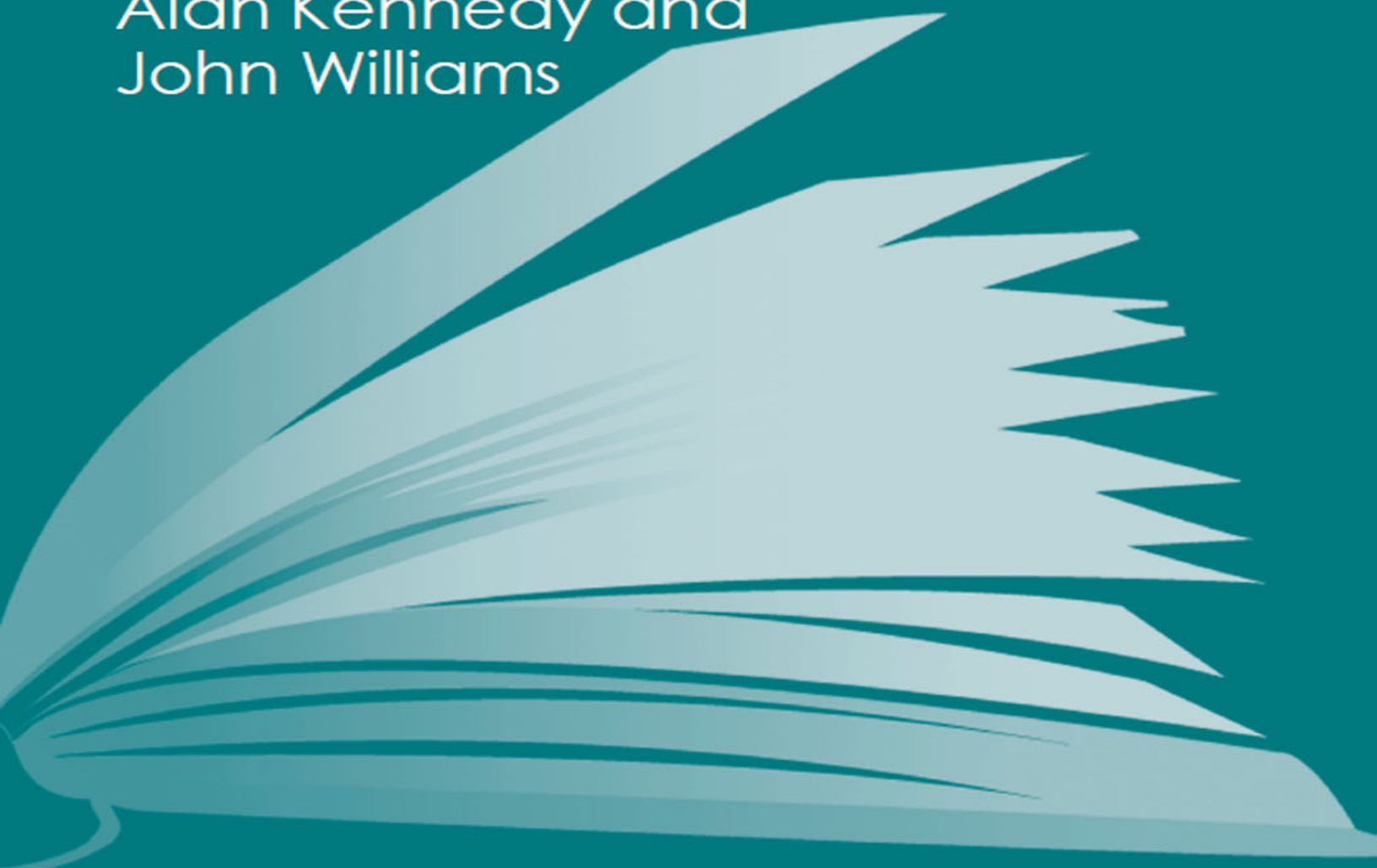
Inside Bob Paisley's Liverpool

Kennedy's Way

Alan Kennedy and
John Williams



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Alan Kennedy's career in football began in 1972. He played for a number of teams, including Newcastle United, Sunderland and, most famously, Liverpool. He retired from the game in 1991 whilst at Wrexham, where he played his 500th game. He now comments on football for local and national radio, and is an after-dinner speaker.

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INSIDE BOB PAISLEY'S LIVERPOOL

Kennedy's Way

Alan Kennedy and John Williams

EDINBURGH AND LONDON

For Mum and Dad, the people who made me, and for Jane, Michael and Andrew, my dream team

Alan Kennedy

For Sylvia and Joy, Leicester City and Liverpool

John Williams

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ROME, 1984

‘Alan Kennedy is a special player: he always scores in finals.’

Kenny Dalglish

EUROPEAN DREAMS

What does 1984 mean to you? A cash-card number perhaps? Think of the *year* 1984, 20 years ago now. Do you imagine tales of state terror mapped out by Orwellian futurists? Think again: think sport. There was probably an Olympic Games going on somewhere in 1984: the year sounds about right. France won the European Football Championships, the beauty and power of Platini, Tigana and Giresse writ large: and no English hooligans to spoil it all. But for football fans from Merseyside, 1984 meant either glory or revival, depending upon your Red or Blue persuasion. Everton finally had a team and their own FA Cup victory to cheer in 1984, Andy Gray dumping both goalkeeper Steve Sherwood and Graham Taylor’s Watford at Wembley. Everton fans now had the promise of a bright new Blue era, led by manager Howard Kendall and an ex-Kopite battler, Peter Reid, to challenge their dominant Red neighbours. Even League titles beckoned for Goodison in 1985 and 1987. But for Liverpudlians, 1984 was less about a potential Blues revival than it was about a new manager, Joe Fagan, and a unique Reds’ football trophy Treble: the League

Championship won (again), the League Cup retained and, best of all, for the fourth time in eight years, the recapture of the European Champions Cup. Indeed, 1984 was a good year to be alive as a Liverpool football fan – and as a fan of English club football.

And note, very carefully, the precise use of the word ‘Champions’. Because before naked cash and the search for global TV audiences became the ultimate drivers of the European game, the original Champions Cup was the all-or-nothing terrain of the European football cream only. We are talking authentic champions here. In 1984, for example, the English champions, Liverpool, were required to beat the champions of Denmark, Spain, Portugal, Romania and finally, in their very own backyards, the champions and best club side in Italy, to claim the European football club title. Everything was at stake on each leg of this historic journey at a time when Liverpool Football Club, already champions three times, was both feared and revered in Europe, a favoured target and a respected foe. All of this meant that there could be no doubt that Liverpool was certainly the best club team in Europe in 1984. They had triumphed the hard way, in routing a talented Benfica side at the Stadium of Light, surviving a horror semi-final night in Bucharest when even the local police were after Merseyside blood, and by holding a galactic Roma team in their own turbulent Olympic Stadium, to eventually claim the silverware in a mind-numbing penalty shoot-out. No one – not even the most blue-blooded Evertonian – could argue that this latest Liverpool triumph in Europe was merely some knockout Euro cakewalk. This was the real McCoy.

It was three years earlier in 1981, in Paris, and after an uncharacteristically chaotic League season, that Liverpool had last won the European Cup, under the guidance of the master, Bob Paisley. The unlikely Reds hero on that occasion was not a Dalglish or a Souness. Instead, it was a feverish and sometimes disorganised converted left-winger, who was

now a head-down left-back; a man who had spent most of the season injured and concerned about his long-term future at the club. A man the Liverpool fans already called ‘Barney Rubble’. The North-east’s Shiney Row old boy, Alan Kennedy, signed by Liverpool in 1978, was recalled from injury by Paisley for the Champions’ final against the most famous football club in Europe, Real Madrid, at the Parc des Princes. Before Paris, Kennedy had played just one match after a six-week lay-off with a broken wrist. He was not match fit, not even close. But with the match heading for extra time, the Liverpool left-back broke forward late on to collect a Ray Kennedy throw-in before scoring the winning goal in the final minutes. The Kennedy name was thus already destined for perpetual illumination in the Anfield Hall of Fame. Kennedy had even added to his credit among Liverpool fans by also scoring in winning League Cup finals in 1981 and 1983. He had no right to hope for more European reward just a few years later. But he was going to get it anyway.

Three years on, following unacceptably early Reds’ European Cup exits, first in Sofia (1982) and then at inhospitable Lodz in Poland (1983), Liverpool were on the European Cup trail once more. Bob Paisley had retired in 1983, an unprecedented three European Cup wins to his name, and smiling Joe Fagan was the new man in charge at Anfield. Finally clear of injuries, Alan Kennedy was now a fixture in a Liverpool back five, a unit that, collectively, missed just one League game in 1983–84. Crazy Zimbabwe goalkeeper Bruce Grobbelaar made mind-boggling saves – and occasional howlers – in the Liverpool goal; Phil Neal, at right-back, made sunrise seem inconsistent; and Alan Hansen and Mark Lawrenson offered talent, pace and class – and cryptic one-liners – to burn, at centre-back. Other new men had also staked their first-team place at Liverpool since the 1981 final: teak-hard Irish ball caresser Ronnie Whelan in midfield; the endlessly energetic Sammy Lee and Aussie

Craig Johnston alongside him; Steve Nicol, a versatile young Scot; and a certain Ian Rush, to icily plunder goals up front – 32 League goals alone in 1983–84. Liverpool had been remade since Paisley's marvellous 'golden generation' of the late '70s. This new side looked powerful and fluent, but it also seemed much pacier than earlier versions. Why not another serious tilt at Europe?

The Liverpool backroom staff badly wanted to win the big title in Europe once more. Alan Kennedy, it would be fair to say, was slightly less focused than this. He was greedy for more medals, sure, but he also hoped for a few more European nights of football laughs, adventure and celebration – and a welcome break from midweek training at Melwood. Certainly, the last thing he had on his mind, as the club's players boarded a charter flight to Denmark in the autumn of 1983 to begin the new European campaign at little BK Odense, was that nine months later he might be reeling on a foreign field in Rome, trying to feel his legs and control palpitations and sweaty palms, as he faced the perceptibly expanding Roma international goalkeeper Franco Tancredi – and a howling Roman crowd. Kennedy had a penalty kick to win yet another European Cup for Liverpool. It was the stuff of which dreams – or more properly football nightmares – are surely made.

WALK ON

After the trauma of that Rome night, Liverpool and Alan Kennedy were back at the very top of European football once more. It was to prove a short stay. The real Liverpool nightmares lay just ahead at the Heysel Stadium in 1985. After the Brussels débâcle all English clubs were banished from European competition for five seasons. Graeme Souness and Ian Rush, respectively lead enforcer and goalscorer extraordinaire at Fagan's Liverpool, both left Anfield for foreign excursions and big money. These were painful, wilderness years, when the English game – and later

Liverpool Football Club – lost their way. Alan Kennedy himself would soon lose his own bearings and fall out of love with Anfield, wrecking the later stages of his career as a result. By the early ’90s another football club, just 20-odd miles east down the M62 motorway, would be on the way to dominating the English game almost as completely as Liverpool had done in the ’70s and ’80s. But Manchester United would not dominate European football. No English club would ever do that again in quite the same way.

In the 20 years that have followed that crucial penalty kick in Rome in May 1984 the question Anfield followers have been asking most often, the puzzle which haunts us all ever since the trembling Alan Kennedy faced Tancredi, is: can Liverpool ever return to the halcyon days of two decades ago? Souness himself, Roy Evans and the cerebral Gérard Houllier have all failed this crippling test as Liverpool managers who came and went following the deeds of a great player turned great manager, Kenny Dalglish. The latest Anfield boss, ex-Valencia coach Raphael Benitez, faces a huge challenge in a new globalised era in which ‘Liverpool’ is no longer a universal by-word for world footballing excellence, and Anfield is no more the preferred destination of every talented young footballer in Britain, never mind the focal point of ambitions of the new foreign football mercenaries that all top clubs must now chase. Back in the early ’80s Liverpool whistled and the stars followed. Today these talents hear other voices and feel their wallets instead. History dims quality in an era of instant gratification. Liverpool must find a way back to the very top in European football, of course, but no one should make the mistake of thinking that this will be easy. It won’t be.

Alan Kennedy had no illusions that Liverpool were signing a ‘world-class’ left-back when Bob Paisley splashed out a record £330,000 fee for the Newcastle United man in August 1978. But he knew, just as Bob did, that the club were

signing a real Liverpool player. Kennedy could play, sure, but he also recognised that he was fortunate, indeed, to share a dressing-room for more than seven years with rare talents like Souness, Dalglish, Hansen and the rest. These were the coming stars of the British game and of European football: the key outfield men at Liverpool under Paisley and Fagan represented pretty much the last of the rich seam of Scottish football talent that had graced the English game for more than a century. Players like Alan Kennedy, Jimmy Case, Sammy Lee, Craig Johnston and others were the vital glue that held the truly great Liverpool teams together. But by May 1984 Kennedy had also worked hard at his game, had scored crucial goals for the club, and could reflect on six injury-interrupted but satisfying years at Anfield, during which time he had already won one European Cup, five League titles and four League Cups. ‘Show me another left-back with more medals,’ he would say. Who could blame him? Europe now beckoned again for Kennedy and for Liverpool: he was ready for the challenge.

This book charts Alan Kennedy’s life in football but it also looks more broadly at the Paisley and Fagan years at Anfield and some of the men who made it. It looks at Alan Kennedy’s problems after Liverpool and his life in football today, as well as his views on why Liverpool have since failed to match these glory years of European dominance. But where else to start than with Alan Kennedy’s own story of that marvellous last successful Liverpool European Cup campaign of 1983–84? Having disposed of BK Odense, Athletic Bilbao and Benfica in earlier rounds, Liverpool faced Dinamo Bucharest in the European Cup semi-finals. Theirs was a fierce challenge. But a story was unfolding here that would mean that the Liverpool left-back Kennedy would actually score winning goals in two Champions Cup finals for Liverpool, an incredible tale. And who could have foreseen that outcome for the modest and shy boy rejected as a youngster by his native Sunderland FC?

* * *

IT WAS 20 YEARS AGO TODAY . . .

We fancied ourselves now we had reached the 1984 European Cup semis. The four teams left were Roma, Dinamo Bucharest, Dundee United and Liverpool, so no prizes for guessing that we were all hoping to get Dundee. We had hammered Aberdeen a few years before in Europe, so we were comfortable with Scottish teams. We knew Bucharest would be a difficult trip and that Roma would be a handful – they were full of good players. We drew Dinamo, a real challenge, so the Liverpool staff had to work out how to make the trip as painless as possible for us. In their semi, Dundee United won 2–0 at Tannadice and then lost 0–3 in Rome, but the referee of the second leg admitted much later that the game had been got at. What, in Italy? Big shock! After they'd been beaten in Rome, the Dundee lads said that they had been done, that they were conned. It certainly looked dodgy: the Scots lads knew that they'd been slaughtered by the ref. We weren't that surprised: we knew that nobody in Europe wanted an all-British final because we were so dominant at the time in European football.

The first leg for us, against Dinamo Bucharest at Anfield, was a battle. We won it 1–0, little Sammy Lee getting the winner, a header in the first half. They were completely cynical, trying for anything, and we didn't play that well. But Joe Fagan said that at least we got a decent result: that we had something to take with us to their place in a fortnight's time. We knew we'd need this 'something' all right, because their captain and best player, Movila, decided to have a little go with Graeme Souness. I thought at the time: 'He's a bloody brave man, this little Rumanian.' The referee, André Daina from Switzerland, could see it all starting but at this stage he was just saying to everyone, 'Calm it down, take it easy.' There was nothing blatant or really violent in it so far,

it was just very niggly, some very cynical tackles. That is until this fellah Movila easily beat Graeme with a real bit of skill and you could see Graeme saying to himself: ‘You’re not gonna do that to me again, friend.’ So as this guy turned away to play a one-two, Graeme turned right into him and caught him with a beautiful right cross, smack on the jaw. It pole-axed the guy, he went down flat, but the play went on. The referee didn’t see it: no one really saw it.

Now, as this guy was having treatment, all their players gathered round and got excited and started pointing – as they tend to do – at Souness. And Graeme knew what he had done and he’d done it well, to be fair. This fellah was then carried off with a broken jaw, the full business. Afterwards, when the lads all started talking about it in the dressing-room, Souey just said: ‘Listen, whatever he got, he deserved it. End of story.’ We won the game, but all the talk afterwards from them was: ‘We can’t wait to get you lot back to Bucharest.’ I don’t think they meant it as a welcome! After the match, their players said that this Souness guy had wound everyone up in the newspapers; that he had riled their players and their fans and then knocked their hero right out. So we knew we were in for a pretty hostile reception out there. Tin hat time. But when Graeme’s in that type of combative mood all you can say is: ‘Bring it all on: we’ll take it all.’ This was also part of the Liverpool Way, of course: we all stuck together as a team and if we’re going to go down fighting it will be all of us, not one of us. We weren’t afraid of going over there, not at all. Even though when we got there there were Bucharest policemen all over the place who drew fingers across their throat and said to us: ‘You are dead.’ It was intimidating, but Souey was just laughing it off, he wasn’t taking any notice. His view was that you just had to stand up and be counted at these games.

As we were coming out of the tunnel for the warm-up in Bucharest we could hear all the boos from the 60,000

crowd: it was deafening. Graeme's at the front, he's the captain, but it was aimed at all of us. We were all just eyeing the crowd as if we were saying: 'We'll take you on all right: all of you.' Graeme loved it, of course: Souness would take it all on himself if he could. He had received threats from the police and from the Dinamo players, even from the hotel staff. People were staring and spitting at him, he'd got the lot. Even the police and army guys patrolling the crowd were joining in the booing as we were warming up. Whenever Graeme got the ball in the warm-up, the booing really took off. So when someone passed the ball to him and the crowd was getting ready to boo, he would just dummy it, so the booing would stick in their throats. He was getting them back, making them madder still. You could just feel the tension rising. We were all going: 'Oh, Graeme, please, there are 60,000 lunatics here and the police are all against us. They'll all be on the pitch in a minute!' Souey, of course, couldn't give a shit: he was absolutely loving it, loving it.

Kenny and Rushie kicked off and the ball came straight back to Graeme (boos) and he played a lovely ball out to me on the wing, with the boos still ringing out all around the place. So I'm starting to panic now, because the crowd's on *my* back. But gradually we started doing what we said we were going to do: play it over the top, turn them, and let's start again from there. Graeme was obviously a marked man and a couple of their players had a pop at him, but he's far too clever for that. And he also got a couple of them on the way back as well, because he was very good at doing his little bits and pieces off the ball when he needed to. Graeme was a hard target. Frankly, the game was shit. We had a lot of flair in that Liverpool team, but sometimes you just have to abandon flair to get a result. This was one of those occasions when we said: 'Hey, we're not playing any pretty football here. We're just going to lump it forward and let Rushie dig in.' It was a bad pitch, but Rushie – who was shipping some punishment himself – was brilliant, and he

scored the two goals. It was Ronnie Whelan who set him up: Ronnie got the ball from a shortish corner and feinted to cross with his left foot, first time, but he decided to just flick it up with the outside of his right, through the defender's legs, to set up Rushie. One-nil, and we'd only played 12 minutes.

Suddenly, the crowd began to go flat. And now Dinamo are struggling: they are always struggling from here, because they *so* wanted to kick Graeme Souness and no one could get near him because he did everything right. He just moved the ball on whenever they tried to get to him. Orac scored for Dinamo, a top free kick, but with six minutes to go Rushie scored again, from a pass from Souness of all people! We won the game 2–1, and the tie 3–1 on aggregate. We'd shown a lot of character and discipline and we were in the final. After the match, nobody on their side shook Souey's hand; nobody wanted to mix it with him. But we'd won, even if we thought we'd given away a soft goal which got them back in it for a while. There was just no way we were going to lose that game. All the other stuff was just a distraction: we'd done our job, but we were lucky to get out of there so easily. If the scoreline had been closer for longer, and if their fans had started getting onto the pitch, for example, the police were not going to do anything, not a chance. It was an intimidating night all right because they just *hated* us – they hated Graeme the most – but they hated all of us. But we came through.

In the dressing-room afterwards Joe Fagan told everyone to be really quiet and then he started cheering out loud like a madman – he was delighted with the character we had shown. And he was in his first European Cup final as the Liverpool manager. Now we had to get out of the stadium, get our stuff from the hotel and get back home. It's always nice to get home from a difficult place – a hostile place – one where you have to go and get a result. Especially that one: I wasn't always sure we were going to get out of there,

definitely the worst place I've ever played for sheer hostility. All we had to do now was to face 60,000 rabid Romans in the 'neutral' Olympic Stadium. Easy!

ROMA, 1984: 'THEY DON'T WANT US TO WIN IT.'

To be honest, we thought it was very unfair that the European Cup final of 1984 was played in Rome. UEFA had only picked the stadium for the final about a month before. And what if Dundee United had got through? A Liverpool v. Dundee United final: and all the way to Rome to play it? I don't think so. We were annoyed, so I'm sure Liverpool's chief executive Peter Robinson said something to UEFA about the fact that we had to go to Rome, Roma's backyard. The Italians said: 'Well, didn't Liverpool play a European Cup final at Wembley in 1978?' Well, yeah, but Wembley isn't Liverpool: so why not play the 1984 final in Milan, or Turin? We knew we had to just suck on it in the end, because we all felt that UEFA and the lot of them in world football wanted Liverpool out of the way because we were too successful and they didn't like it. They wanted us out of the competition. Joe Fagan used that feeling with us before the match to wind us up: 'They don't want us to win this.' We had a bit of the old 'siege mentality' about us at the time, but there is no doubt that the odds were purposely stacked against us to make sure we didn't get a result. I think we all believed that.

We had them watched, but we had no great dossiers about Roma. We just knew they were a good side: Falcao and Cerezo, Conti and Graziani. Bloody good players. They were definitely the favourites, but we also thought the pressure was on us to win the English Treble because it hadn't been done before. Because there was a gap between the end of the season and the European final we went for a week's break and training in Israel, mainly to chill out and for some drinking and relaxation. We ended up doing a bit of fighting too as it turned out! We took the British press with

us, but the Italian press thought we were crazy. Then we got our thinking heads back on when we got back at Anfield. We all knew the likely Liverpool team, which was terrible, really, on the rest of the squad, but easier on Joe. He wouldn't have to disappoint anyone. It was: Bruce in goal; the back four had been the same all season – Neal, Lawrenson, Hansen and me; Craig Johnston, Sammy Lee, Souness and Whelan were in midfield; with Kenny and Rushie up front.

Joe then decided we needed to practise a penalty shoot-out against the reserves – just in case. I think we lost it about 1–5. Tony Parks had saved a penalty in the shoot-out for Tottenham against Anderlecht in the UEFA Cup final a few weeks before and I remember seeing him on TV run off down the pitch. Afterwards, I was thinking: what a hero he is. He was a national hero, and we all wanted to be that man. Scoring a penalty in Rome for Liverpool meant you could be a hero, but everyone at the club was more worried about the possibility of being a failure. I think that's how Hansen and Lawro, and a few of the others, thought about it. Some of the Liverpool players you think should score were missing penalties in the practice. So Joe made everybody have a go. I know I was just as bad as anybody else. I kept on putting mine to the keeper's left – and missing. And this was only up against a young Liverpool kid in goal, who was not the tallest or strongest of keepers. After a while, it became a bit of a fun thing: 'Aye, you have a go next – put it in that corner.' We all started messing about. It wasn't taken that seriously because, to be honest, we weren't any good at it and we didn't think it would get that far in Rome. We thought 120 minutes of football should produce a winner.

Joe had probably worked out in his own mind who could take two or three of the penalties, if we needed them: Phil Neal, Ian Rush and Souness. Maybe, Kenny. But I knew I was in with a shout, because I know Joe Fagan, Ronnie Moran and Roy Evans would have asked our youth man and

European scout Tom Saunders who he would trust to take a penalty. They respected Tom's views, thought he was a good judge of character. Tom once said about me that if there was a fight going on somewhere, I'd be one of the first to go over the top: that I'd want to be involved. And someone else said to me: 'Aye, that's because he wants you to be the first to get shot!' Tom thought I was pretty reliable, good in a crisis, a fighter. The staff all probably compared their five choices for penalty takers. They must have gone into it in a bit of detail, but who was going to be the fifth penalty taker? I was probably about number eight or number nine in line at that time. I'd taken one pre-season in Holland in a penalty shoot-out – and missed it. Alan Hansen had also missed one: his was worse than mine. I had taken a couple of penalties, way back in youth team football. I reckon I'd probably taken a handful of penalties in my whole life in competitive games, and none that mattered as a professional. It is quite unusual, actually, to ask someone to beat the keeper from 12 yards in that kind of situation, from a cold start. It looks easy, but everyone can get the wobbles.

'WE'VE GOT TO PUSH THEM BACK'

Joe named the team and the subs about an hour before the game in Rome. There was very little atmosphere in the Liverpool dressing-room: actually, it all seemed quite nervous. Ronnie Moran was scurrying around, busying himself and trying to calm people, but was mislaying things and getting in the way, making things worse. People just wanted to get out, get it over with. At the time, most of the Liverpool lads liked the singer Chris Rea and a few of us had even gone to see him perform. We had a Chris Rea tape in the dressing-room and Dave Hodgson, one of the subs said, as we were about to come out, that he thought the Italians looked a bit nervous. So why don't we sing them a Chris Rea song, 'I don't know what it is but I love it', just to wind them up? Everyone said not to be so stupid – that this was the

European Cup final. But when we got in the tunnel, Hodgy and Craig Johnson both started singing it and the rest of us just joined in. It was a way of breaking our nerves, and putting the wind up them. The Roma players were gobsmacked: they must have thought we were lunatics. As we got on the pitch we were still singing and we were even getting louder. All these cool, international footballers, now they all just looked scared shitless: first blood to Liverpool.

Joe had told us to concentrate on keeping the ball at the start and we had some good possession, got the crowd quietened. There were loads of clouds from the flares from the Italian end, and the match took a while to settle. There had been no real chances when Phil Neal went forward from right-back and passed the ball wide to Craig Johnston. Craig crossed it to the far post and Ronnie Whelan went up with Tancredi, the Roma keeper. It looked like a foul: continental referees normally give them when you even touch a keeper and Ronnie had jumped into Tancredi. But, there was no whistle, and when Tancredi fell and dropped the ball, Roma just panicked. A defender whacked the ball against the keeper's head: it was quite funny. Typical Liverpool, Phil Neal had kept his run going right into the box and the ball fell directly to him: he put it in with the outside of his right foot.

We thought it might be a little easier now, because the onus was on them to come forward and we thought we might be able to nick another on the break. They came right back at us, but we were comfortable. But just before half-time Conti got the ball in from the left byline and his cross cut out both Nealy and Lawro, who had gone across to cover. Pruzzo got in a great little cushioned header at the near post. I still remember thinking: 'Brucie will get that,' but somehow it looped over him and inside the far post. When you lose a goal so close to half-time, away from home in Europe, you end up sitting in the dressing-room wondering about the sort of lift it will give them. You could hear the crowd outside: the place seemed to be buzzing.

But Joe was good. He said at half-time: ‘Look, don’t worry about that goal. We’ve got to push them back a little more. They’ve had the last ten minutes of the first half, but we’ve got to get back to what we were doing at the start – and start creating some chances.’ He was right: we hadn’t been able to get our front players going at all.

In the second half there seemed to be a lot of play stuck in the middle of the field. I got into a really terrible phase of play and after about 60 minutes I was having a really bad time. I remember getting the ball and just giving it away all the time. Conti was switching wings and giving me bad problems. I was in real trouble. Ronnie Whelan was looking at me as if to say: ‘Fucking hell, what are you doing? Help me out. I’m just a young lad.’ I had a word with him, I said: ‘Listen, Ronnie, I’m having a nightmare, but bear with me, and I’ll try to play my way out of it.’ So Ronnie sat in with me for a while, and he helped me get over the worst of it. Then Brucie seemed to make a couple of really important saves, because by that stage we had started to hang on a bit. I felt *I* was hanging on, especially. I’m sure the boss must have been thinking about bringing me off before the end, but it was Kenny and Craig Johnston who got substituted. We made it to 90 minutes, still no more goals. At full time Joe said: ‘Penalties are a cruel way to decide any game. So let’s get out there and make sure we don’t need them.’ But by this stage both teams were tired, and frightened of making a mistake. It was still about 75 degrees. To be honest, at this stage you end up pretty much playing percentage football – get it up the touchline, away from our goal. I told Ronnie just to dig in, and no one really looked like scoring. When the match was over, I suppose we thought that we had done well enough, holding Roma on their own ground for 120 minutes. We, maybe, hadn’t done quite enough to win, but we deserved something. Penalties.

* * *

THE PENALTY TAKER’S FEAR OF THE PENALTY

Alan Kennedy and the Liverpool players now faced a new test. Penalty kicks have always been a controversial feature of football, a strange and foreign intrusion in the beautiful game. Right back in the early days of football in England in the late nineteenth century, gentlemen amateurs refused to score from penalty kicks or to defend them, arguing that their award assumed that some players were willing to behave like ‘cads’ and deliberately foul opponents. How little they knew. Initially, goalkeepers were allowed to run at penalty takers, to challenge them for the ball, but by 1905 this was outlawed and in 1930 another law change demanded that the goalkeeper stand on the goal line and ‘not move his feet until the penalty kick has been taken’. Most goalkeepers agreed that this gave too much advantage to the penalty taker: no goalkeeper who actually wanted to try to save a penalty kick could afford to wait until the kick was taken. So goalkeepers always moved, even if good penalty takers later waited for their movement – and picked another place. And goalkeepers have always been advantaged psychologically in their battle with the taker by the key fact that, although fans have their hopes, nobody ever expects a goalkeeper to save a penalty. His is a wager against nothing. Even though three out of ten penalty kicks are missed – saved by the keeper, blasted wide, hit high over the bar, twanged off posts, launched by David Beckham into outer space – goalkeepers are still treated as conquering heroes, magicians, when the ball is somehow kept out from the spot. The odds on scoring from a penalty are only about 1–2 on. And how many odds-on wagers fail to deliver? But it is still the penalty taker who is vilified, disowned for missing his kick, rather than the goalkeeper for allowing his precious goal to be breached. Which means that in real life we would almost all prefer to be goalkeepers rather than penalty takers. It is low-risk, high-reward work.

If you stand on a penalty spot, roughly 36 feet from an open goal in a local playing field, then missing a penalty kick seems almost impossible. The goal looks gaping. Add a goalkeeper and things look different – but not that much different. Andrew Anthony in his book *On Penalties* calculates that a penalty taker has roughly 180 square feet to aim at, allowing for about 12 square feet of a mobile goalkeeper. This is a lot of space. He estimates that a firmly struck kick, at say 60 miles per hour, allows a goalkeeper roughly half a second to respond. In reality, keepers concentrate on defending the area close to the centre of the goal. If a player hits his kick reasonably well and within a yard of either post it is almost impossible to save. Anything high up and on target or well hit along the ground also has a good chance, because in the time available to react it is almost impossible for a keeper to get in position to make the save. Everything seems to be in favour of the penalty taker. Remember three things only: make your mind up; don't change your mind; make a clean contact. Easy. Except that not everyone has the sort of personality needed to take hold of this in-built advantage and actually make it work. And everything becomes much harder once you add a stadium to your open field, a hostile crowd, millions of television viewers, a long and lonely walk to the spot, some deep psychological warfare with the opposing goalkeeper – who has nothing to lose – and the realisation that the man in the bubble is actually you. The recognition that whatever you do over the next ten seconds actually matters and will do so for the rest of your life – for yourself, and for the people whom you most love and respect – will make most of us retch. Nothing can now be postponed.

Penalty shoot-outs were introduced in football in 1970 to deal with the choking international fixture list and the growing problem of defensive football in major international tournaments. The shoot-out, it was thought by the game's masters, could also act as an antidote to boring matches for

armchair viewers who actually preferred theatre or human drama to the deep complexity of sport. It was aimed at the sort of people who liked the idea of watching grown men get publicly humiliated: at all of us, in fact. But for the football professionals the shoot-out was first seen as a lottery, an unsatisfactory way to end any contest: not really a victory at all. Why not count corners or shots at goal? Not that those measures told you anything useful about the pattern of a football match. But players and coaches soon got over this principled objection to shoot-outs, and even playing for penalties would eventually no longer be seen as a negation of the sport. After all, penalty kicks could also test nerve, skill and invention, the staple diet of any football contest. In 1976 the Czech player Antonin Panenka tried to change the entire way in which the penalty shoot-out was conceived in football. In the European Championship final against West Germany in Belgrade, Panenka took the deciding kick, a huge moment for the Czechs. He neither tried to place the ball in the corner, nor ram it at the centre of the goal: instead, he nervelessly and gently chipped the ball into the middle of the net, as the German keeper Maier flung himself aside to try to make a save. You had to see this thing again and again to truly comprehend it. What an act of incredible chutzpah and poise by Panenka – and one of utter humiliation for the Germans. The Czech's skill and audacity seemed to say that even the crude banality of the penalty shoot-out could be converted, instead, into a thing of worth and beauty – and one of deception.

In 1984, and way before the England World Cup and Euro Championship penalty traumas that were to come, Liverpool Football Club were not serious at all about preparing for penalty kicks. The club's coaches disliked practising any dead ball situations and Liverpool had never been involved in a penalty shoot-out that really mattered. The Liverpool staff preferred to trust such matters to the intuitive decision-makers among the players the club had so

meticulously assembled. What's more, most Liverpool players were, frankly, hopeless at penalties. Rubbish. We might look inside the dressing-room for the reasons why. The team ethic at Anfield and the ruthless dressing-room exposure of individuals who stepped out of line in any way, made any odd remark, or even wore different clothes, was hardly aimed at supporting the kind of individualism demanded by this kind of test. Okay, the club's regular penalty taker, Phil Neal, and also striker Ian Rush were pretty reliable, and the captain Souness would step up, if required. After that, it was take your pick. Dalglish hated the exposure of the penalty spot, and those smooth and silky centre-backs, Lawrenson and Hansen, simply cowered and hid when the matter was even raised. The new Scot at Anfield, Stevie Nicol, might have a go: he was certainly young and recklessly brave enough. A fifth taker, the suicide spot? Whelan? Sammy Lee? Who? Alan Kennedy was willing, but he couldn't score from the spot in training to save his life: banjos and elephants. 'Let's just hope it doesn't come to this' seemed to be the feeling from Joe Fagan. Christ, it is Roma in Rome, after all. If UEFA have their way, Liverpool will probably get hammered anyway. But Liverpool had survived: now they – in particular a trembling left-back – would need to keep their nerve.

* * *

'I DECIDED TO OPEN UP MY BODY'

Everybody in the stadium seemed to be excited now – apart from the players. Every player, I can tell you, was nervous, petrified. Who goes first? Which side do we go to now? Had we tossed up to see where the kicks would be taken? We wouldn't have won the toss anyway, because we knew everything was planned to stop Liverpool winning. So the penalties were taken up at the Italian end. Joe and the staff felt there was no point arguing. Joe came round and said to

the Liverpool players: ‘No matter what happens now, you have all done Liverpool Football Club proud. And I think you’ll win this shoot-out thing and we’ll take that beautiful cup home, too.’ Joe then said to me: ‘How are you feeling?’ I said: ‘I feel all right.’ He said: ‘Good, because you’re taking a penalty.’ I said: ‘No problem.’ And he then just wandered off. Then I thought: *Why* did I say that? Why did I use those words? I probably thought it might not get that far down, that I wouldn’t have to take my penalty. Remember, I knew what we were like at penalties. But from then on my nerves really kicked in. I’d never been nervous before, until Joe said those words. Joe now had to go and work out exactly who was taking which penalty. Everybody seemed to be organised on this except me: I had no idea what was going on. All I could think about was: he’s picked me. Why has he picked me to take a penalty? But I was also focusing on the lads who were taking penalties before me. I knew Phil Neal was taking the first one, so I started encouraging Phil. But he was fine, he was super confident: he wasn’t worried about it at all.

The penalty takers were in the centre circle now and we knew that we were taking the first kick. Joe said: ‘Right, I’ve got the five players here.’ Stevie Nicol was now in for Craig Johnston, because Craig had been substituted. Before any more could be said, Stevie had just grabbed the ball from Phil Neal and was striding towards the goal. He had had a word with Phil and said: ‘Look, I’m confident: I’m all right, don’t worry about me. But I want to take the first penalty, get it over with.’ He was young, but he *was* confident. Joe said: ‘Aw, just let him get on with it.’ It was obviously a mistake, because Stevie blasted it miles over the top and we all sucked in our breath. When he walked back to join us, of course, we all told him: ‘Not a problem, mate, they’re bound to miss one.’ He was only a young kid. But we’re really thinking that these Italians are usually pretty good at penalties, they don’t normally miss them. Their fellah

scored, of course, and the Italians in the stadium were really giving it some now. It was completely nerve-racking. I'm standing there with my arms folded, away from the rest of the lads by this stage, wondering: who's next? Then I saw Phil Neal pick up the ball. Relief! But I'm starting to think that, now Stevie has missed, it *might* just come down to me. My nerves are terrible now: my hands had gone cold. My stomach was tightening. All I could think was: 'Don't let it come down to me.' I would honestly rather that they had won the fucking cup as long as I didn't have to take one. Phil scored for us and then Conti missed. Graeme scored and then they scored another. So we're still level. Then Rushie scored for us. I'm really shitting myself now. All the players who have taken one, they're all relaxed, no problem. You could tell, just by looking at the players' faces, who was still to take a penalty and who might have to volunteer. It was like a walk to the football gallows.

Bruce Grobbelaar had had a few words from Joe, who said: 'Listen, in some way, put one of their players off. I don't care what you do.' No problem for Bruce, who's as mad as a goat anyway. Bruce had a little bag in the back of his net and he went to the bag and started faffing around with it. And the ref says, 'Come on, come on!' Then Bruce started to mess with the cameramen behind the goal: he started biting the back of the net. They all started to have a go at him now. Then he did his famous wobbly knees at Graziani. And somehow Graziani, this fantastic Italian player, proven international, hits the top of the crossbar with his kick and over. Grobbelaar then goes completely berserk, obviously thinking: 'Yeeeeees, yes, we've done it. We've won the European Cup!' We just needed to score the last penalty: that's all. No one else could work it out: we were all in shock. And so I start stripping off my tracksuit top: I'd put it on because it was starting to get cold and I was freezing now. My nerves had been shivering me all over and I was on my own in the middle of the pitch. I was the only player left,

though Mark and Alan Hansen and the others were edging closer again because they knew they might have to take the next penalty if I missed. They all thought I *would* miss.

I've got a ball with me. I started talking to myself and thinking: where else would I rather be now? I could be a hero or the biggest villain that ever walked the earth. I didn't feel confident. I was trying to focus and it was difficult because my legs were like jelly. I thought about my family as I was walking up there, because I was really looking for help, some guidance, just over this next 30 seconds. I kept on trying to remember where the other penalties had gone and which way Tancredi had dived. It was exciting watching the other penalties, but I had no idea now where those kicks had gone, or where the referee had stood, anything. I knew that no goalkeeper had yet made a save. I passed Bruce, who had a little bit of a grin on his face. He said: 'Oh no, I didn't realise it would be fucking you to take this!' I said: 'Thanks a lot, Brucie.' At the edge of the 'D' I looked at the keeper and at all the cameramen behind, and I convinced myself that they all wanted me to miss. I put the ball on the spot. I remembered that Joe had said something to me about 'not being afraid to change my mind' because I'd been pinging all my penalties the same way at Melwood to my right – and I'd been missing them all. Joe said: 'Why don't you try to *place* it the other way?' There was loads of whistling and booing and camera flashes. I turned quickly to get my stride right, because I'd never practised this. I was also worried that if I went too slowly my legs might not even get me to the ball. So I ran quickly and at the last second I decided to open my body up and side-foot it with a bit of pace to my left, his right. It wasn't right in the corner, but it certainly wasn't in the middle of the goal. Thank God, he went the wrong way. Everything seemed to happen very slowly now, but only one thing mattered to me: HE WENT THE WRONG WAY AND IT WENT IN!

The whole thing was incredible now: I wheeled away to my right, back towards the lads. My arms and legs were going all ways, and I didn't know what to do with myself, because I didn't really know how to celebrate, or what to do. And as all the lads got to me, I just did a stupid little jump in the air, that's all I could do. They were all on top of me and the shock on the lads' faces said it all. They all thought I'd miss it: 'Did you mean to put it there?' I felt great now: I was a hero after all! At the presentation, just to touch the European Cup again after three years missing out on it was fantastic. Afterwards, we went up to a villa we had booked in the hills and stayed up dancing and drinking until 5.30 in the morning. Two hours' sleep and then a press call, and we were on the plane back home to Liverpool at 11 o'clock the following day. Knackered. Half the Liverpool supporters who went to that game were still in Rome when we were back on the streets of Liverpool, together with what seemed like one million Scousers and the European Cup! Full-backs don't get much credit in football, so this seemed like a dream: scoring winning goals in two European Cup finals. We'd all had a lot of ale, but the second we got off that bus we all soon woke up. Ronnie Moran made his little speech: 'Right: that counts for nothing now. Put them medals away, put them in the wardrobe, and bring them out when you're 65 and then you can appreciate them. See you in 26 days, pre-season training.' The highs and lows in football: a year later, Heysel happened. It is hard to believe that Rome 1984 happened to me: a snotty young kid growing up all those years ago in Shiney Row, Co. Durham.

Chapter 2

A MACKEM BECOMES A MAGPIE

GROWING UP GOOD

Gordon Kennedy from Fatfield in Northumberland and Sarah-Anne Donnelly from Hetton-le-Hole, Bob Paisley's home village in County Durham, were two young people who, like many in their generation, met at a celebration post-war dance. This one was held in Sunderland as the nation and the world were recovering, still giddy, from years of shortages and war. Gordon was a sportsman, a wiry footballer and a keen gardener. He was also a motorcycle enthusiast, his interest in bikes and machines a reminder of his recent war service. Sarah-Anne, four years older than Gordon, worked in a fish and chip shop in her home village and she also loved sport. She was athletic and fit, a pretty young school netball enthusiast. When casually kicking a football around with the boys in her neighbourhood she also noticed – as many of them had – that she had a wicked left foot. Gordon played football for the Royal Ordnance (RO) team at the local factory in Birtley, where he now worked. He was a tricky right winger, only 5 ft 7 in. tall but with some real pace: he was nothing special, but was an honest wide man and clever on the ball. Gordon Kennedy enjoyed his weekly football and his weekend pint in the local, but his job as a draughtsman for the RO, an educated escape from

the heavy mining work which dominated the communities from which they were both drawn, was his real passion. He lived for his job and, although the pay wasn't great, it was clean work with some status and it offered stable employment for life, if you wanted it. Gordon was conscious of not ending up as his father had, chained to the mines; he had ambitions to better himself and his family. His work was important, occasionally even exotic for these parts. He was reputed to have taken on some 'top secret' assignments, about which he seldom talked to friends or family. Rumours had it that he once worked on something to do with tank design for the Shah of Iran. This was a long way from the slog and grim dangers of coalmining. It was a way out.

When the couple finally married they moved into a small two-bedroom terrace house in Shiney Row, County Durham. Number 36 Eden Terrace was five miles from the Royal Ordnance factory where Gordon worked and the house backed onto the main street that ran through to nearby Philadelphia. Like all similar houses in the area, number 36 had an open range and also a cool larder for food store, where Sarah-Anne kept her jams and chutneys and Gordon his allotment vegetables. Twice a week – less often in winter – a tin bath was produced in front of the fire for bathing, which Sarah-Anne filled with water heated to boiling over the open range. Sarah-Anne worked hard in the home, cooking and cleaning, while Gordon was hot on DIY and making things for self-improvement. They made a good team: Gordon was serious, occasionally moody, good with his hands and gently ambitious and Sarah-Anne was a sweet-natured, kindly and enthusiastic young woman who was in charge of home and baking and conducting happy and neighbourly exchanges over the back fence. In her spare time – when was that? – she also liked to read. Gordon was reserved and had few close friends, but the couple enjoyed quiet socialising with their many relatives – Sarah-