

The Eightieth issue of a sort-of letter substitute, fanzine kinda thing. Maybe weekly, maybe not. Available from:

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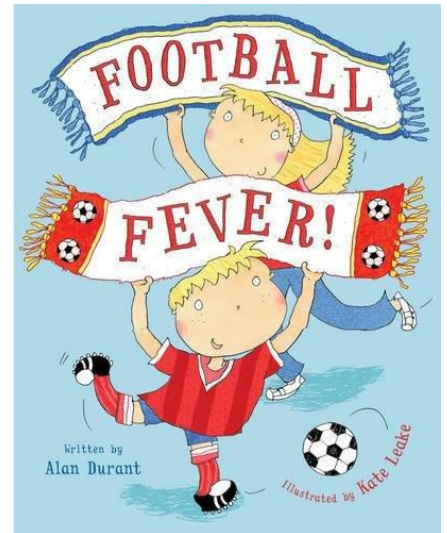
Available via the World Wide Web, or as an email attachment. I recommend the Portable Document Format (pdf) or, if you insist, a WORD or Rich Text Format (rtf) can also be emailed or posted. Get in touch and we'll sort something out. Please do email and respond – I will have a loccol issue. Another burst of fannish energy from Tommy, proof read by Eugene Doherty. Dated, already, 30/07/2020.

Football teams – they're not just for Christmas!

"Daddy I've chosen my football team!" said Maya, then aged 6, late in 2019. This is a big moment in any child's life and a proud moment in any dad's/parent's life too, so I approached it carefully.

"Yes? And who did you choose?" Measured, patient tones - taking this decision and its announcement seriously.

"Chelsea..." Not great, I thought, but it could have been worse. It could have been Manchester United. Or, God forbid, Spurs. "...because I like their blue tops..." she finished.



Well I've heard of worse reasons. Leslie, my wife, who is from Richmond, Virginia in the United States chose her team Newcastle for equally valid, although somewhat more obscure reasons. She didn't want to choose Man Utd - even she knew twenty odd years ago this would not be a good choice - "they're like the Dallas Cowboys of soccer, aren't they?" Yes, they are. She didn't want to choose any of the 'big' teams of that era either: Liverpool, Chelsea and definitely not Arsenal - she couldn't support my team as well. Newcastle was a good solid team, great support, wonderful history and a decent mid-table mediocrity.



"Besides," she said, "their tops remind me of umpires..."

Now you may have already picked up I'm a Gooner - have been all my life, though I initially toyed with other teams - Wolves obviously because they're just cool. I mean, wolves? Totally cool, right? Also, Derby County - not because of their logo a ram - but just because I had all the team stickers in my Panini sticker book when I was young. But, after not too long, I chose Arsenal.

Again, the rationale isn't entirely obvious. Sure, my dad was Arsenal fan, as was his father as far as I can tell. Legend has it he was a navy working in North London and got dragged into the Arsenal supporters' club because of the cheap drink. As reasons go, that's a fairly good one. But I'm the youngest in my family and my elder brother is a Liverpool fan - dyed in the red wool and all. Now I've nothing against Liverpool, great club, fantastic fans and a lot of amazing achievements down through the years, as well as great tragedy. The Hillsborough disaster in 1989 I saw live on the TV and remember the initial disgust at the behaviour of the fans, which quickly turned into horror at the events unfolding before me. Unlike the Sun I bitterly regret my first reactions - I didn't print them all over the 'newspaper' the following days.

So I'm okay with Liverpool and my elder brother and I have had our banter back and forth over the years. Again 1989 sticks out - Arsenal needed to beat Liverpool by two clear goals to win the league that year and it all came down to Michael Thomas in the 92nd minute with a last gasp goal. I still shiver when I think of that. Certainly Liverpool have given us a run for our money over the years, though details (even with Google) elude me...

So, is it just tribal nonsense? A sense of belonging in the playground at school? Not even too sure if it is just a UK thing, when it comes to football. I could spend ages googling and looking up the psychology of the whole thing - but I think that would spoil it. Certainly, for my family:

"Is there football on tonight, daddy?" asked Maya recently.

"Yes, there is a Serie A match tonight, as the premier league is finished. Though we don't have Sky Sports so can't watch it..."

"Is Chelsea playing?" she replied. I thought of explaining different football leagues, in different countries but gave up - it is enough she knows who she supports right now.

"No, they play Arsenal next weekend." Maya shrieked with excitement! Abigail casually glanced up from her book to see what was going on, realised it was sports stuff, and focussed back again on the adventures of Skulduggery Pleasant.

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Many thanks for the replies on the last issue - I will have a lettercol in a forthcoming release.