

SPOILING MY PAPER

'I STILL HAVE A MEMORY OF WATCHING THE MATCH ON OUR BLACK-AND-WHITE TELEVISION SET AND SHUDDERING AS I WATCHED ALL THE BAD THINGS HAPPEN'

Once used to live in a small town near Leeds. The shops would close early on a Saturday so that the shop-keepers could go and see Leeds United play at home, and the shops would not open at all if Leeds were playing in a cup final at Wembley – which, in those days, seemed to happen every year. This was back in the days of the much-maligned Don Revie, when outsiders would claim that Leeds were a dirty team, and I would be forced to explain that they were simply combative, driven to react in the face of extreme provocation from much dirtier teams. By birth, I am a natural supporter of Glasgow Celtic, but, living near Leeds, I became a fan and can still recite the names of the players from the Glorious Seventies. I really should note important dates in a diary, but I think that it was around 1975 when Leeds last won their way through to the final of the European Cup. My memory is starting to fade but their opponents were probably Bayern Munich, and the venue for the final was certainly Paris. A shuttle service from Leeds/Bradford airport flew over most of West Yorkshire for the match. Our butcher's shop closed on the Monday, our greengrocer's shop on the Tuesday, and the others – by now cutting it fine for the kick-off – on the Wednesday. Leeds, we felt, should win the final comfortably with their combination of silky passing and combative tackling. Something went wrong that night. I still have a memory of watching the match on our black-and-white television set and shuddering as I watched all the bad things happen. The solid defence faltering. The smooth attack seizing up. Free-kicks bouncing off the Bayern cross-bar (or maybe, it was off the Juventus bar). Appeals for penalties turned down. In the end, Leeds lost and the Leeds supporters in the crowd went on a rampage, tearing up their plastic seats, and throwing them onto the pitch. With justification I thought. If my armchair had not been so heavy, I also would have thrown it at the television set.

Shortly after that match, the UK had a referendum on whether we should join (or maybe it was on whether, having joined, we should remain in) the Common Market. Still in a foul mood, I drove to the polling station, banging my hand against the steering-wheel in frustration. I took my ballot paper into the booth, and pulled

round the curtain securely. I wrote on the front "I HATE EUROPE FOR WHAT THEY DONE TO LEEDS", and then, running out of space, turned it over and wrote on the back "EUROPEAN REFEREES ARE BLIND. IT WAS DEFINITELY A PENALTY. YRS TRULY, A LEEDS FAN." I looked the scrutineer full in the eye – as I would do, walking with contraband through the Green Channel – and put my folded paper into the slot on ballot box. The enumerators would not have to worry about hanging chads, and I imagine would have classed my vote as a Spoiled Paper.

I am not proud of Spoiling my Paper, but in my defence I should stress that at the time I was a fervent Leeds fan, that it was definitely a penalty, and that I was not at the time a Corporate Treasurer. (The Association surely cannot expel me now if I was not a member then). This incident has come back to mind because (a) Leeds United, although lacking the silky skills of my heroes of the Seventies, scrambled though to the semi-final of the European Cup in 2001, (b) we are soon due to have another referendum on Europe.

Will I behave sensibly when we next vote on a referendum? Well, now that I am a retired member of the Association, I can be relied upon to use my vote rationally. I get a bit misty-eyed at the thought of losing the Queen's head from banknotes, and I obviously regret the threat to the employment of FX dealers who have productively spun their way over the years between sterling and lire and francs and deutschmarks and all the other vanishing currencies. I admit to being worried about the effect of a single interest rate policy; and yet, and yet, think of the stability in pricing and...I almost forgot...pricing transparency...and no more commission on currency exchange. The Small Fire Extinguisher Division of Widgets, I mused, might not have been such a financial shambles if the euro could have been used as our small fire extinguishers criss-crossed over national boundaries. I assure you that I will be sensible in my voting next time. Why, I was so excited by the prospect of the euro that I persuaded my techno-whizz son on a trip home to pluck from the internet the euro symbol for my PC so that it could sit beside the £ and \$ symbols. I even printed off and filed away his instructions, so that, if I hold down CNTRL and ALT simultaneously and press 4, the Å symbol appears..

No more football influences? It is true that the Swiss referee did not spot a blatant hand-ball when Valencia scored their first goal in the second leg of the semi-final against Leeds in 2001; but, now that I have moved to the Midlands, I am not such a keen Leeds fan, I suppose that I cannot blame the Common Market for a mistake of a referee from Switzerland. JF