



BOOK EXTRACT

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CHAPTER ONE

BAG BOX DAY TO SHANKLY'S WAY

I am not a great reader of books, so the thought of actually writing one myself was quite daunting. When I received a letter from Apex Publishing suggesting that they publish my autobiography, my immediate reaction was to put the letter to one side or even bin it! Why me? Who would want to read about my life and career, when there are so many more people of consequence and importance who have published work over the years?

However, my wife took a very different view. "Why shouldn't you write a book? You can say this; you can say that. It will be good fun! I'll help." Her enthusiasm for the task helped persuade me to give it a go. My wife has a great memory for detail, almost photographic at times, so going back over the years her recall would become invaluable.

Here's a little story to give you some idea of my wife's character. At junior school, if the curriculum for the day had been completed with ten minutes or so to spare, the teacher, not wanting the kids to be sat around idle or messing about would say, "Anne Parry [her maiden name, obviously], come out to the front and talk"! She would keep the class entertained and perhaps educated in anything she chose to speak about on that day. Nothing has changed after 32 years of marriage!

Regarding the content of my book, it will be as it was, with little sensationalism and not too much poetic licence, just honest everyday things that have happened and experiences that have occurred in my life as a professional footballer, coach and manager. Anne said, "Could you put the naughty bits in?" My reply was, "Let's wait and see." I have no intention of embarrassing anybody in my book, but at the same time most things need to be told as they were.

I have met some fantastic people in and outside football. I have also met some nuggets, back-stabbers, silly arses, big-time charlies, dicks and wannabes, etc. Oh dear, I'm sounding a bit cynical already and I've hardly got started!

I didn't play for England or in the top division of football but I still had a good career in a tough profession and came out of it in pretty good shape. People tend to take special notice when they read or hear something that a famous person has stated, or assume that if a foreign manager or coach at a high level says something in broken English it must be profound. What a load of cobblers! Having been in the game at a decent level, I can assure you it isn't all

profound. Having been a manager in the Football League, I know that what is said in the dressing room at Colchester United or Manchester United will be very similar. One big difference is that you don't see many second-hand Vauxhalls in the players' car park in Manchester. The point I'm trying to make is that you don't need to be a household name before you have something worthwhile to say to people.

Coming from Liverpool I nearly always try to see the funny side of things, so there have been lots of comical events in my career as well as some not so funny moments. All in all I am a positive person and even now, at the ripe old age of 53, I try to be optimistic every day I get out of bed. My father always says, "You are a long time dead son!" and he is 88!

I was born in Liverpool in 1954, the fourth of five children with three older sisters – Carol, Lorraine and Pauline, and one younger brother - David. My brother David will appear in the book later, as he also was involved in professional football. In fact, we even played in the same team for a while. We lived in Tuebrook, Liverpool 13, only a bus ride from Anfield football ground.

Dad was born in Liverpool and mum was born in Llandudno, North Wales. My mum was a Wren and my dad served in the Army. They met during the Second World War, had a whirlwind romance and were married pretty sharpish before he was sent overseas. Five kids, seven grandchildren, four great-grandchildren and 65 years later, they are retired and living in Llandudno.

My father was a season ticket holder and still is to this day. In his earlier years he lived close to Melwood Drive training ground and used to watch the old Liverpool players such as Billy Liddle, Bob Paisley, Ronnie Moran and Jimmy Melia. At the end of one such training session, my dad wryly tells me of the time that Bob Paisley sauntered over to him still sweating from his exertions, retrieved a half-smoked ciggy from behind his ear and asked for a light! Unfortunately, my father had to decline one of his idols, as he was a non-smoker! Oh my, how the game has changed. I don't think the present Liverpool manager would be too happy with that scenario these days.

My earliest recollection of football is when I was about eight years old and I used to go down to a local field called 'The Red Wreck'. I would watch men's teams play with a real 'Casey' as we called them. This was basically a leather ball with a bladder in it and a laced-up slot. They were dubbed in to try to repel the moisture that turned it into a huge brown bar of soap – no wonder the goalkeepers wore those big silly woollen gloves!

I used to stand behind the goal, which had 'real' nets. That meant to me in those days that it was a proper game of 'togger', as we called it in Liverpool. From behind the goal I would chase after the ball with half a dozen other kids whenever a shot went wide of the target. Most of the lads were older and bigger than me so I rarely got a look in. In fact I usually got pushed over and trampled on before I put a finger on the Holy Grail. I loved just being there though, and when I did actually get the ball I would give it the full welly back to the goalie without showing any kind of facial expression, even though it felt as though I'd broken my bloody foot! Those 'Caseys' were rock hard!

The real treat came in my ninth year when my dad first took me to Anfield with him. His season ticket was in the Kemlyn Road stand but I had to stand in the paddock on the opposite side of the ground. Kids could take a box or whatever to stand on, so I took mine in my haversack and worked my way to the front so that I could see. Of course, you are supposed to take your box out of the bag, but the manoeuvre seemed so awkward to perform amongst such a melee' that I actually stood on the bag instead, which consequently got all wet and filthy as you can imagine. Heaven knows what the 'wet' was; I shall leave that to your own imagination! I managed to see the game by just peeping over the wall. I got knocked off the box a few times when the crowd surged forward, but the men around me hitched me up by the scruff of my neck and dumped back on the bag box!

The atmosphere was unbelievable. It was scary, frightening, noisy and physical but I was hooked – not so much on the watching but rather my desire to get on the pitch and be one of them, 'A Footballer'. I wanted to wear that red shirt.

As I watched the game and everyone around me was shouting, cheering, swearing, singing and jumping up and down, I just stood there and took in all that was happening both on and off the pitch. When the players came close to the touchline where I was standing I could even smell them. The liniment or embrocation made the hairs on my neck stand up! I could feel my heart thumping, not in fear but just being enveloped by everything. When the players made physical contact I could hear the smack or thud of flesh on flesh and see the expressions on their faces. Fantastic!

When the game finished and the crowd began to move, I must admit I was a little concerned as how I was going to get out in one piece. I thought, if I fall over I will get trampled on and never get up, especially with this bag on my back, but I needn't have worried. In fact my feet hardly touched the ground. It was so packed that I literally got carried out

of the stadium with my feet off the floor, totally compressed between others' bodies! I can't say that I enjoyed that bit and I was pretty relieved to reach the exit and meet my dad, who had left his seat a tad early so that he could get around to me in good time. My father has always been a Liverpool fan and from that day on I have been one too, always keen to discover their match results in a way that is different to my searching out the results of teams I was involved with as a player, coach or manager.

By the time I was ten we had moved across the Mersey River to The Wirral, which is still part of the Merseyside area. Some folk from Liverpool call people from over the water 'Plastic Scousers', but I was born in Liverpool city and as far as I am concerned I am a true Liverpoolian.

I started playing local junior football around this time and joined the Boys Brigade U12s. We did well at times to keep the score down to single figures; in fact, we did actually lose 27-0 in one game! From what I can remember I wasn't that bothered about the score, I was just happy to change into some kit and get my boots on. The boots were rubber-moulded studs (which were all the go at the time). I think mine were second-hand and they were a bit big for me but it didn't matter. The shirts were somewhat rugby-like and came down to your knees when untucked, or even nearly to the floor when wet!

Luckily for me, a man named Dave Bale was watching one of our games and he pulled my dad and me to one side afterwards. He asked if I would like to go training with one of his Junior Olympic teams, which he ran from U11s to U16s. Dave was and still is an unassuming bloke, very quietly spoken and not a brash or boasting type but quite persuasive. It turned out that Junior Olympic FC was a very well run outfit respected in the area and above all, for me, all the sides had full matching kit! Even better they played in RED. When I asked Dave in latter years why he picked me out of a team that was losing by double figures almost every week, he said, "You were the only boy in the team with your sleeves rolled up, you had a big bush of blond hair and you covered every inch of the pitch. You never touched the ball much but you ran your socks off!"

Talking of running your socks off, I can remember in some games when the pitch was saturated and like a quagmire, so if your socks were a little big for you they would slip down, get completely soaked and end up over your boots! It was like trying to run in sodden house slippers and, remember, they were at the end of thin white legs with knees that looked like knots in cotton. What a state! I still loved it though.

Believe it or not, I rolled up my sleeves in every game I can remember throughout my career, even if it was freezing cold. It was just my way and I felt comfortable with it.

While on the subject of being comfortable, how can you play a game of football in a pair of gloves? A lot do it these days. What a set of 'tarts'! They'll be playing in earmuffs next!

And, talking of ears, I will digress for a moment to recount a story that upset my wife when I told her some 20 years later!

I had not been in Wallasey, Wirral, for long and one cold day I was going down to the local park for a kick-about. On the way you had to pass some public toilets. As I approached them, I noticed a lad running out of them at some speed. He was only about my age and I didn't think too much of it, so I went into the loo for a quick pee before the game. However, when I got in there the floor was two inches deep in water and all the washbasins had their plugs in with the taps full on! Water was overflowing and flooding the whole place. My first reaction was to turn off the taps in order to try to stem the flow. As I grabbed a tap and started to turn it off, a big burly bloke came into the toilets and, before I could explain, he smacked me hard across the face and ear with his dinner-plate-like hand. It was the hardest I had ever been hit and I literally did see stars! The old survival mode clicked in and I legged it. He obviously thought that I was the perpetrator, but I wasn't going to hang about to protest my innocence and maybe cop another one! When I got to the park my mates said, "What happened to you?" Apparently I had a huge red handprint on the side of my face. I played for two hours or so with my mates until the redness had gone, so I could go home without my mum or dad seeing it. I didn't want them to know. I don't know why, but I just didn't want to tell them.