we wanted was to go to Anfield and see the Reds. Gerry had left before I was finally allowed to go to the match so we never shared that pleasure. Today, we're finally going to do just that. It only took 34 years. That glimpse of him from a bus was the last I saw of him until 2012.

One day I did a bit of online stalking and put his name into Facebook's search engine. There he was. The same russet red hair, albeit aged. Grown-up Gerry. I sent a friend request and within minutes he sent me a message asking if it was really me. How many Karl Coppacks from Liverpool did he know, I wondered. Over the next few hours he told me about what happened when he left the Institute. There was no Breckfield Comp.

One afternoon, in the winter of 1981, he went home and found his clothes shoved into Kwik Save bags. His dad threw them at him and told him that he was no longer welcome. Confused, Gerry asked him where he was supposed to go. 'Your mother's.' He hadn't seen his mother since he was four years old. She wasn't well and had been in hospital and care for years but he had no idea where. He might as well have been told to go and find the Golden Fleece.

His dad, not shy at showing his fists, didn't find it unusually cruel to put his son on to the streets in the dead of winter. Gerry didn't argue either, save for the confused questions of a child. He knew what would

happen if he did. He would often come to school with the odd bruise or cut but 12-year-olds are always subject to the odd scrape so no one ever suggested anything might be wrong. Gerry was homeless and soon to be hungry.

For two days and nights he wandered the streets, trying in vain to bunk on the Isle of Man ferry. He then walked to Speke airport and back, sleeping rough in Sefton Park. He survived on stolen milk from doorsteps. He was settling in for a third night when two policemen approached him. He made up some cock-and-bull story as he didn't fancy another beating from home. They took him to the police station, fed him and tried to put him somewhere where he wasn't at risk.

There were no available foster homes or much of a social services system back then so he was placed in the only free place – a young offenders' institute. From one institute to another. Of course, he wasn't an offender but over time he became institutionalised and was treated the same as everyone else. A few weeks into his time in the facility he received a letter and a fiver from his dad asking why he hadn't been in touch. Some people aren't cut out to be parents. Some people aren't cut out to be decent human beings either. Some people should be in jail.

Again, the signs were there for me to see. One day, a few weeks before his life changed, he travelled across the city to visit me. My parents were less than pleased at the ten minutes' notice I'd given but were courteous when he arrived. My mum gave him a bacon butty. He still talks about it today. Ordinarily when he would come home his stepmother would feed her own children before him, and even when there was extra she would throw it on to the fire and send him to bed beaten and hungry. He was effectively being starved, so the simple episode of a mother feeding a child as mine did was an all too irregular occurrence. He never spoke of it and I never asked. I wasn't really into reality at that age. All I wanted to do was listen to The Beatles and talk about Ray Kennedy and *Doctor Who*. I had no idea that my mate was living in such appalling circumstances.

So today is Gerry's first Anfield game since the mid-1980s. He was allowed an escorted visit out at weekends so, with no family to visit, chose the ground of the European champions. Last season we went up to Hull to shout at Victor Moses, but today is all about an overdue day out at the place we always talked about.

In February we travelled up to Liverpool for a school reunion organised by our own George Sephton – himself an old boy. On the way I asked Gerry two questions. Firstly, why the hell did he book the Adelphi hotel (it was deemed posh when he lived in Liverpool) and secondly, how did he feel about going back home. He hadn't been home

for years but saw the trip as a chance to exorcise some demons. We met some old mates and had a fantastic night. We even managed to get a guided tour of the school, now the Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts (LIPA) and no longer looking like a museum for fallen masonry. I kept an eye on Gerry for obvious reasons. He told me that seeing the lads and the school left him feeling cheated. Our school history didn't include him and it should have done.

My oldest mate Chee, also from Croxteth, was with us that night. I'd taken my first trip to Anfield with him in 1981 and shared many celebrations and disappointments over the years. That first game was also against Southampton. Gerry should have been with us back then. We're making amends today.

It's an early start. I like a 3pm Saturday kick-off but as today is a 1.30pm game I'm picked up at 7am. A few of the other lads are on their way up too but from different starting places in the capital. Simon and Tony are picking up Steven at Banbury. Mart and Richard are coming up from Haywards Heath while Sachin is on a coach somewhere, feeling all smug because he has his first ever season ticket. Ideally, we should all meet at a service station on the way up but we're not too good at this and Gerry and I end up getting to Liverpool hours before anyone else.

Liverpool is quiet. Very, very quiet. There's hardly any traffic. There was no queue at The Rocket. This is odd. We head for my mum's. This is a necessary visit.

Flashback 24 hours. My sister has left my tickets at my mum's so I call her to make sure that she'll be in. 'Do you want something to eat after the game?' She probably thinks Gerry is still a poor, starving waif rather than a grown man of 45 who now has his own building business and a degree from London Guildhall. I decline as we want to get back on the road once we've dropped the tickets off afterwards.

'Are you sure?'

'Yes, mum. Thanks though.'

'OK luv.'

The city awakes. Anfield is a great place to be before a match. There's laughter and moaning in equal measure and a riot of red and white. We visit my mates outside The Sandon and discuss the key points of the day – the inclusion of Lucas, crown green bowls and the character of Mother Teresa. Then we're in! Anfield! The greatest ground in the world! We're also in the worst seats in the ground.

There's even more ire coming. The club's mascot, Mighty Red, is now included in the on-pitch photos. Yes, I know it's harmless. Yes, I know it's for the kids and not for a curmudgeon like me, and yes, I know that a charity is involved somewhere. But please, can we have no more

of this? Mascots on the pitch just bring us a step closer to celebration music at goals and half-time cheerleaders. I didn't need a mascot to make me feel part of the club when I was a kid. I had Kevin Keegan. This is a worrying development. Bolton have a man dressed as a six-foot lion who dances when they score. I've always been glad that we didn't do that. Liverpool doesn't need added razzamatazz.

I'm still not happy with us having a scoreboard in the Kemlyn stand. All a bit too futuristic for me.

And then there was the game. You know what happened. We got through despite a performance that was as flat as Norfolk. I like the look of Javi Manquillo and Jordan Henderson fills my heart with nothing but joy. But we're very, very rusty and in dire need of another striker. Dejan Lovren, a debutant today, looks suitably scary, which I'm convinced is half the job for centre-halves. He also likes to shout at Simon Mignolet, so we're already firm friends.

One thing that does have to change is Glen Johnson. I used to love Glen Johnson. Gifted, useful and integral at times, but when he's bad he stinks the place out. There were numerous occasions today when he was still strolling back from an attack, leaving Lovren to cover two players at once.

I'm also not convinced that Lucas and Steven Gerrard on the same pitch makes sense. Joe Allen gave us a lot more energy when he replaced the Brazilian so I'd like to see more of him. It's also OK to rest Steven from time to time. That may be seen as a heretical view in some quarters but it's something that should at least be considered.

Anyway, 2-1. Third in the league. Good.

After the match Gerry and I had some chips on the walk back to the car. I'm trying to eat more healthily these days and haven't eaten bad matchday food since the final game of last season. I felt a bit sick and very stuffed by these over-salted chips. They were a mistake. Bilious and sluggish, I rang the bell at my mum's house.

You're ahead of me, aren't you?

She'd prepared a full roast dinner. The works. The absolute works. You can't say no to your mother.

We could barely walk back to the car. And I still forgot to give her the tickets.

Day one and it has to get better.