

Dedication

For my wife, Jennifer, who is my soulmate and best friend.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to my wife, Jennifer, for her unwavering patience, and to my PA, Chris, for his constant, practical help.

I'm also extremely grateful to John Gibson, who has reported on Newcastle United for the Evening Chronicle for 60 years, for writing the Foreword for this book.

I'd also like to say a massive thank you to a few special friends for their support along the way. Especially: Ian Carter, Roger Martin, Mark Forster, Jarrett Rivers, Kevan Smith, Alan Walsh, Stephen Lowson and John Gray.

Foreword

By

John Gibson

Newcastle United's history has always been painted in vivid colours upon a sweeping canvas. It is a club which veers from drama and delight to doom and gloom - often in the very same season.

There is inevitably a story to tell because United don't do dull. As a cradle-to-grave fan myself who has been privileged to report on a historic club for the last 60 years, from 1966, when I returned from Fleet Street to take on my job of a lifetime, I have ridden the bucking bronco.

That Paul Hodgson should decide to devote his time and his love to recalling the last 45 years of our club is quite a task with many challenges, but we have experienced so much since the 1980s for him to tackle with the relish only Geordies can bring to the party.

Not a bad place to start, by the way, given that Kevin Keegan first walked amongst us, arriving in a blaze of publicity to waken up a club dormant and listing in the old Second Division. He influenced the likes of Peter Beardsley, Chris Waddle, and Paul Gascoigne, three Geordies bound for global recognition but sold because the colour of money meant more in the club's eyes than an ambition to hold on to three of their own. Within no space of time following the final bailout, United were relegated. What a surprise!

However, before they departed, a front line of Waddle, Keegan and Beardsley spectacularly won promotion to the top flight.

What was to follow in the next decade, after the takeover by John Hall's Magpie Group - a bloody two-year battle - was the return of KK and the birth of the Entertainers. Paul highlights the stars of the era as a silver thread that runs through our history and, boy, did United in the Nineties give us a barrow load of memories ...wonderful signings like Beardsley, back again, along with David Ginola, Andy Cole, Rob Lee, Philippe Albert and Les Ferdinand all the way up to a world record fee of £15m paid for Alan Shearer who was to go on and smash 'Wor Jackie's' goalscoring record.

Of course, being Newcastle United, there were downs as well as ups. We have lived on a snakes-and-ladders board all our lives. We went through big-name managers like Kenny Dalglish, Ruud Gullit and Graeme Souness without significant input, found a gem in Bobby Robson, but then had to endure the Mike Ashley years before emerging into the sunshine, winning the Carabao Cup and playing in two Champions League campaigns.

Hopefully, having whetted your appetite a tad, I can leave you in the capable hands of Paul Hodgson to guide you through 45 years as colourful as a kaleidoscope. Enjoy as I did.

All the best.

John Gibson

Sports Journalist – Evening Chronicle

Introduction

I'm sure people's memories as Newcastle United fans are filled with just as much drama and rollercoaster moments – your club more than most – and that are what I've tried to capture in this book, as well as the history of the club from the 1980s to 2025.

While most of the players you would expect to find in a collection such as this are indeed here, there are a few others that might evoke some raised eyebrows and a couple that might even raise the question, 'Why?' Well, there's a reason behind each one. Some may be more obvious than others.

In addition, reading the happenings from each decade will no doubt evoke some memories, some good, some bad, just like most football clubs up and down the country.

I hope you enjoy reading about a few players who might otherwise have been forgotten and confined to a stat in a history book.

I reckon the next few years will probably yield another 20 or so new lads who could live happily in this book. However, here are fifty that should certainly stick in my memory banks for one reason or another.

Enjoy the book, and thank you for purchasing it.

Paul Hodgson

Chapter One

A Brief History of the 1980s

Before the ‘Entertainers’ era of the 1990s, Newcastle United lived through a turbulent decade that tested every inch of the club’s spirit.

These ten years were a time of one step forward and two steps back — moments of brilliance followed by a letdown, legends born and quickly sold. It was the decade that shaped Newcastle United’s identity: passionate, unpredictable, and forever on the brink of something special.

The 1980s were a rollercoaster for Newcastle United — a decade of dizzying highs, crushing lows, and everything in between.

After slipping out of the First Division in the late 1970s, the Magpies struggled to find their footing.

However, in 1982, salvation arrived in the form of Kevin Keegan, the former England captain whose signing electrified Tyneside. Keegan didn’t just bring goals — he brought belief.

By the 1983/84 season, Newcastle United were flying again. Keegan led the charge to a third-place finish in the Second Division, sealing automatic promotion back to the top flight.

For the first time in years, St. James’ Park buzzed with optimism.

That era also saw the rise of three future icons: Peter Beardsley, Chris Waddle, and Paul Gascoigne — a golden Geordie trio who would light up English football throughout the decade.

But as quickly as the good times rolled in, trouble wasn't far behind.

Manager Arthur Cox departed after falling out with the board, frustrated by their refusal to invest in the squad.

His replacement, Jack Charlton, couldn't maintain momentum. Newcastle United limped to 14th, and Waddle was sold to Tottenham Hotspur — the first of several painful departures that would define the decade.

Even so, there were flashes of brilliance. Beardsley became the club's talisman, finishing as top scorer and firing the Magpies to 11th place. Gascoigne, still a teenager, began to show the swagger that would make him a superstar.

Unfortunately, Newcastle United couldn't hold on to their homegrown heroes. Beardsley was snapped up by Liverpool in 1987; Gascoigne followed him out the door a year later, joining Spurs. With stars gone and chaos in the boardroom, the club's momentum crumbled.

By 1988/89, Newcastle United were bottom of the First Division. Relegation felt like the end of an era — and in many ways, it was. But as history would prove, that fall would set the scene for one of the greatest resurgences the club would ever see.

Chapter Two

Ten Memorable Players from the 1980s

Peter Beardsley

As a youth player, Beardsley played for Wallsend Boys Club in North Tyneside before joining Newcastle United.

In 1977, he joined fellow former Wallsend Boys Club player Steve Bruce for a trial with Third Division club Gillingham.

Although The Gills signed Bruce as an apprentice, they rejected Beardsley. He also had unsuccessful trials with Burnley and Cambridge United.

Beardsley eventually began his professional career with Carlisle United in 1978. He managed 22 goals in 104 league games, helping them win promotion to the Second Division at the end of the 1981/82 season

Between 1981 and 1983, he played three seasons in the North American Soccer League for the Canadian club Vancouver Whitecaps.

He then joined Manchester United, though his time there was unsuccessful, making only one appearance in a League Cup tie against AFC Bournemouth and failing to break into the first team.

Eventually, in September 1983, he was re-signed by Newcastle United for £150,000.

He made his debut for the Magpies a day later in the 1–1 draw with Barnsley at Oakwell. He was an instant hit with the Newcastle United supporters, scoring and setting up spectacular goals.

Peter went on to celebrate promotion with his teammates, who Kevin Keegan captained in his final season as a player. They finished in the final promotion spot behind winners Chelsea and runners-up Sheffield Wednesday. He scored 20 league goals that season and formed an exciting strike partnership with former England striker Keegan, who had also won major honours with Liverpool. Beardsley scored his first goal for the Magpies on 19 October 1983 in their 2–0 victory over Cardiff City at Ninian Park. His first goals at St James' Park came in Newcastle United's next fixture, against Manchester City. United beat City 5–0, and Beardsley scored his first-ever hat-trick.

In his first season in the First Division, Beardsley scored 17 goals in 38 league games as Newcastle United finished in 14th position. These included a hat-trick on New Year's Day in a 3–1 home win over local rivals Sunderland, who finished the season in the relegation places.

During the following campaign, he played in all of Newcastle United's 42 league matches, scoring 19 goals.

Interestingly, in one fixture against West Ham United, he ended the game as a stand-in goalkeeper. The game ended in an 8–1 defeat for Newcastle United, with Beardsley conceding the last three goals.

After returning from the 1986 FIFA World Cup, Beardsley helped a struggling Newcastle United squad to avoid relegation in the 1986/87 season, eventually finishing 17th.

He scored just five goals in 36 appearances that season, winning a further six caps for his country, before Liverpool manager Kenny Dalglish made a national record £1,900,000 offer to Newcastle United for Beardsley's services. Manager Willie McFaul accepted the offer, and Beardsley was on his way to Merseyside after four seasons on Tyneside, which had brought a total of 61 goals (all in the league), his transfer was completed on 14 July 1987.

Twelve years later, Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson revealed in his autobiography that he had made a £2,000,000 bid for Beardsley.

Ian McFaul had rejected the offer and told him that he wouldn't sell the player even if Ferguson offered £3,000,000.

Beardsley joined Liverpool at the same time as John Barnes, the Watford winger. They were added to John Aldridge, who had signed during the previous campaign, with the three playing against Arsenal on Beardsley's debut at Highbury on the opening day of the 1987/88 season, 15 August 1987. Aldridge scored after just nine minutes, Liverpool went on to win 2–1, and this shaped the rest of the season for the Reds. The new-look striker partnership of Beardsley and Aldridge took over from the long-standing partnership of Dalglish and Ian Rush, arguably the most successful in English football during the 1980s. Rush had departed for Serie A club Juventus.

At the same time, player-manager Dalglish had decided to make only occasional first-team appearances after the 1986/87 season, finally retiring as a player in August 1990.

Peter's first goal for his new club came on 29 August 1987 in the 4–1 victory over Coventry City at Highfield Road, with Beardsley scoring in the 83rd minute. He helped Liverpool to a record-equaling 29-match unbeaten start to the league as Liverpool convincingly strolled to the League title with just two defeats to their name.

However, there was disappointment at the end when Wimbledon denied them the 'double' with a shock 1–0 win in the 1988 FA Cup final, a game in which Beardsley found the net, only for it to be ruled out by the referee, who awarded Liverpool a free-kick for an earlier foul instead of allowing play to continue. Wimbledon scored the only goal of the game from a looping header by Lawrie Sanchez. Aldridge missed a penalty for Liverpool in the second half. The striker scored 15 league goals in his first season for Liverpool, level with John Barnes as the club's second highest scorer, behind Aldridge.

Ian Rush rejoined the club in the 1988 close season, and Liverpool returned to Wembley to win the FA Cup the following year, but lost

their League championship on virtually the last kick of the last game of the season against Arsenal.

Although Rush missed 14 games due to injury, when all three of Liverpool's strikers were fit, Dalglish played with a 4–3–3 formation that allowed Beardsley, Aldridge and Rush to play alongside each other when possible. Beardsley scored 11 league goals that season.

In April 1989, after the Hillsborough disaster claimed the lives of 97 Liverpool fans, Beardsley was among many Liverpool stars left distraught by the tragedy, attending several funerals and visiting the injured in hospital. He was part of the team that won the FA Cup that season, beating neighbours Everton 3–2 at Wembley Stadium.

With Aldridge's departure a few weeks into the 1989/90 season, Dalglish reverted to a 4–4–2 formation, with Beardsley and Rush as his main strikers. Beardsley scored 10 goals in 29 games. Liverpool won the championship again that season, but the arrival of Israeli international striker Ronny Rosenthal saw his first-team opportunities limited in the title run-in, in which Liverpool overcame a strong challenge by Aston Villa to finish champions by a nine-point margin.

Despite UEFA lifting the ban on English clubs in European competitions for the 1990/91 season, Liverpool were unable to compete in the European Cup, as (being the team present at the Heysel disaster that had sparked the ban in 1985) they had to serve an extra year of the ban before being allowed to play in European competitions again.

Beardsley suffered another blow to his first-team chances in January 1991 when Kenny Dalglish signed David Speedie. Dalglish stepped down the following month and was replaced a few weeks later by former Liverpool player Graeme Souness, after Ronnie Moran spent two months in charge on an interim basis. Beardsley managed 27 games that campaign and scored 11 goals – three of them in a 4–0 league win over Manchester United on 16 September 1990, and a further two in the Merseyside derby against Everton a week later.

Peter's final league goal for the Reds came on 17 November 1990, when he scored the only goal in a 1–0 win at Coventry City. By this

relatively early stage of the season, he had scored an impressive 11 times in the league. Still, a failure to add any more goals over the Christmas period may have played a part in Dalglish's decision to sign another striker in the new year. His final competitive goals for Liverpool came in a dramatic fifth-round FA Cup first replay against Everton at Goodison Park on 20 February 1991, which ended in a 4–4 draw and was the club's last game before the sudden resignation of manager Dalglish.

Liverpool were top of the league at this stage, but in the new year, they were overhauled by Arsenal, and the title went to Highbury at the end of the season. With the arrival of Dean Saunders for a national record fee of £2,900,000 after the end of the season, Beardsley's days at Anfield were looking even more numbered, despite the sale of Speedie.

During Beardsley's Anfield career, he played in 175 matches and scored 59 goals, winning two league titles and an FA Cup. Still, it was his vision, guile and all-action style of play that endeared him to the Anfield faithful, so much so that he was voted in 19th position in the 2006 poll 100 Players Who Shook The Kop, conducted by the Liverpool Football Club website; over 110,000 supporters worldwide voted for their 10 favourite players of all time.

Liverpool's derby rivals, Everton, secured 30-year-old Beardsley's signature when he joined them on 5 August 1991 for a fee of £1,000,000. He made his debut on 17 August in a 2–1 defeat to Nottingham Forest at the City Ground. Beardsley scored 25 goals in 81 appearances for the blue half of Merseyside.

However, Everton did not achieve anything greater than a mid-table finish in the league during his time there and failed to make an impact in the cup competitions.

While at Everton, he, along with David Johnson, became one of only two players to score for both sides in Merseyside derbies. He finished as the club's top scorer by the end of his first season at Goodison Park and again showed his dynamic quality during his

second season, but off the field, Everton were suffering financial difficulties.

On 16 July 1993, Beardsley rejoined Newcastle United for £1,500,000, where his old teammate and strike partner Kevin Keegan was now manager. Newcastle United had just won promotion to the Premier League as First Division champions, and in 1993/94 they finished third and qualified for the UEFA Cup, with Beardsley scoring 25 goals and his strike partner Andy Cole setting a club record with 41 goals in all competitions. He played for a further four years at the club, almost captaining them to the Premier League title in 1996, but Manchester United pipped them to the title. They finished as runners-up again the following year.

However, 1996/97 was a trying season for the club, as they failed to set the pace at the top of the table as they had the previous season. By halfway through the season, Keegan had stunned the club with his resignation, with Kenny Dalglish then succeeding him.

During his second spell at St James' Park, he racked up 157 appearances and scored 56 goals, bringing his overall total after two spells with the club to 321 appearances and 117 goals. This equates to a goal every 2.74 matches, a decent ratio for a player who was seen by many as a provider rather than a goal-scorer, particularly in the 1996/97 season, when he was switched to midfield following Alan Shearer's arrival. It is this period of his career that Beardsley regards as the time when he peaked.

Beardsley left Newcastle United for the second time on 18 August 1997 for £450,000, joining Bolton Wanderers, where he made 21 appearances but was unable to save them from relegation from the Premier League just one season after their promotion. He then went on loan to Manchester City, where he played six times in the First Division. This loan spell made Beardsley the only player to have played for both top-flight teams in Liverpool and Manchester.

He then moved to Fulham, managed by his former manager Keegan, where he made 28 appearances across two loan spells and eventually signed for them permanently. He then joined Hartlepool

United on a free transfer and played 22 times in the Third Division to secure their Football League status.

Beardsley finally ended his career at the age of 38 when he played twice for the National Soccer League club Melbourne Knights.

In a professional career spanning some 20 years, he managed 659 league games and 210 goals, and 799 games and 238 goals in all competitions. He had won three major trophies (all with Liverpool) and was capped 59 times by England, scoring nine goals. He had also played in two promotion-winning teams earlier in his career, although he had been sold by Carlisle United just before they sealed promotion in 1982.

During the 2012/13 season, Beardsley played in a friendly match for Cambridge United against the Newcastle United reserve squad to celebrate the club's 100th anniversary.

After reaching the First Division with Newcastle United, Beardsley became a regular in the England side in the second half of the 1980s, and teamed up with striker Gary Lineker, who described Beardsley as 'The best partner I could ever have'.

On 29 January 1986, he made his debut for his country, coming on as a substitute for Lineker in the 4–0 friendly victory over Egypt in Cairo. His first goal came in his fourth appearance, on 17 May 1986, in the 3–0 friendly win over Mexico in Los Angeles, as England prepared for the forthcoming World Cup in Mexico. England scored seven goals in the tournament, of which Lineker scored six (winning the Golden Boot for doing so); the other goal came from Beardsley in a 3–0 victory over Paraguay in the second round. England had failed to score a goal in the first two matches of the finals, but in the third match – Beardsley's first start in the tournament – they beat Poland 3–0. He contributed in that match with a spectacular cross to Steve Hodge, which allowed Hodge to create England's second goal for Lineker.

The next game was the famous Argentina V England match, in which Diego Maradona scored twice in a 2–1 victory that saw England eliminated from the tournament. Beardsley played the whole

game and was one of the five players passed by Maradona for the 'Goal of the Century'.

He maintained his place in the England team and featured in both Euro '88 and the 1990 World Cup. Peter was named England captain on 17 February 1988, after a 0–0 draw with Israel in a friendly.

The striker was dropped by England manager Graham Taylor after the end of 1990, around the same time he lost his regular place in the Liverpool line-up, and, controversially, continued to be overlooked by him despite England's disappointing performance at Euro 92 as well as their unsuccessful attempt to qualify for the 1994 World Cup. He, meanwhile, was performing very well for his new club, Everton, having signed for them in August 1991, although Everton's form was far from impressive.

During his second spell at Newcastle United, Beardsley was recalled to the England team by new manager Terry Venables in early 1994 after an absence of three years, and ultimately ended his international career while still at Newcastle United in 1996, when he was one of the three players dropped from the provisional squad of 25 for the final squad of 22 for Euro 96, along with Dennis Wise and Jason Wilcox, after gaining 59 caps and scoring nine goals.

Peter once scored four goals for England against Aylesbury United. These did not count towards his international tally, however, as this was not an official international match. Interestingly, Aylesbury United became the only non-League side to face the whole England team, hosting the national side in a warm-up match in 1988 in preparation for the European Championships. England won the game 7–0.

Beardsley joined the coaching staff at Newcastle United after his playing career was over.

In early 1999, He also served as assistant manager to Howard Wilkinson during his first caretaker period as England manager, between the dismissal of Glenn Hoddle and the appointment of Kevin Keegan. England faced – and lost to – world champions France in a friendly at Wembley.

In 2003, Beardsley was the subject of a Premier League inquiry, after it was claimed that he had bullied two Newcastle United youth players. He was cleared of the charges.

Bullying allegations were again raised against Beardsley in January 2018.

He left Newcastle United in 2006, when Glenn Roeder took over as the club's permanent manager. He believed Newcastle United should go in a different direction. Beardsley then worked in a media role at the club. In 2007, Howard Kendall, his former boss at Everton, stated he was interested in taking over as manager of the Republic of Ireland national team, with Beardsley as his assistant manager. Beardsley was also linked with a return to Newcastle United in January 2008, when Keegan returned as manager for a second spell.

In March 2009, the former striker was re-appointed as an academy coach at Newcastle United, working primarily with young strikers. On 27 July 2010, he was appointed as reserve team manager, with Steve Stone as his assistant manager.

On 6 December, following Chris Hughton's dismissal, Beardsley was placed in temporary charge of the team before Alan Pardew was brought in as Hughton's replacement.

In January 2018, Beardsley was placed on leave by Newcastle United following allegations of racism. In March 2019, they confirmed he had left the club, and the Football Association later confirmed it was investigating him. He was subsequently charged with three counts of using racist language against players.

In September 2019, he was suspended from all football-related activity for 32 weeks after being found guilty by the FA of making racist comments to players. Beardsley said he was 'surprised and disappointed' at being found guilty. The FA panel said: 'Even if he did not intend to do so, he plainly did cause offence'. However, the panel said it did not believe Beardsley was racist, stating, 'We are satisfied that Mr Beardsley is not a racist in the sense of being ill-disposed to persons on grounds of their race or ethnicity'.

Peter should be remembered as a brilliant forward, one that I (Paul Hodgson) saw play many times.

Peter Beardsley's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring three goals against Manchester City in October 1983 in a 5-0 win at St James' Park

Paul Gascoigne

Gascoigne was born in Gateshead, County Durham.

He attended Breckenbeds Junior High School, then the Heathfield Senior High School, both in the Low Fell area of Gateshead. He was noticed by football scouts while playing for Gateshead Boys, though he failed to impress in a trial at Ipswich Town.

Further trials at Middlesbrough and Southampton also proved unsuccessful before the team he supported, Newcastle United, signed him as a schoolboy in 1980.

Former Ipswich and Newcastle United scout Charlie Woods has claimed Ipswich were keen to sign Gascoigne, but once Newcastle United got wind of it, they quickly signed the youngster. Gascoigne frequently got into trouble with his friend, Jimmy 'Five Bellies' Gardner. The pair were taken to court and fined over a hit-and-run incident. Newcastle United chairman Stan Seymour Jr. described Gascoigne as 'George Best without brains'.

He was usually overweight during his time in the Newcastle United youth side. Jack Charlton, the Newcastle United manager, claimed Gascoigne was 'a bit chubby' and looked anything but a footballer. Paul ate Mars bars and other junk food. Charlton was not overly concerned, as he believed this weight would give Gascoigne extra strength on the football pitch and would not slow him down. He also noted that Gascoigne showed early signs of being gaffe-prone and a prankster.

Eventually, the manager did warn the midfielder about his junk-food diet and gave him two weeks to lose the extra weight. Paul then trained for ten days, wrapped in a black bag.

Paul captained Newcastle United's youth team to the FA Youth Cup in the 1984/85 season and scored twice in the 4–1 victory over Watford in the final at Vicarage Road. In the first leg of the final, they drew 0–0. Teammate Joe Allon stated that Newcastle United were unusually poor in the first leg, but Gascoigne was instrumental in their victory in the return game.

After the match, Jack Charlton told Gascoigne he would be in the first team the next day against Norwich City. He did travel to Norwich, though Charlton chose not to pick him.

Gascoigne made his first-team debut as a substitute for George Reilly in a 1–0 win over Queens Park Rangers on 13 April 1985 at St James' Park. Charlton later noted that Gascoigne's first-team appearances under him were too brief to suggest he was more than a useful talent. At the age of 18, Gascoigne signed a two-year £120 a week contract at Newcastle United, with the club also having a further two-year option clause.

By noting Gascoigne's generous personality, Charlton arranged for around half of Gascoigne's wage to be paid into a bank account for him to collect in a lump sum at the end of his first contract.

Willie McFaul took over as manager for the 1985/86 season and named Gascoigne in his starting lineup from the opening game of the campaign, replacing Chris Waddle, who had been sold to Tottenham Hotspur in the summer.

He scored his first goal at home against Oxford United in a 3–0 victory on 21 September 1985 and went on to claim a further eight goals in the 1985/86 campaign. Newcastle United finished 11th in the First Division that season, and at the end of it, Gascoigne was featured on the front cover of the Rothmans Football Yearbook. He scored five goals in 24 league games in the 1986/87 season, as the 'Magpies' slipped to 17th place, just three points above the relegation play-offs.

In 1988, on the BBC programme Football Focus, Newcastle United's then all-time top scorer, Jackie Milburn, stated that Paul was 'the best player in the world'. In a 0–0 draw with Wimbledon at Plough Lane in February 1988, hard-man Vinnie Jones singled him out for attention. In an incident that would become a much-publicised photograph, Jones grabbed him by the genitals as Gascoigne screamed in agony.

He was named the PFA Young Player of the Year and listed on the PFA Team of the Year in the 1987/88 season. However, his time at Newcastle United coincided with unrest and instability at the club, leaving it unable to retain such a talented young player. Paul promised Alex Ferguson that he would sign for Manchester United. Ferguson duly went on holiday to Malta, expecting to sign the player.

On his holiday, he learned that Gascoigne had signed for Tottenham Hotspur for a record British fee of £2,200,000.

In his 1999 autobiography, Ferguson claimed that Gascoigne was wooed into signing for Spurs after they bought a house for his impoverished family. Gascoigne, in his autobiography, stated that after he received his £100,000 signing-on fee, he spent £70,000 on property for his mother and father.

In his first season at White Hart Lane, Gascoigne helped Terry Venables's Tottenham Hotspur to sixth in the First Division, scoring seven goals in 37 appearances. They rose to third place in 1989/90, but were still 16 points behind champions Liverpool. On 26 September, he scored four goals in a 5–0 victory against Hartlepool United in the second round of the 1990/91 Football League Cup.

Paul was named BBC Sports Personality of the Year in 1990, and, on accepting the award, said, 'I haven't won anything in the game as yet'. But the World Cup did help to put England on the map. He was also named as the club's Player of the Year.

Gascoigne was named on the PFA Team of the Year in the 1990/91 season as Tottenham Hotspur reached the FA Cup Final, with victories over Blackpool, Oxford United, Portsmouth, Notts County, and North London derby rivals Arsenal. He scored the opening goal of the 3–1

win over Arsenal at Wembley with a free-kick, one of six goals he scored in the competition.

At this time, Spurs were also under significant financial strain with a massive £10,000,000 debt. With Spurs tied to enormous debt, they hired a financial advisor, Nat Solomon. Solomon strongly argued for selling Gascoigne to Lazio to ward off the vultures.

Going into the final against Nottingham Forest, Spurs had readily accepted an offer from Lazio, and Gascoigne had already agreed to the playing terms to join the Italian club. The deal would be worth £8,500,000 to Tottenham Hotspur.

His final was to end in injury; however, 15 minutes into the game, he committed a dangerous knee-high foul on Gary Charles and ruptured his own cruciate ligaments in his right knee. England teammate Stuart Pearce scored from the resultant free-kick, and Gascoigne subsequently collapsed after the kick-off, forcing him to leave the match on a stretcher. Tottenham Hotspur went on to win the Cup in extra time.

Paul eventually joined Lazio for a fee of £5,500,000; he received a huge signing-on fee and signed a contract worth £22,000 a week.

He made his Serie A debut on 27 September 1992 against Genoa, which was televised in both Britain and Italy. He failed to fully settle in Italy and was beset by negative media attention, which was not helped by numerous occasions when he punched reporters and by his belching into a microphone on live television. He was well received by the club's fans, but not by the club's owner Sergio Cragnotti, who resented him after Gascoigne greeted him by saying, 'Tua figlia, grandi tette' (roughly translated as, 'Your daughter, big tits'). His form was inconsistent in his first season at the Stadio Olimpico as he had previously spent a year out injured.

Still, he endeared himself to Eagles fans when he scored in the 89th minute to equalise during the Rome derby against AS Roma. He broke his cheekbone whilst on international duty in April 1993 and had to play the remaining games of the season while wearing a mask. Lazio ended the campaign in fifth place, which was considered a success as

it meant qualification for European competition for the first time in 16 years.

Gascoigne fell badly out of shape before the 1993/94 season and was told by manager Dino Zoff to lose 13kg by the start of the campaign, or he would lose his first-team place. Gascoigne went on an extreme weight-loss diet and shed excess weight.

In one spell, out-injured Zoff told Gascoigne to go on holiday to recuperate. He explained to his manager that he did not want to go on holiday. To the surprise of the Lazio fitness staff, Paul arrived back from his holiday overweight. When he spoke to the coach about his weight, Gascoigne told Zoff, 'I told you not to send me on holiday, Signor Zoff!'

In 1994, Zdeněk Zeman arrived from Foggia to coach Lazio and Gascoigne. Zeman was a coach known for using his whistle during training sessions.

During one such session, Zeman misplaced his whistle and found it when he saw a goose at the Lazio training ground wearing it. Pierluigi Casiraghi later reasoned that Gascoigne was the culprit who placed Zeman's whistle on the bird.

Later that year, he broke his leg in training whilst attempting to tackle Alessandro Nesta.

After his recovery, he was disgruntled with Zeman's strict fitness approach, and both the club and the player decided to part ways at the end of the 1994/95 season.

The midfielder signed for Rangers in July 1995 for a club-record fee of £4,300,000 on a weekly wage of £15,000.

He made an immediate impact: in the fifth league game of the 1995/96 season, the Old Firm fixture at Celtic Park, he scored a goal after running almost the full length of the pitch to get on the end of a pass in a breakaway; it proved vital as this was the only match lost by title rivals Celtic during the campaign.

On 30 December, Gascoigne was booked by referee Dougie Smith after picking up his yellow card from the ground and jokingly 'booking' the referee during a match against Hibernian.

Rangers went on to win the Scottish Premier Division, clinching the title in the penultimate game of the season against Aberdeen at Ibrox Stadium; Gascoigne scored a hat-trick, including two solo efforts. They won the double, having also won the Scottish Cup by knocking out Celtic before beating Heart of Midlothian 5–1 in the final at Hampden Park. He scored 19 goals in 42 appearances in all competitions and was named as both PFA Scotland Player of the Year and SFWA Footballer of the Year.

Rangers won the league title again in 1996/97, their ninth in succession. Gascoigne claimed hat-tricks against Kilmarnock and Motherwell and ended the campaign with 17 goals in 34 games. However, during this season, manager Walter Smith and assistant Archie Knox became increasingly concerned over Gascoigne's reliance on alcohol. 'The Gers' won another double by also winning the Scottish League Cup, beating Hearts 4–3 in the final at Celtic Park, with Gascoigne scoring twice and Ally McCoist claiming the other two goals.

In 1997, young Italian player Gennaro Gattuso joined Rangers. He was welcomed to Ibrox by Gascoigne, who defecated in Gattuso's sock as a prank. Paul would also buy Gattuso his club suits under the pretence that Rangers were paying for them; Gattuso found out many months later, from other sources, that Gascoigne had secretly paid the bill.

In November 1997, Paul received a five-match ban after being sent off for violent conduct during the Old Firm derby following an incident with Celtic midfielder Morten Wieghorst.

In January 1998, he courted serious controversy when he mimed playing a flute (symbolic of the flute-playing of Orange Order marchers) while warming up as a substitute during an Old Firm match at Celtic Park.

Having already made the same gesture as a goal celebration shortly after joining the club in 1995, at the time claiming to be ignorant of its meaning, his actions infuriated Celtic fans who had been taunting him. Rangers fined Gascoigne £20,000 after the incident. He also received a death threat from an IRA member.

The 1997/98 season was less successful. Gascoigne scored just three goals in 28 games and was sold on while Rangers failed to win any trophies after he had departed, losing the league title to Celtic and the Scottish Cup final to Hearts.

Gascoigne left Scotland to join Middlesbrough for almost £3,500,000 in March 1998, where former England teammate Bryan Robson was manager.

His first match was the 1998 Football League Cup Final defeat to Chelsea at Wembley, where he came on as a substitute. He played seven games in the First Division, helping the North-East based club into the Premier League as runners-up to Nottingham Forest at the end of the 1997/98 season.

Paul started the following season in good form and helped Middlesbrough into fourth place by Christmas. They ended the season in ninth place, and, having scored three goals in 26 top-flight games, Gascoigne was linked with a recall to the England squad, now managed by former teammate Kevin Keegan and lacking a creative presence in midfield.

Gascoigne signed a two-year contract with Everton, managed by former Rangers boss Walter Smith, after joining on a free transfer in July 2000.

He started the 2000/01 season well despite not playing every game due to his lack of fitness, but a series of niggling injuries and his ongoing depression took him out of the first team picture by Christmas.

After spending time at an alcohol rehabilitation clinic in Arizona, Gascoigne was fit enough to play for the Toffees in the 2001/02

season, and he scored his first goal for the club – and last in English football – away to Bolton Wanderers on 3 November.

The midfielder then suffered a hernia injury, keeping him out of action for three months. Walter Smith left Goodison Park in March, and Gascoigne left the club shortly after Smith's successor, David Moyes, took charge.

George Reynolds attempted to bring Gascoigne to Darlington, then playing in the Third Division, but talks broke down, and Gascoigne finished the 2001/02 season with Stan Ternent's Burnley. Paul made six First Division appearances for Burnley. The club narrowly missed out on the play-offs, and he left Turf Moor after two months.

Apart from a brief spell at Boston United, where he was player-coach, that spell ended his playing career.

In 2002, he was inducted into the National Football Museum, being described as 'The most naturally gifted English midfielder of his generation'. Fellow England midfielder Paul Ince said that Gascoigne was, 'the best player I've ever played with ... he had everything. He was amazing'.

Gascoigne was called up to the England under-21 side in the summer of 1987 and scored with a free-kick in his debut in a 2–0 win over Morocco. He went on to win 12 caps for the under-21s under Dave Sexton. The team were semi-finalists at the UEFA U-21 Euros and finalists at the Toulon Tournament, beaten on both occasions by France in 1988.

The midfield player was first called up to the full England squad by Bobby Robson for a friendly against Denmark on 14 September 1988 and came on as a late substitute for Peter Beardsley in a 1–0 win.

He scored his first goal for England in a 5–0 victory over Albania at Wembley on 26 April 1989. Paul made his first start in the following game against Chile and kept his place in the first team for most matches in the run-in to the 1990 FIFA World Cup. He also played four games for the England B team. The midfielder secured his

place in the World Cup squad with a 4–2 win over Czechoslovakia, scoring one goal and being a key contributor to the other three.

Paul went to the World Cup in Italy, having never started a competitive international. He played in all three group games, and England topped Group F, with Gascoigne providing the assist for Mark Wright's winner against Egypt. In the first knockout game against Belgium, he made another assist after chipping a free-kick into the penalty area, where David Platt volleyed the ball into the net. Gascoigne was at the centre of the action again in the quarter-final clash with Cameroon when he gave away a penalty, which Cameroon converted.

In extra time, he made a successful through-ball pass from which Gary Lineker won the penalty and subsequently scored the winning goal. Referring to the 1990 World Cup, Bryan Robson later commented that Gascoigne was the 'best player' he had ever played with, saying that in 1990 he 'was challenging Maradona as the best player in the world at that time'.

On 4 July 1990, England played West Germany in a World Cup semi-final match at Juventus's Stadio delle Alpi in Turin. Gascoigne, having already received a yellow card during England's 1–0 victory over Belgium in the second round, was booked for a foul on Thomas Berthold, which meant that he would be suspended for the final if England won the match. Television cameras showed he had tears in his eyes after the yellow card, making Gascoigne a highly popular figure with the sympathetic British public. The game culminated in a penalty shoot-out, which the Germans won after Stuart Pearce and Chris Waddle missed their penalties.

Robson quit the England job after the tournament. His successor Graham Taylor dropped Gascoigne in favour of 32-year-old Gordon Cowans in a Euro '92 qualifier against the Republic of Ireland in November 1990, citing tactical reasons.

He returned to the starting lineup for a friendly against Cameroon the following February before an injury in the FA Cup final three months later kept him out of the next 21 England fixtures, including

all of UEFA Euro 1992, where England failed to progress beyond the group stages.

Gascoigne returned to fitness in time for the opening qualifying game against Norway in October 1992. Before playing in the 1–1 draw, he responded to a Norwegian television crew's request to say 'a few words to Norway' by saying 'fu** off Norway'. His message was broadcast on Norwegian television, and he was forced to apologise for the remark.

The following month, he scored two goals in a 4–0 victory over Turkey. Qualification ended badly for England, as they finished in third place behind Norway and the Netherlands, missing out on a place in the 1994 FIFA World Cup.

A broken leg in 1994 meant Gascoigne was unable to play for 15 months.

By the time he returned to fitness, Terry Venables – his former manager at Spurs – had been appointed as England manager. As England hosted UEFA Euro 1996, they did not have to qualify, so they instead played numerous friendlies, most of which featured Gascoigne in the starting lineup. The last of these games was played in Hong Kong, after which numerous England players were photographed on a night out, during which Gascoigne and several others had drinks poured into their mouths while sitting in the 'dentist's chair'.

The tournament opened with a 1–1 draw with Switzerland, during which Gascoigne was substituted. He scored in England's second game of the tournament, against Scotland (where he was playing at club level at the time). Receiving the ball from Darren Anderton outside the Scotland penalty area, he flicked the ball over Colin Hendry with his left foot and changed direction; Hendry was wrong-footed entirely and, as the ball dropped, Gascoigne volleyed it with his right foot past Andy Gormann to seal a 2–0 victory. The goal was followed by the 'dentist's chair' celebration, referring to the incident before the tournament, where Gascoigne lay on the ground as if he

were sitting in the dentist's chair. Teammates sprayed water from Lucozade bottles into his open mouth.

England beat the Netherlands 4–1 to reach the knockout stages. They then drew 0–0 with Spain before winning 4–2 on penalties, the last of which was converted by Gascoigne. England drew 1–1 with Germany in the semi-finals, and Paul missed the chance to win the game in extra time when he came inches away from connecting to an Alan Shearer cross, yards in front of an unguarded German net.

England lost to Germany in the resulting penalty shoot-out, with Gareth Southgate missing England's sudden-death penalty.

Under Glenn Hoddle, Gascoigne was regularly selected and helped England win the Tournoi de France in 1997, beating Brazil, France, and Italy. Qualification for the 1998 FIFA World Cup went down to the last group game against Italy at the Stadio Olimpico, and Gascoigne put in a disciplined and mature performance to help England secure the 0–0 draw that was enough to take them through to the tournament.

Following his qualification, British tabloid newspapers published pictures of Gascoigne eating kebabs late at night with his DJ friend Chris Evans. These pictures were taken only a week before the final squad was due to be chosen. The pictures angered Hoddle, who elected not to pick Gascoigne in the final squad.

After hearing the news, the midfielder wrecked Hoddle's room in a rage before being restrained.

Paul, who won 57 caps and scored ten goals, would never play for England again.

Paul Gascoigne's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring his first ever goal at St James' Park against Oxford United in September 1985 (Newcastle United won 3-0).

Kevin Keegan

Keegan began his career at Scunthorpe United, where the club's financial struggles were evident. They trained on a rugby pitch and even held five-a-side sessions on a concrete car park.

Keegan's early training was self-driven—he would run the steps of the Old Show Ground's cantilever stand with teammate Derek Hemstead, always pushing himself to be first in running drills. His coach once told him he was a 'one-hundred percenter' —advice that became central to his character.

Scunthorpe United's young players often had to drive the team minibus to away matches themselves. On one occasion, Keegan and several teammates crashed a club tractor during timed 'races' around the ground, an incident that taught him the cost of responsibility.

He made his first-team debut in 1968, aged 17, and became a regular by 1969/70, making 46 league appearances. Scunthorpe United reached the FA Cup fifth round that season, and Keegan's tireless style caught the eye of scouts.

Despite attracting interest from several First Division clubs, he remained grounded, stating, 'I'm getting first-team football here'. By the early 1970s, however, ambition drove him to seek a higher level.

In 1971, Liverpool's chief scout Geoff Twentyman recommended Keegan to manager Bill Shankly, who signed the 20-year-old for £33,000.

Initially bought as a midfielder, Keegan was soon moved up front alongside John Toshack after impressing in reserve matches. On his debut at Anfield against Nottingham Forest, he scored within 12 minutes.

Keegan quickly became integral to Liverpool's success. His partnership with Toshack and work ethic embodied Shankly's values. Liverpool won the First Division title in 1972/73 and lifted the UEFA Cup, defeating Borussia Mönchengladbach in the final, with Keegan scoring twice in the first leg.

In 1974, Keegan's two goals in the FA Cup Final helped Liverpool beat Newcastle United 3–0.

Later that year, he was infamously sent off alongside Billy Bremner during a fiery Charity Shield clash with Leeds—both players stripped off their shirts in protest.

Under the new manager, Bob Paisley, Keegan continued to shine. Liverpool won another league title and UEFA Cup in 1976, then achieved a historic League and European Cup double in 1977, beating Mönchengladbach again. Shortly before that final, Keegan announced his intention to move abroad.

After scoring 100 goals in 323 Liverpool appearances, he left for Hamburger SV in a record £500,000 transfer.

Keegan's early months in Germany were difficult. He struggled with the language and faced resentment from teammates after replacing a popular player.

Feeling isolated, he was even sent off for punching an opponent in a friendly—a low point that spurred him to learn German and fully integrate.

His perseverance paid off. By 1978, he was named European Footballer of the Year, an honour he retained in 1979 after leading Hamburg SV to their first Bundesliga title in 19 years under the strict discipline of coach Branko Zebec. Hamburg reached the 1980 European Cup final but lost to Nottingham Forest.

Despite his success, Keegan left Germany after three seasons, citing the exhausting training regime. His locker sketches of Zebec as a prison warden—now displayed in Hamburg's Museum—captured both his humour and intensity.

In a surprise move, Keegan joined Southampton for £420,000 in 1980, turning down a Liverpool return.

Under Lawrie McMenemy, he played alongside Mick Channon and Alan Ball in an entertaining side.

The Saints finished sixth in 1980/81 and briefly topped the league the following season, with Keegan scoring 26 league goals and winning both the PFA Players' Player of the Year and the Football Writers' Award. However, tensions with McMenemy over the club's defensive frailties led Keegan to seek a move.

Keegan signed for Newcastle United, then a Second Division club, in 1982.

For the Tyneside faithful, his arrival was transformational. On his debut, he scored and celebrated by diving into the crowd, instantly becoming a local hero.

Playing alongside Chris Waddle and later Peter Beardsley, Keegan scored 48 goals in 78 appearances, helping Newcastle United win promotion in 1984.

Sensing his physical decline, he retired at age 33, saying, 'I was the mongrel who made it to Crufts'.

Keegan earned 63 caps and 21 goals for England, debuting in 1972. He became captain in 1976 and led his country at Euro 1980, but England failed to progress. Persistent injuries limited his appearances at the 1982 World Cup, where he came on as a late substitute against Spain and missed a crucial header.

After falling out with new manager Bobby Robson over communication, Keegan retired from international football, ending a decade-long England career.

Eight years after retiring, Keegan returned to Newcastle United—this time as manager—with the club on the brink of relegation to the third tier. He revitalised both the team and the city.

Backed by businessman Sir John Hall, he cleaned up the training ground, imposed professionalism, and introduced exciting attacking football.

In his first full season (1992/93), Keegan's side won promotion to the newly formed Premier League, inspired by signings like Barry Venison and Rob Lee. Newcastle United finished third in 1993/94,

earning European qualification, and Keegan's 'Entertainers' became famous for their fearless play.

The 1995/96 season saw Newcastle United lead the league by 12 points before Manchester United overtook them. Keegan's passionate on-air declaration—'I would love it if we beat them!'—became one of football's most iconic quotes. Despite missing out on the title, he was adored by fans and nicknamed 'King Kev'.

After signing Alan Shearer for a world-record £15,000,000 in 1996, Keegan resigned in January 1997, saying he had taken the club 'as far as I can'.

Keegan became Fulham's chief operating officer, working with Ray Wilkins (now sadly no longer with us). Funded by Mohamed Al-Fayed, Fulham were promoted from the Second Division in 1999 before Keegan left to manage England.

Appointed in February 1999, Keegan guided England to qualification for Euro 2000. The tournament proved disappointing: England beat Germany but lost to Romania and Portugal, exiting in the group stage. Keegan resigned after a 1–0 defeat to Germany in the last match at the old Wembley, admitting 'he was not up to it at this level'. His record of 38.9% wins remains among the lowest for an England manager.

Keegan returned to club management at Manchester City, signing players such as Eyal Berkovic, Ali Benarbia, and later Nicolas Anelka. He led City to promotion in 2002 as Division One champions with 108 goals, making him the first manager to win that title with two clubs. City finished ninth in their first Premier League season and qualified for the UEFA Cup via the Fair Play award.

City's first season at the new Etihad Stadium brought mixed results, including a famous 3–0 comeback win over Tottenham Hotspur in the FA Cup. Keegan resigned in 2005, aged 54, saying it was time to retire.

In 2008, Keegan made a sensational return to Newcastle United. His comeback reignited fans' hopes, but internal conflicts with owner

Mike Ashley and director Dennis Wise over transfer control undermined him.

After a promising run that included wins over Fulham and rivals Sunderland, he resigned that September. An independent tribunal later ruled Newcastle United had constructively dismissed him.

Kevin Keegan's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring on his Newcastle United debut against QPR in August 1982.

Terry McDermott

McDermott joined Bury as a youngster in 1969. He made a total of 90 appearances and scored eight goals before joining Newcastle United in 1973.

Manager Joe Harvey gave McDermott his Newcastle United debut on 17 March 1973, at Old Trafford against Manchester United. He came off the bench but was unable to prevent Newcastle United from losing 2–1.

McDermott reached the FA Cup Final in 1974 against Liverpool, but Newcastle United lost the match 3–0.

Liverpool manager Bob Paisley, in his first season in charge after replacing Bill Shankly, brought McDermott to Merseyside in November 1974.

The midfielder made his Liverpool debut on 16 November, as did Phil Neal, in a Merseyside derby against Everton at Goodison Park. The match ended goalless. His first goal came in a 1–1 draw with Burnley at Turf Moor on 8 March 1975.

For the next two years, McDermott struggled to secure a regular place in the team. Liverpool won the League Championship and the UEFA Cup in the 1975/76 season, but he did not play enough matches

to earn a League medal, despite being part of the squad that won in Europe.

Speculation mounted that he would leave Anfield in the summer of 1976, but he stayed and became an integral part of the following season's successes. McDermott was a key figure in the 1977 side that retained the league title.

His goal against Everton in the semi-final of the FA Cup, a turn and chip from the edge of the penalty area, was voted the 'Goal of the Season' by the BBC.

Liverpool went on to reach both the FA Cup and European Cup finals in May 1977. They lost the FA Cup final to Manchester United, ending hopes of a treble. Still, four days later, McDermott opened the scoring in the European Cup final against Borussia Mönchengladbach, which Liverpool won 3–1.

On 6 December 1977, he scored a hat-trick in the second leg of Liverpool's victory over Hamburg in the UEFA Super Cup Final.

Liverpool reached their first League Cup final in 1978 against Nottingham Forest. McDermott had two goals controversially disallowed over the two matches, and Forest eventually won 1–0 in the replay. The midfielder later insisted that one of the disallowed goals had been legitimate.

He found consolation later that season when Liverpool retained the European Cup, beating Club Brugge 1–0 at Wembley.

The following season, McDermott scored one of Liverpool's most memorable goals in a 7–0 win over Tottenham Hotspur on 2 September 1978. After a swift counterattack from a Spurs corner, he ran nearly 70 yards to head home Steve Heighway's cross.

By the end of that season, Liverpool were league champions again, and they retained the title in 1980. McDermott was voted both the PFA Players' Player of the Year and the FWA Footballer of the Year – the first player ever to win both awards in the same season. He also scored another outstanding goal against Tottenham Hotspur that year

in the FA Cup, flicking the ball into the air before volleying it into the far corner.

In 1981, McDermott helped Liverpool win the League Cup for the first time, defeating West Ham United after a replay. Later that season, he played in the team that beat Real Madrid to win another European Cup. He added another League title and League Cup in 1982, though by then his place in the team was less secure.

McDermott returned to Newcastle United in September 1982, where he played alongside Kevin Keegan, Chris Waddle, and Peter Beardsley. The club won promotion back to the top flight in 1984. McDermott left Newcastle United in January 1985 and moved to Ireland to play for Cork City.

From 1985 to 1987, he played for Cypriot club APOEL, where he won both the Cypriot Championship and the Cypriot Super Cup.

McDermott made his England debut on 7 September 1977 under manager Ron Greenwood, in a 0–0 draw with Switzerland at Wembley. He scored his first international goals on 10 September 1980, netting twice (including a penalty) in a 4–0 win over Norway.

He was selected for England's squad at the 1980 European Championships in Italy, playing in two group games.

He was also selected for the 1982 FIFA World Cup in Spain but did not play, despite having featured in every qualifying match. He won 25 caps for England and scored three goals.

When Kevin Keegan became manager of Newcastle United in February 1992, he appointed McDermott as the team's first coach.

Together they led Newcastle United back to the top flight and came close to winning the Premier League in 1996. McDermott remained for another season under Kenny Dalglish but left when Ruud Gullit became manager.

In 1999, McDermott became assistant head coach at Celtic under John Barnes, but both were dismissed in February 2000 after a Scottish Cup defeat to Inverness Caledonian Thistle.

He returned to Newcastle United in 2005 as part of Graeme Souness's coaching staff and remained with the club under several managers until 2008.

In December 2008, McDermott was appointed assistant manager of Huddersfield Town under Lee Clark. He was dismissed in February 2012 following Clark's sacking.

Terry rejoined Birmingham City in June 2012, this time as Clark's assistant, and left the club in February 2014.

Terry McDermott's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring his first goal since his return to Newcastle United against Cambridge United in a 2-0 win at St James' Park in November 1982.

Neil McDonald

Born in Wallsend, North Tyneside, McDonald began his footballing journey with his local youth team, Wallsend Boys Club, before joining Carlisle United as a schoolboy.

He represented England at the schoolboy level before joining Newcastle United as an apprentice, where he went on to make over 200 league and cup appearances.

During his time at St James' Park, he represented England at both Youth and Under-21 levels.

In the summer of 1988, McDonald joined Everton for £525,000. During his three years at Goodison Park, he made more than 100 league and cup appearances and played in the 1989 FA Cup Final against Liverpool, which Everton lost 3–2. He was also part of the Everton side that topped the First Division briefly in late 1989 and was voted the club's Player of the Year for the 1990/91 season.

McDonald joined Oldham Athletic in October 1991 for £500,000. He spent three seasons with the club, helping them survive two top-flight relegation battles and reach the 1994 FA Cup semi-final, where

they were denied a final appearance after a late equaliser from Mark Hughes for Manchester United. Oldham Athletic were relegated later that year.

In 1994, McDonald signed for Bolton Wanderers, where he helped the club gain promotion to the Premier League as Division One play-off winners and reach the 1995 League Cup Final, losing 2–1 to Liverpool. A broken ankle disrupted his time at Bolton Wanderers, but he returned for the end-of-season play-offs.

He joined Preston North End for £40,000 in November 1995, helping them win promotion as Division Three champions in his first season.

McDonald retired from playing at the end of the 1998/99 season, having contributed to Preston North End's steady rise under manager David Moyes.

After retiring, McDonald began his coaching career at Preston North End in 1997 as a player-coach, transitioning into a full-time coaching role the following year.

In 2000, he joined Sam Allardyce's backroom staff at Bolton Wanderers as first-team coach, earning his UEFA Pro Licence during his time at the Reebok Stadium.

He moved to Crystal Palace in 2005 as Iain Dowie's assistant before taking over as manager of Carlisle United in the summer of 2006. In his first season, Carlisle United finished 8th in League One, their highest placing in 20 years. He was dismissed in August 2007.

Shortly after, McDonald spent a brief spell in Sweden managing Östersunds FK, helping the club avoid relegation.

Later in 2007, he became assistant manager to Peter Jackson at Lincoln City, before joining Leeds United as head coach under Gary McAllister in early 2008.

In December 2008, McDonald reunited with Sam Allardyce at Blackburn Rovers as assistant manager.

He briefly took charge of the team while Allardyce underwent heart surgery, including overseeing a League Cup victory over Chelsea. Both were dismissed in December 2010.

When Allardyce was appointed manager of West Ham United in June 2011, McDonald again joined him as assistant manager, a role he held until 2015.

McDonald was appointed manager of Blackpool in June 2015 but left after the club's relegation to League Two.

He later worked as an assistant head coach at Hull City in 2016, leaving in January 2017 following Mike Phelan's departure.

In May 2017, McDonald became manager of Limerick FC in the League of Ireland Premier Division.

The following year, he joined Scunthorpe United as assistant manager to Graham Alexander and later moved to Swindon Town as assistant to Phil Brown. Both roles were short-lived.

In 2019, he followed Brown to India, where he became the assistant manager of Hyderabad FC in the Indian Super League. Both left the club in January 2020.

McDonald returned to England in 2021 as assistant coach at Walsall under Matt Taylor, later serving briefly as caretaker manager before departing in February 2022.

He then joined Barrow as assistant manager to Phil Brown, helping the club in their fight against relegation.

In June 2023, McDonald was appointed assistant coach at Bengaluru FC in India. In January 2024, he reunited with Phil Brown at Kidderminster Harriers, signing a new two-year deal following the club's relegation.

On 1 August 2025, McDonald was announced as assistant first-team manager at Hartlepool United as part of Simon Grayson's backroom staff ahead of the 2025/26 season. He left the club on 6 October 2025.

Neil McDonald's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Neil became Newcastle United's youngest ever first-team player (later beaten by Steve Watson) when he made his debut against Barnsley at St James' Park in September 1982. Unfortunately for McDonald, Newcastle United were beaten 2-1.

Mirandinha

Francisco Ernandi Lima da Silva, known as Mirandinha, was born in Chaval, Ceará, Brazil.

He had unsuccessful early spells at Ceará and Fortaleza before finding some success at the 'third club' in Fortaleza city, Ferroviário. He then moved to play for Ponte Preta. By 1981, he was playing for Botafogo in the Taça de Ouro.

In 1987, Mirandinha signed for Newcastle United for £575,000, becoming the first Brazilian to play in English football.

He made his debut in September 1987 in a 1-1 draw away to Norwich City.

The striker left Newcastle United in 1989 and returned to his former club, Palmeiras.

In 1991, he moved from Palmeiras to join Belenenses in Portugal, though he was there for only a short time, playing three matches in the Portuguese League.

By late February of that year, he was playing for Corinthians, scoring two goals for them in the 1991 Copa Libertadores.

After leaving Corinthians, he played again for Fortaleza, and later had spells in Japan with Shimizu S-Pulse and Shonan Bellmare.

Mirandinha won four caps for the Brazil national team, all in 1987, scoring his only international goal against England in a 1-1 draw during the 1987 Rous Cup.

Mirandindha's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring twice against Manchester United in a 2-2 draw in the 1987/88 season.

Micky Quinn

Quinn began his career as an apprentice with Derby County, signing for the East Midlands club upon leaving school in 1978.

However, he lasted only four months at the Baseball Ground before returning to his Merseyside home, suffering from homesickness.

Eager to turn professional, Quinn joined Wigan Athletic in September 1979 as an apprentice and signed professional forms later that season.

He was given his Fourth Division debut by manager Ian McNeill in April 1980, just before his 18th birthday, and went on to score 19 goals in 69 league games for Wigan Athletic.

After helping Wigan Athletic gain promotion to the Third Division in 1982, manager Larry Lloyd considered him too inexperienced for the higher level and gave him a free transfer to Stockport County, who were still in the Fourth Division.

It was at Edgeley Park where Quinn established himself as a regular goal scorer.

Having proven his worth, he attracted the attention of manager Joe Royle at Oldham Athletic and joined the club for £53,000 in January 1984. Quinn spent just over two years at Boundary Park and proved himself a competent goal scorer at a higher level of football.

After scoring 34 goals in 80 Second Division games for Oldham Athletic, Quinn joined Portsmouth in March 1986. Manager Alan Ball paid £150,000 for his services in an attempt to push for promotion to the First Division, though Portsmouth narrowly missed out that season.

In April 1986, Quinn was found guilty of drink-driving and received a £100 fine and a one-year driving ban for a previous offence.

Later that year, he breached the ban twice and was sentenced to 21 days in prison, serving 14. He also attracted controversy when he and teammate Paul Wood were ejected from Fratton Park by police for swearing at a linesman during a match against West Bromwich Albion.

Despite these off-field issues, Quinn was Portsmouth's top goal scorer with 24 goals in all competitions as they finished Second Division runners-up and earned promotion to the First Division.

However, Portsmouth were relegated after just one season, during which Quinn scored 11 goals.

Weighing around 88 kilograms (194 lbs), Quinn became a cult figure among fans, who chanted:

'He's fat, he's round, he's worth a million pounds, Micky Quinn!'

In August 1987, he was fined £5,000 by the Football Association for declaring that he was 'the hardest man in football'.

Quinn remained at Fratton Park for the 1988/89 season, scoring 20 league goals. Portsmouth finished 20th in the table, narrowly avoiding a second consecutive relegation. When his contract expired, he rejected a new deal and requested a transfer, hoping to move to a First Division club.

Newcastle United manager Jim Smith signed Quinn in July 1989 for £680,000, shortly after the club's relegation to the Second Division. Portsmouth manager John Gregory had demanded £1,500,000, but a tribunal set the fee at the requested amount.

Quinn made an immediate impact, scoring four goals on his debut in a 5–2 home win over Leeds United on 19 August 1989.

He went on to finish as the Football League's top scorer for the 1989/90 season with 34 league goals and 39 in all competitions. Newcastle United missed out on automatic promotion and were eliminated by Sunderland in the play-offs.

He scored 20 goals the following season, but Newcastle United's form declined, and they finished tenth. Quinn then suffered a knee

injury in October 1991, missing three months and scoring only seven goals in 22 matches.

After Kevin Keegan replaced Ossie Ardiles as manager in February 1992, Quinn fell out with him over media comments and lost his first-team place. He was sold to Coventry City in November 1992 for £250,000.

At Coventry City, Quinn made a sensational start to Premier League life. During his first six months, he scored 17 goals — 10 of them in his first six games. Scoring in his first four matches made him one of only seven players to achieve that feat in the Premier League era.

His scoring run included doubles against Manchester City, Southampton, Liverpool, and Aston Villa. Coventry City fans affectionately adapted his old Portsmouth chant to: 'He's fat, he's round, he scores on every ground'.

Despite his goals, Coventry City finished 15th in the league. Quinn was nicknamed 'Sumo and often joked that he was the Premier League's fastest player over a yard'. Other nicknames included 'Hippofatamus,' 'Bob' (for his resemblance to entertainer Bob Carolgees), and 'The Mighty Quinn'.

The following season, Coventry City finished 11th, and Quinn began the campaign with a hat-trick in a 3–0 win over Arsenal at Highbury — the first match played at the stadium after it was converted to all-seater.

He was briefly considered for an England call-up in early 1993 when Alan Shearer and David Hirst were injured, but it never materialised. Quinn was also approached to play for the Republic of Ireland, but was ineligible because his closest Irish-born relative was his great-grandfather.

He also qualified for Italy through an Italian-born grandfather.

Quinn's relationship with manager Phil Neal deteriorated after he was sent off against Blackburn Rovers early in the 1994/95 season,

and new signing Dion Dublin soon replaced him. He subsequently handed in a transfer request.

Quinn had short loan spells with Plymouth Argyle in November 1994 and Watford in March 1995. He was released by Coventry City on 1 May 1995, the day before his 33rd birthday.

He then had a brief spell with PAOK Thessaloniki in Greece. However, during this period, tragedy struck when his younger brother Sean died at the age of 25, and his mother passed away from cancer the following year.

Quinn left PAOK in February 1996 and applied unsuccessfully for the manager's job at Burnley before deciding to retire from football.

Mick Quinn's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring four goals on his Newcastle United debut in a 5-2 win over Leeds United in August 1989.

Glenn Roeder

Roeder (sadly no longer with us) was born in Woodford, Essex, on 13 December 1955. He played for Gidea Park Rangers and represented Essex and London schools before joining Arsenal as a schoolboy in December 1969.

After being released by The Gunners, he joined Orient in August 1972. Roeder made his name as a classy, ball-playing defender and was part of the Orient squad in the Second Division during the 1970s that reached the FA Cup semi-final in 1978.

He transferred to Queens Park Rangers for £250,000 in August 1978, where he made 181 senior appearances and captained the team to the 1982 FA Cup Final against Tottenham Hotspur, missing the replay due to suspension, and to the Second Division title in 1983. Roeder was one of the first players famed for using the step-over move—known as the 'Roeder Shuffle', a technique he said his father had taught him as a child.

After a brief loan spell at Notts County, Roeder transferred to Newcastle United for £125,000 in December 1983. He captained the club and made 219 senior appearances over five years, helping them win promotion from the Second Division in 1984.

He joined Watford on a free transfer in July 1989, making 78 senior appearances over two years before returning to the renamed Leyton Orient in 1992, where he played eight games. He finished his playing career with a six-game stint at Gillingham, whom he had joined as player-manager in November 1992.

Roeder spent one season as player-manager of Gillingham, leading the side to 10 wins in 37 games.

They finished second from bottom of the Football League but escaped relegation after a win against Halifax Town in the penultimate match. He resigned in July 1993 to take over at Watford.

After Steve Perryman left for Tottenham Hotspur, Roeder became manager of his former club Watford at the start of the 1993/94 season.

The club was fined for an illegal approach and ordered to pay compensation to Gillingham.

In his second season, Watford narrowly missed out on the play-offs, finishing two places outside. He was sacked in February 1996 as the team struggled near the bottom of the First Division.

During his tenure, he signed Kevin Phillips from Baldock Town for just £10,000.

Roeder then worked as assistant manager to Chris Waddle at Burnley. The partnership was not successful, and the club narrowly avoided relegation to the bottom tier. Roeder became an unpopular figure among fans and left after one season alongside Waddle.

The defender worked as a coach under Glenn Hoddle with the England national team before returning to club football in 1999.

Harry Redknapp appointed Roeder as a coach and scout at West Ham United in 1999.

After Redknapp's departure in 2001, and following failed attempts to appoint Steve McClaren and Alan Curbishley, Roeder was unexpectedly made manager.

Despite doubts from fans, he guided West Ham to seventh in his first Premier League season. Key signings included David James, Tomáš Řepka, and Don Hutchison.

The 2002/03 season was difficult, with injuries and poor form leaving West Ham United at the bottom of the league at Christmas. Despite late-season improvements, Roeder collapsed in April 2003 after suffering a brain tumour and was replaced by Trevor Brooking for the final games. West Ham United were relegated despite earning 42 points—a record high for a relegated team.

He returned after recovery but was sacked in August 2003 following a poor start to the new season.

After nearly two years out of football, Roeder became Newcastle United's youth-development manager in 2005.

When Graeme Souness was sacked in February 2006, Roeder was appointed caretaker manager, with Alan Shearer as his assistant. He transformed Newcastle United's season, leading them to a seventh-place finish and qualification for the Intertoto Cup.

The club was granted special dispensation for him to continue as manager without a UEFA Pro Licence, given his previous illness.

As full-time manager, Roeder guided Newcastle United to victory in the 2006 Intertoto Cup—their first trophy since 1969.

However, injuries and inconsistent results plagued the following season. After a poor run of form, he resigned in May 2007.

Roeder became Norwich City manager in October 2007, with the team bottom of the Championship. He guided them to safety after an impressive turnaround and extensive squad changes. His decision not to renew Darren Huckerby's contract angered many supporters. The following season began poorly, and after a series of defeats, he was dismissed in January 2009.

Glenn Roeder's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Helping Newcastle United clinch promotion to the First Division in the season 1983/84.

Imre Varadi

Varadi started his career in non-league football with Letchworth before joining Sheffield United in 1978, shortly before his nineteenth birthday.

The striker became a nomadic journeyman, rarely spending more than two years with any club and never making 100 league appearances for any team.

He played for Sheffield United, Everton, Newcastle United, Sheffield Wednesday, West Bromwich Albion, Manchester City, Swansea City, Sheffield Wednesday (again), Leeds United, Luton Town, Oxford United, Rotherham United, Mansfield Town, Boston United, Scunthorpe United, and finally had a spell as player-manager at Matlock Town.

He was part of the Leeds United side that won the First Division in 1992, but only played in three matches, which was not enough to earn a winner's medal. He was also part of the Sheffield Wednesday side that won promotion to the First Division in 1984.

A year later, he was sold to West Bromwich Albion, where he was the club's top scorer with nine league goals in 1985/86, though the team was relegated.

He then joined Manchester City, where he scored 26 league goals in two seasons but could not prevent their relegation. City fans nicknamed him 'Imre Banana' during the inflatable banana craze.

Varadi returned to Sheffield Wednesday in 1988 for two seasons before moving to Leeds United in 1990, helping them win promotion to the First Division.

However, he rarely played for Leeds United in the top division and did not make enough appearances in 1991/92 to earn a league medal.

He had loan spells at Luton Town and Oxford United before joining Rotherham United in 1993, where he scored 25 goals over two seasons.

The striker had brief spells at Mansfield Town and Scunthorpe United before retiring from professional football in 1995 to become player-manager of Matlock Town. He later joined Guiseley.

In 1997, Varadi signed with the South Jersey Barons in the United States, playing two league games and scoring once before returning to England. He came out of retirement for one game with Stalybridge Celtic in 1998.

Imre Varadi's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Imre was Newcastle United's top scorer in the 1982/83 season with 22 goals, more than Kevin Keegan!

Chris Waddle

Waddle began his footballing career with Pelaw Juniors, then moved on to Whitehouse SC, Mount Pleasant SC, HMH Printing, Pelaw SC, Leam Lane SC, and Clarke Chapman before joining Tow Law Town at the start of the 1978/79 season.

While working in food processing, Waddle had unsuccessful trials with Sunderland and Coventry City. He joined Newcastle United as a 19-year-old in July 1980 for £1,000.

He made his Second Division debut in a 1–0 home win over Shrewsbury Town on 22 October 1980 and quickly established himself as an effective attacking midfielder.

Playing alongside Kevin Keegan and Peter Beardsley, Waddle helped Newcastle United win promotion to the First Division at the end of the 1983/84 season.

In one of his first games in the top flight, against Queen's Park Rangers at Loftus Road on 22 September 1984, he scored a first-half hat-trick as Newcastle United led 4–0 at half-time. However, a spirited QPR comeback saw the match end 5–5.

After scoring 46 goals in 170 league games for Newcastle United, Waddle joined Tottenham Hotspur on 1 July 1985 for a fee of £590,000. He scored twice on his league debut, a 4–0 home win over Watford on the opening day of the season.

Tottenham Hotspur finished tenth that year, prompting the replacement of manager Peter Shreeves by David Pleat. Waddle went on to win an FA Cup runners-up medal in 1987 when Coventry City beat Spurs.

That same season, the team finished third in the league and reached the semi-finals of the League Cup.

On 1 July 1989, after scoring 33 times in 138 league appearances for Tottenham Hotspur, Waddle moved to French club Olympique de Marseille for £4,500,000 — then the third-highest transfer fee ever paid for a footballer.

During his time in France, Marseille won the French championship three times (1990, 1991, and 1992). They also reached the 1991 European Cup Final, where they lost on penalties to Red Star Belgrade.

Marseille fans nicknamed him 'Magic Chris,' and he was seen as the successor to former club favourite Roger Magnusson.

In 1998, he was voted the second-greatest Marseille player of the century, behind Jean-Pierre Papin.

Waddle returned to England in July 1992 in a £1,000,000 move to Sheffield Wednesday, managed by Trevor Francis.

The club reached both domestic cup finals in the 1992/93 season, losing both to Arsenal. Waddle scored Wednesday's goal in the FA Cup final replay and was voted the Football Writers' Association Footballer of the Year in 1993.

He helped Wednesday reach the semi-finals of the League Cup in the 1993/94 season, but further success eluded the club. Injuries and managerial changes disrupted his final years at Hillsborough.

In January 1996, Kevin Keegan tried to re-sign him for Newcastle United, but Wednesday rejected the offer. He was released five games into the 1996/97 season, having made 109 appearances and scored 10 goals.

Waddle joined Falkirk in the Scottish First Division in September 1996 but returned to England the following month to play for Bradford City.

Though his stay was brief, he became a fan's favourite. He famously scored directly from a corner in a televised 3–3 draw with Huddersfield Town and netted a stunning goal in a 3–2 FA Cup win over Everton at Goodison Park, which was voted second in Match of the Day's Goal of the Month competition. His performances helped Bradford avoid relegation from Division One.

In March 1997, Waddle signed for Sunderland, the club he had supported as a boy, for a nominal fee of £75,000.

Despite scoring once against Everton and providing several assists, he was unable to prevent Sunderland's relegation from the Premier League at the end of the season.

In May 1997, Waddle was appointed player-manager of Burnley. His first season in charge was a struggle, and the team narrowly avoided relegation.

He scored once during his time with the club — a goal in a 2–2 draw against AFC Bournemouth in October 1997.

Waddle left Burnley in the summer of 1998 and joined Torquay United that September.

He played seven times before returning to Sheffield Wednesday as reserve team coach in 1999. He left the club in June 2000 following the appointment of Paul Jewell as manager, shortly after Wednesday's relegation from the Premier League.

He later appeared for Brunsmeer Athletic in the Meadowhall Sheffield & District Sunday League.

During the 2012/13 season, Waddle played at an amateur level in the Sheffield Wragg Over-40s League for Hallam.

After 11 years away from competitive football, he came out of retirement in July 2013 to sign for Hallam FC, a Sheffield-based non-league club in the Counties East League.

He made his debut in a pre-season friendly against Chesterfield, coming on as a substitute at half-time in a 6–2 defeat. On 1 August 2013, he signed a one-year deal for the 2013/14 season while continuing his work as a football commentator. Waddle later rejoined Hallam in 2023.

Waddle was first called up to the England Under-21 team before making his senior debut for Bobby Robson's England side on 26 March 1985 in a 2–1 win over the Republic of Ireland. He scored his first international goal later that year in a 5–0 victory over Turkey.

He represented England at the 1986 and 1990 FIFA World Cups and at Euro 1988.

Although England were eliminated early at Euro 88, they reached the World Cup semi-finals in 1990. Waddle hit the post during extra time of the semi-final against West Germany and then missed the decisive penalty in the shootout, sending it narrowly over the bar.

He went on to earn 62 caps for England, scoring six goals, with his final appearance coming in October 1991 in a 1–0 win over Turkey. Despite his consistency, he was later left out under coach Graham Taylor.

Terry Venables considered recalling him in 1994, but injury ruled him out of contention.

Chris Waddle's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring three goals against QPR at Loftus Road in a 5-5 draw during the season 1984/85.

Chapter Three

A Brief History of the 1990s

Newcastle United's journey through the 1990s was a true footballing fairytale, mixed with soaring highs and agonising near-misses that no supporter would ever forget.

At the dawn of the 1990s, Newcastle United were a club going nowhere. Relegated from the top flight in 1989, the early years of the decade were full of instability and no direction at all.

The 1989/90 season had ended in heartbreaking fashion with a play-off semi-final defeat to local rivals Sunderland, a blow that took a long time to get over.

Manager Jim Smith, frustrated by the lack of boardroom support, famously declared the club 'unmanageable' before his departure in March 1991.

Attendances at St James' Park dwindled to alarming levels, with some Second Division matches drawing fewer than 15,000 spectators. The club's financial health wasn't good, and Newcastle United's identity seemed to be fading.

The turning point—a seismic shift that would redefine the club for the next decade and beyond—arrived in February 1992 with the appointment of Kevin Keegan as manager. Keegan, a revered figure from his playing days at St James' Park, was a gamble. He was charismatic and passionate, but had never managed before.

However, his infectious enthusiasm and unwavering belief in an attacking brand of football quickly won over the fans.

His arrival coincided with the club's takeover by Sir John Hall, a local businessman whose ambitions and deep pockets provided the money needed to match Keegan's footballing ideals.

Hall, drawing on his experience in property development, immediately set about planning for the club's future, including both the playing squad and St James' Park.

Keegan's impact was immediate. With the club flirting with relegation to the third tier, he galvanised the squad and instilled a renewed sense of purpose.

The transformation was dramatic. The 1992/93 season saw Newcastle United return to the top flight, clinching the First Division Championship with a brand of thrilling, attacking football that became their hallmark.

This style earned them the enduring nickname 'The Entertainers', a label that perfectly summed up their approach to the game.

The club's promotion to the newly formed Premier League was seamless. In their debut Premier League season, 1993/94, they defied expectations, finishing an impressive third and qualifying for the UEFA Cup.

The squad was carefully assembled, a blend of experienced players and exciting young talent. Peter Beardsley, a returning hero, provided guile and creativity. Andy Cole emerged as a prolific goal scorer, eventually joining Manchester United in a high-profile transfer. Midfielders like Rob Lee and David Batty provided the engine room.

At the same time, defenders such as John Beresford and Darren Peacock formed a solid foundation.

Later additions, such as the elegant French winger David Ginola and the powerful striker Les Ferdinand, further enhanced the team's attacking arsenal, elevating their status as one of the most exciting teams in English football.

The pinnacle of 'The Entertainers' era unfolded in the 1995/96 and 1996/97 seasons, where Newcastle United finished as Premier League runners-up on both occasions. The 1995/96 title race, in particular,

remains etched in the memories of football fans, a tale of triumph and heartbreak.

Newcastle United held a commanding twelve-point lead over Manchester United at one stage, playing breathtaking football that seemed destined to secure the Premier League title.

However, a series of poor results, combined with Manchester United's relentless pursuit, saw the lead dwindle. The defining moment of this period, arguably of the entire Keegan era, was his impassioned on-air retort to Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson's mind games: 'I'll tell you, honestly, I will love it if we beat them! Love it!'

Despite the fiery passion, the title ultimately eluded them, a cruel twist of fate that left a lingering sense of 'what if' among the faithful.

The summer of 1996 brought a moment of immense pride and expectation for the club and its supporters. Alan Shearer, the prolific goal scorer and Newcastle United native, rejected the advances of Manchester United to sign for his boyhood club for a world-record fee of £15,000,000.

It was a statement of intent, a declaration that Newcastle United was a major force to be reckoned with. The pairing of Shearer and Ferdinand—a potent strike partnership—promised an unstoppable attacking force. While the team finished runners-up again in the 1996/97 season, securing Champions League qualification, the dream of Premier League glory remained unfulfilled.

Beyond the electric atmosphere of match days and the drama of the title races, St James' Park, the iconic stadium nestled in the heart of the city, also underwent a remarkable transformation during the 1990s.

The stadium, a cherished symbol of Newcastle United since 1892, had seen only piecemeal development in the preceding decades. Under Sir John Hall's vision, fuelled by the team's newfound success and increased attendances, ambitious redevelopment plans were set in motion.

The most significant development was the construction of the Sir John Hall Stand at the Leazes End, drastically altering the stadium's silhouette.

By 1995, St James' Park had evolved into a modern, all-seater venue with a capacity of 36,610, enabling it to host matches during the UEFA European Championship in 1996.

Further expansion, commencing in 1998 and completed in 2000, pushed capacity beyond 52,000, creating the distinctive, towering structure familiar today. This growth, however, was not without its moments of contention.

A proposed move to nearby Leazes Park in 1995 sparked strong local opposition, and the club faced protests from season ticket holders over increased prices, leading to the formation of the 'Save Our Seats' campaign.

Kevin Keegan's unexpected resignation in January 1997, citing that he had taken the club as far as he could, marked the end of the initial 'Entertainers' era. His departure sent shockwaves through the club and its fanbase.

Kenny Dalglish, another legendary figure from the football world, took the reins. While Dalglish successfully navigated the team to another second-place finish in the Premier League and secured Champions League qualification, his style of football was more pragmatic and less flamboyant than Keegan's.

The 1997/98 Champions League campaign offered moments of European glory, most notably a memorable 3-2 victory over the mighty Barcelona at St James' Park. The team also reached the FA Cup final that season, their first since 1974, but ultimately fell short, losing 2-0 to Arsenal.

Dalglish's tenure, however, proved to be relatively brief. A disappointing start to the 1998/99 season saw him dismissed and replaced by Ruud Gullit, the enigmatic Dutchman. Gullit, despite an initial honeymoon period, struggled to fully implement his vision.

He did, however, lead Newcastle United to another FA Cup final in 1999. Still, once again, silverware eluded the club as they succumbed to a 2-0 defeat against Manchester United, who were in the midst of securing their historic treble. Gullit's time at the helm was short-lived and marked by internal divisions and a sense of underachievement, given the talent at his disposal.

He departed early in the 1999/2000 season, paving the way for the arrival of Sir Bobby Robson.

Sir Bobby Robson's appointment in September 1999 signalled the dawn of a new chapter for Newcastle United as the decade drew to a close. His arrival — a return to his North East roots — was met with immense hope and expectation.

The 1990s for Newcastle United had been a thrilling, often heartbreaking journey. It was a decade of renaissance, a period where a struggling club found its voice, its identity, and its place among the elite of English football.

The memories of Keegan's Entertainers, the iconic goals, the roar of the crowd at a transformed St James' Park, and the passionate, unwavering support of the 'Toon Army' remain indelible, a testament to a truly unforgettable era in the club's storied history.

While silverware, particularly the coveted Premier League title, remained elusive during this exhilarating decade, the sheer joy, excitement, and renewed sense of pride instilled in the city ensured that the 1990s would forever be remembered as a golden age for Newcastle United.

Chapter Four

Ten Memorable Players from the 1990s

John Beresford

Beresford was born in Sheffield, West Riding of Yorkshire, in 1966, and grew up in a city steeped in football culture.

From a young age, he displayed the energy and athleticism that would later mark him out as a professional.

Sheffield's parks and school pitches offered the perfect backdrop for a boy who could rarely be separated from a football, and by his teens, he had developed the pace and attacking instincts that would become his trademarks.

He was spotted by Manchester City scouts, who invited him to join their youth system.

For a youngster from Sheffield, the opportunity to train with a top-flight club was a dream, though the reality of breaking into the first team was a stern challenge.

At Manchester City, Beresford learned the game's professional standards but found first-team chances limited. The competition for places was intense, and the tactical expectations of the time often demanded full-backs to stay deep rather than surge forward.

To gain experience, he spent a short spell in Ireland with Finn Harps. This proved invaluable: it offered him the chance to play

regularly in a different football environment, toughened him up and gave him the freedom to attack more.

Returning to England, he joined Barnsley, where he began to show more consistency.

Supporters quickly warmed to his determination and commitment, and his attacking runs from deep positions hinted at the qualities that would later flourish at the highest level.

His progress soon attracted the attention of Portsmouth, and it was on the south coast that Beresford's career truly took off.

Under manager Jim Smith, Portsmouth played an open, attractive style that perfectly suited his strengths. He became a fixture as the team's first-choice left-back.

Fans admired his work rate and his habit of driving the team forward even when under pressure. The 1991/92 season brought him national attention as Portsmouth reached the FA Cup semi-finals. Facing Liverpool at Highbury, Portsmouth pushed the favourites to the limit. The match went to a penalty shootout after a 1–1 draw, and Beresford, never one to shirk responsibility, volunteered to take a kick. Unfortunately, he missed, and Liverpool went through to the final. The disappointment was crushing, but his courage in stepping up was widely respected. Ironically, Liverpool were so impressed with his performances throughout the season that they agreed to sign him that summer. Yet fate intervened when he failed a medical examination, ending any hopes of the move.

Instead, what could have been a career setback became the opening to a new and remarkable chapter. In the early stages of rebuilding Newcastle United, Kevin Keegan saw in Beresford exactly the kind of player he wanted: bold, technically adept and full of attacking intent.

In 1992, Beresford joined the North-East-based club just as they were beginning to re-emerge from a difficult period. Keegan's philosophy was revolutionary but straightforward: he wanted his team to entertain, to attack relentlessly, and to make St James' Park a place

of excitement once more. Beresford's arrival coincided with a wave of optimism that swept through Tyneside.

He quickly established himself as a key player in a side that was as fearless as it was talented.

Along with fellow full-back Warren Barton, Beresford provided the width that underpinned Newcastle United's exhilarating play. The two were often compared for their similar appearances and playing styles, and their overlapping runs became a hallmark of the team's approach. Newcastle United won promotion to the Premier League in 1993 and, over the next few years, became one of the most talked-about sides in English football. The attacking fluency of players such as Peter Beardsley, David Ginola and Andy Cole was supported by Beresford's constant willingness to push forward, stretching opposition defences and creating space for others to exploit.

During the 1995/96 season, Newcastle United came agonisingly close to winning the Premier League title.

For much of the campaign, they led the table, playing a brand of football that thrilled neutrals and delighted their fans.

Although Manchester United eventually overtook them, the season remains etched in memory for its drama and excitement. Beresford was central to that run, his balance of defence and attack helping Newcastle United dominate many of their opponents. His composure on the ball and his ability to deliver accurate crosses from deep made him one of the most effective full-backs in the division.

Not everything during that period was smooth. On 14 April 1996, in a match against Aston Villa, Beresford was substituted after just 25 minutes following a heated disagreement with Keegan. The incident became a talking point in the press, and Beresford did not feature again that season. He later apologised to his manager and teammates, acknowledging that his frustration had got the better of him. The apology was accepted, and by the start of the next campaign, he regained his place and the manager's trust. The episode ultimately strengthened his reputation for honesty and professionalism.

The following seasons brought more memorable moments. In 1997, Beresford scored twice in the first leg of Newcastle United's Champions League qualifier against Croatia Zagreb, a rare feat for a defender and a testament to his attacking instincts. Those goals helped secure Newcastle United's place among Europe's elite and provided one of the standout moments of his career. Playing in the Champions League was a proud achievement for both player and club, symbolising how far they had come in just a few short years.

Beresford's time at Newcastle United coincided with some of the club's most iconic matches: the 5–0 victory over Manchester United, the high-scoring battles with Liverpool, and the electric atmosphere that filled St James' Park every weekend. Supporters adored his determination and his willingness to take risks. In many ways, he personified Keegan's footballing philosophy — adventurous, passionate and unafraid to make mistakes in pursuit of victory.

After six eventful seasons on Tyneside, Beresford left Newcastle United in 1998. He joined Southampton, bringing experience and leadership to a young squad. Though his spell there was shorter and less dramatic, his professionalism remained undiminished.

He later moved to Birmingham City, continuing to contribute with the same drive that had characterised his entire career.

As injuries began to take their toll, he prepared for life after football, eventually retiring after more than fifteen years as a professional.

On the international front, Beresford's consistent performances earned him recognition from England. In 1994, he won two England 'B' caps, facing Northern Ireland 'B' and the Republic of Ireland 'B'. He was also called up as cover for the senior national side in 1993, an acknowledgement of his outstanding form in the Premier League.

Competition for the left-back position was fierce during that period, with Stuart Pearce and Graeme Le Saux both established internationals, and Beresford never made a full senior appearance. Nonetheless, his inclusion in the wider England setup reflected the respect he commanded within the game.

As a player, Beresford stood out for his modern interpretation of the full-back role. He was fast and always wanted to attack.

His ability to glide forward with the ball, link play with wingers, and deliver precise crosses made him a vital component of Newcastle United's attacking machine. At the same time, he was defensively disciplined, able to read the game and recover quickly when caught high up the pitch. His style certainly helped usher in the attacking full-back as a standard feature of modern football, paving the way for later players such as Ashley Cole and Leighton Baines.

Off the field, Beresford was known for his humour and approachability. He built strong relationships with fans, often stopping for conversations and autographs long after matches had ended. His connection with supporters was genuine, and he remained a popular figure long after leaving each club. Those who worked with him describe a player who combined competitiveness with humility — a man as committed to the team's success as he was to his own improvement.

John Beresford's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring twice against Croatia Zagreb in a UEFA Champions League Qualifier in the 1997/98 season, a rare feat for a full-back.

Andy Cole

Cole's early life in Nottingham was typical of many English boys who grew up dreaming of a professional football career.

From a young age, he displayed a natural talent for the game, demonstrating quick feet, a keen eye for goal, and an understanding of space that belied his age.

These early signs of promise eventually led him to Arsenal, one of the most successful clubs in England, when he joined their youth system in 1988.

Arsenal, at the time under the management of George Graham, was a club with a strong reputation for discipline, defensive organisation, and producing technically capable players.

For Cole, breaking into such an environment was a significant challenge, but the opportunity to train with and learn from established professionals provided him with an invaluable foundation.

The striker signed professional terms with Arsenal in 1989, but opportunities in the first team were scarce. The Gunners boasted a strong squad, and competition for forward positions was intense. His only league appearance for the club came on 29 December 1990, at the age of 19, as a substitute in a 4–1 win over Sheffield United at Highbury.

Though he did not score, the appearance marked the beginning of his professional football career. He also made a substitute appearance in the 1991 Charity Shield against Tottenham Hotspur, during which he nearly made an impact by hitting the side netting from distance.

However, first-team opportunities remained limited, and it became clear that Cole needed regular game time to fully develop his potential.

In pursuit of this, Cole was loaned to Fulham in the Third Division during the 1991/92 season. In 13 appearances, he scored three goals, gaining valuable experience in senior football.

Later, he was loaned to Bristol City, then a Second Division club, in March 1992. His performances at Bristol City impressed the management sufficiently to secure a permanent transfer that summer for £500,000, making him the club's most expensive signing at the time.

At his new club, Cole's career began to gather real momentum. He quickly established himself as a reliable goal scorer, demonstrating a natural ability to read the game, find space in the box, and finish with composure under pressure. His performances drew attention from clubs across the country, and he emerged as one of England's most promising young strikers.

Cole's breakthrough came in February 1993 when Newcastle United, under the management of Kevin Keegan, signed him for £1,750,000, breaking the club's transfer record. Newcastle United were leading Division One and were eager to secure promotion to the Premier League. Cole's impact was immediate.

He scored 12 goals in as many league matches, including two hat-tricks—one against Barnsley on 7 April and another on the final day of the season in the 7–1 demolition of Leicester City. He also scored in the promotion-clinching 2–0 victory over Grimsby Town. Cole's goalscoring prowess helped Newcastle United secure the Division One title and return to the top flight, and he quickly became a fan's favourite.

The 1993/94 season in the Premier League cemented Cole's status as one of England's elite forwards. With Peter Beardsley as his strike partner, he formed a lethal attacking duo that terrorised defences across the country.

Cole scored 34 league goals in 40 appearances and 41 in all competitions, breaking Newcastle United's goalscoring record set nearly 70 years earlier by Hughie Gallacher. He scored in 26 different league matches, a record that remains in the Premier League to this day.

His first top-flight goal came against defending champions Manchester United at Old Trafford, and he produced memorable hat-tricks against Liverpool and Coventry City. His performance earned him the PFA Young Player of the Year award, and his reputation as a natural finisher was firmly established.

Cole's success at Newcastle United was not limited to domestic competitions. In European matches, he also displayed his striking talent, scoring hat-tricks in the UEFA Cup. His ability to maintain his scoring consistency made him a highly sought-after player.

By the start of the 1994/95 season, Cole had already demonstrated the qualities that would define his career: intelligent movement, anticipation, clinical finishing, and an uncanny ability to perform in crucial moments.

Despite this, in January 1995, Cole was sold to Manchester United in a shock deal worth £7,000,000, which included £6,000,000 in cash and the transfer of Keith Gillespie the other way. This transfer made Cole the most expensive British player at the time.

His move to Manchester United placed him under intense scrutiny. United were title challengers, and expectations for him to replicate his Newcastle United form immediately were high. He did not disappoint.

In his first half-season, he scored 12 goals in 18 Premier League appearances, including a remarkable five-goal performance in a 9–0 victory over Ipswich Town, a Premier League record. His goals helped United close the gap on Blackburn Rovers, although they ultimately finished second, just behind their rivals.

Despite his strong start, Cole faced criticism for missing chances in key matches, highlighting the immense pressure that came with playing for a club of United's stature.

The 1995/96 season was challenging. Eric Cantona's return from suspension changed the team's dynamic, and Cole initially struggled to find his previous consistency. He scored 14 goals in the league, a respectable tally but below the high expectations he had set for himself.

However, he proved his resilience by delivering crucial goals in the latter part of the season, including a strike against Newcastle United that showcased his ability to perform against top opposition. United went on to win the Premier League title, completing the Double with victory in the FA Cup final over Liverpool, and the striker collected his first major honours with the club.

Injury became a recurring challenge in Cole's career. During the 1996/97 season, he suffered two broken legs in a reserve match against Liverpool, a serious setback that threatened to derail his progress.

Despite the severity of the injury, Cole demonstrated remarkable determination, returning to first-team action by December 1996. He contributed key goals in both the Premier League and UEFA

Champions League, including one voted the season's best European goal against Porto.

Following Eric Cantona's retirement, Cole became Manchester United's primary striker for the 1997/98 season. He formed a productive, though sometimes tense, partnership with Teddy Sheringham. He scored 25 goals across all competitions and earned a nomination for PFA Players' Player of the Year, finishing runner-up to Dennis Bergkamp.

One of his most memorable goals that season was a delicate chip against Everton, voted the club's goal of the season.

Although United failed to win silverware that year, Cole's individual performances reinforced his reputation as one of England's most reliable forwards.

The 1998/99 season marked the peak of Cole's career. The signing of Dwight Yorke from Aston Villa led to the formation of one of football's most celebrated strike partnerships. Cole and Yorke's understanding on the pitch was near telepathic, combining with Ole Gunnar Solskjær and Sheringham to form a fluid attacking unit capable of dismantling even the strongest defences.

Together, Cole and Yorke scored 53 goals in all competitions, a remarkable contribution that played a crucial role in United achieving the historic Treble of the Premier League, the FA Cup, and the UEFA Champions League. Cole scored decisive goals in the Champions League semi-final against Juventus and in the league-clinching match against Tottenham Hotspur.

His performances that season cemented his status as one of Manchester United's all-time greats.

Cole's prolific scoring continued in the following seasons. In 1999/2000, he scored 19 goals in 28 Premier League matches, helping United retain their league title.

Despite facing injuries in 2000/01, he still managed 13 goals in all competitions and became the club's record European goal scorer, surpassing Denis Law.

By 2001, however, increased competition from Ruud van Nistelrooy and others limited his playing time, prompting his transfer to Blackburn Rovers in December 2001 for £8,000,000.

At Blackburn Rovers, he quickly made an impact. Within two months, he scored the winning goal in the 2002 League Cup final against Tottenham Hotspur, a dramatic personal and professional triumph.

He enjoyed two productive seasons at Ewood Park, forming a reunion with Dwight Yorke and contributing significantly to the team's sixth-place Premier League finish and UEFA Cup qualification.

Despite disagreements with manager Graeme Souness that ultimately curtailed his time at Blackburn Rovers, Cole scored 37 goals in 100 appearances for the club, further demonstrating his enduring quality as a striker.

Cole's later career saw him become a journeyman striker, providing experience and goals for several clubs. He returned to Fulham for the 2004/05 season, becoming their top scorer and producing memorable moments, including a spectacular goal against Liverpool.

A move to Manchester City in 2005 allowed him to continue performing at the Premier League level until injury curtailed his season.

Subsequently, he played for Portsmouth, Birmingham City (on loan), Sunderland, Burnley (on loan), and Nottingham Forest, bringing leadership and experience to teams with younger squads.

At Burnley, he scored six goals, including a hat-trick against Queens Park Rangers, demonstrating that even in the twilight of his career, his instinct for goal remained sharp.

Internationally, Cole's career with England was far less prolific than his club career.

Despite being one of the most dangerous forwards in domestic football, he earned just 15 caps between 1995 and 2001, scoring a single goal in a World Cup qualifier against Albania.

Competition for places, managerial preferences, and a perception of inconsistent finishing limited his international opportunities.

Managers, including Glenn Hoddle, publicly questioned his efficiency, citing his need for multiple chances to score. Injuries further restricted his ability to participate in major tournaments, and he missed out on the 1998 World Cup and Euro 2000.

Following his retirement in 2008 after a brief spell at Nottingham Forest, Cole transitioned into coaching. In 2009, he worked with Milton Keynes Dons under Paul Ince before taking up a role at Huddersfield Town under Lee Clark, focusing on improving the finishing and positional play of forwards.

He later returned to Manchester United to work on coaching qualifications, passing on his wealth of experience to younger players.

In 2019, he joined Sol Campbell's coaching staff at Southend United, further demonstrating his commitment to nurturing the next generation of footballers.

Andy Cole's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring in 26 different Premier League matches in the 1993/94 season. A record that still stands to this day.

Kieron Dyer

Kieron Dyer began his football career in his hometown of Ipswich, Suffolk, joining Ipswich Town as a 17-year-old trainee in 1996.

From the outset, he showed promise, quickly catching the eye of coaches and supporters alike.

His natural talent, pace, and technical ability enabled him to break into the first team during his debut season—a rare feat for such a young player.

Dyer's ability to operate in multiple positions across midfield and attack made him an invaluable asset, and he rapidly gained a reputation as one of the most exciting young prospects in English football outside the Premier League.

He combined agility, vision, and an eye for goal, making him a dynamic presence in any attacking scenario.

During his early years at Ipswich Town, he displayed maturity beyond his age, often performing decisively in high-pressure matches.

Over the course of three seasons, Dyer became a fan favourite at Portman Road, demonstrating his commitment and skill week after week.

Despite his personal success, the club struggled to secure promotion to the Premier League.

After Ipswich Town failed to secure promotion through the play-offs in 1999, Dyer requested a transfer.

Ambitious and eager to further his career, particularly at the international level, he sought a move that would allow him to compete in the top tier of English football and enhance his chances of representing England on the global stage.

In July 1999, Dyer's ambition led to a transfer to Newcastle United for a fee of £6,000,000, which at the time was a record sum received by Ipswich Town. The move represented a significant step up in his career, taking him from a club striving for promotion to one firmly established in the Premier League.

At his new club, Dyer became the only English player signed by Ruud Gullit during his tenure as manager, highlighting the trust placed in his talent and potential.

He scored his first goal for Newcastle United in a home match against local rivals Sunderland, an eagerly anticipated fixture,

although the team lost 2–1. Gullit's short-lived managerial spell came to an abrupt end shortly afterwards, marking a turbulent introduction to top-flight football for Dyer.

Despite the managerial upheaval, Dyer thrived under the subsequent appointment of Bobby Robson.

Under his new manager, he became a central figure in a Newcastle United team that achieved consistently high league finishes, securing fourth, third, and fifth places in the Premier League from 2001 to 2004. Dyer's performances during this period solidified his reputation as a top-class midfielder.

He combined technical skill with a work ethic, contributing both defensively and offensively, often acting as the link between defence and attack. His vision, ability to unlock defences with precise passes, and knack for scoring crucial goals earned him admiration from fans, teammates, and pundits alike.

However, Dyer's time at Newcastle United was not without controversy. On 2 April 2005, he became involved in an infamous on-pitch brawl with teammate Lee Bowyer during a Premier League match against Aston Villa. The altercation, which escalated to the point where players from both teams had to intervene, resulted in both Dyer and Bowyer receiving red cards, leaving Newcastle United temporarily with only eight men.

The incident sparked widespread media attention, with disciplinary action following. Dyer received a three-match ban from the Football Association, while Bowyer was handed a longer suspension and fined heavily by the club.

Later, the courts also became involved, with Bowyer fined for his role in the incident. Despite the negative publicity, Dyer remained a key figure in Newcastle United's squad, demonstrating resilience and professionalism in the face of adversity.

Injuries began to play a more prominent role in Dyer's career starting in the 2005/06 season. A hamstring injury sidelined him for much of the early part of the season, coinciding with Newcastle

United manager Graeme Souness bringing in several new midfield players.

This combination of circumstances limited Dyer's playing opportunities, both at the club and international level. Nevertheless, he returned to first-team action on 4 February 2006 against Portsmouth and soon reasserted his importance to the team.

He scored in an FA Cup fifth-round match against Southampton on 18 February 2006, marking his first start of the season since the opening day.

By November 2006, Dyer had achieved a notable milestone by becoming the first Newcastle United player to score at the Emirates Stadium, netting a goal in a 1–1 draw against Arsenal. His versatility became increasingly apparent during this period, as he was deployed across central, right, and attacking midfield positions, often supporting forwards like Obafemi Martins. Dyer's adaptability enabled him to respond to tactical changes, enhancing his value within the squad.

Dyer's career took another turn in August 2007 when he joined West Ham United for £6,000,000 and signed a four-year deal. His debut for his new club came in a 1–0 victory over Birmingham City, but this would be one of the few positives in what became a largely frustrating and injury-plagued period of his career.

Just ten days after his debut, he suffered a catastrophic injury in a League Cup tie against Bristol Rovers, breaking his right leg in two places. This injury sidelined him for the remainder of the 2007/08 season and marked the beginning of a long period of struggle.

Despite extensive rehabilitation, Dyer's recovery was slow, prompting speculation that his professional career might be over. He eventually returned on 3 January 2009, 17 months after his injury, appearing as a substitute against Barnsley in the FA Cup.

Unfortunately, ongoing hamstring problems and recurring injuries continued to limit his appearances for West Ham United, restricting him to only 22 matches over four years.

His wages remained among the highest at the club, drawing criticism amid the team's financial difficulties. Dyer had brief opportunities to play again, including a short loan spell at his hometown club Ipswich Town in March 2011, but these were limited by fitness issues and the club's own constraints.

Following his release from West Ham, Dyer joined Queens Park Rangers on a one-year contract in July 2011. However, his misfortune with injuries continued.

On his debut, he was forced off the field after just three minutes with a foot injury, later revealed to involve ligament damage requiring surgery. This sidelined him for the entire 2011/12 season.

Despite this setback, he extended his contract with QPR, but his playing opportunities remained minimal. He scored his only goal for the club in January 2013 in an FA Cup match against West Bromwich Albion, his first in nearly six years.

Shortly after, he was released from the club, with manager Harry Redknapp stating that Dyer was not part of his plans.

Later that year, Dyer returned to Ipswich Town to maintain fitness while searching for a new club. Shortly after, he signed a short-term contract with Middlesbrough. His debut came against Ipswich Town, ending in a 4–0 defeat, but he soon regained form, scoring a league goal against Cardiff City in March and playing a full 90 minutes for the first time since 2010 against Nottingham Forest.

At the conclusion of his short-term contract, Middlesbrough opted not to extend his deal, and Dyer returned to Ipswich Town as an academy coach, effectively bringing his playing career to a close.

Throughout his career, injuries had significantly limited his potential, but he remained determined to stay involved in football through coaching and mentorship.

Internationally, Dyer represented England at various youth levels, including under-21, B team, and senior. He made his senior debut in September 1999 against Luxembourg, starting as a right back before being substituted at half-time. Despite early promise, injuries and

managerial changes affected his international career. He was not selected for the Euro 2000 squad, but he did participate in pre-tournament friendlies. He later appeared in the 2002 World Cup as a substitute in three matches, and at Euro 2004, he played for seven minutes against Switzerland.

His final appearance for England came in August 2007 in a friendly defeat to Germany. Despite limited opportunities on the international stage, Dyer's inclusion in squads for major tournaments reflected the high regard in which he was held during his peak years.

Following retirement, Dyer transitioned into coaching, beginning with Ipswich Town's academy in 2014. He became assistant manager of the under-18 team in 2018 and left in 2019 to pursue a career in first-team management. In 2020, he returned to Ipswich Town to take charge of the under-23 team while also assisting with first-team duties under Paul Cook.

He unexpectedly resigned from this role in March 2022.

Kieron Dyer's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring his first goal for Newcastle United in a 2-1 defeat against Sunderland at St James ' Park in the 1999/2000 season.

Les Ferdinand

Ferdinand, one of the most respected and prolific English strikers of his generation, began his football journey in the non-league ranks.

Born in London, he was immersed in the local football culture from a young age and developed a passion for the game that would carry him through an extraordinary career.

He initially played for Viking Sports, a small club where he began to demonstrate the talent that would become his trademark.

From there, he moved to Southall, a club competing in the lower tiers of English football.

Ferdinand made his league debut in August 1984 against Chertsey Town, marking the beginning of his journey through the professional ranks.

Even in those early days, Ferdinand's natural goal-scoring ability was apparent, and he quickly became a key player for the team.

During his time at Southall, he played an instrumental role in the club's remarkable run to the FA Vase final in 1986. Despite losing 3–0 to Halesowen Town in the final, the experience was a formative one for Ferdinand.

Competing in a national cup final, even at the non-league level, provided him with invaluable exposure to pressure situations and the intensity of competitive football.

This early success helped to attract attention from clubs higher up the footballing pyramid, and Ferdinand soon moved to Hayes. There, he truly began to flourish, scoring 20 goals in 42 appearances across all competitions, including friendlies.

His performances there demonstrated his capability to consistently find the back of the net, combining pace, strength, and clinical finishing.

Ferdinand's talent did not go unnoticed. Queens Park Rangers saw the potential in the young striker and signed him for £50,000.

This move marked the beginning of Ferdinand's professional career at a higher level, and he quickly became a player to watch.

He made his QPR debut on 20 April 1987 at the age of 20, coming on as a substitute in a league match against Coventry City, which ended in a 4–1 defeat.

Although his first season yielded only two league appearances, these early games provided him with valuable experience in top-flight English football.

The following season, Ferdinand appeared in just one league match for QPR and was loaned to Brentford for a brief spell, where he played three games.

However, it was his loan to Turkish club Beşiktaş that proved transformative. Playing abroad for the first time, Ferdinand adapted quickly to a new footballing culture and style of play, scoring 14 goals in 24 league games. He also helped Beşiktaş secure the Turkish Cup, contributing to a 3–1 aggregate victory over Fenerbahçe.

This experience not only broadened his technical and tactical understanding of the game but also gave him his first taste of silverware, reinforcing his belief that he could succeed at the highest levels.

Returning to QPR for the 1989/90 season, Ferdinand gradually established himself as a significant attacking threat. He appeared in nine First Division matches and scored his first two English league goals, signalling the beginning of a productive period at Loftus Road.

The 1990/91 season saw further progress, as he played 18 league games and scored eight goals.

His contributions were vital as QPR finished mid-table, reflecting Ferdinand's growing importance to the team.

In 1991/92, he continued to develop his reputation, scoring 10 goals in 23 games and helping QPR secure their place as founder members of the new FA Premier League, set to launch the following season.

Ferdinand's breakthrough came during the 1992/93 Premier League campaign. He established himself as one of the league's top strikers, scoring 20 goals in 37 games. His performances were a key factor in QPR finishing fifth in the league, the highest position achieved by any London club that season.

One of the defining moments of this campaign was his memorable hat-trick against Everton at Goodison Park in April 1993. This achievement was particularly poignant for Ferdinand, as he had previously faced racial abuse from Everton supporters. Scoring three goals in that match provided not only personal satisfaction but also a sense of vindication. It highlighted both his technical ability and mental resilience, qualities that would define his career.

The striker maintained his excellent form into the 1993/94 season, scoring 16 goals in 36 games and helping QPR finish ninth. Despite increasing speculation linking him with moves to Manchester United and Arsenal, he remained loyal to QPR, signing a two-year contract that summer.

In the 1994/95 season, he scored 24 goals in the Premier League, further cementing his reputation as a lethal forward. Over nearly a decade at QPR, Ferdinand played under four different managers—Jim Smith, Trevor Francis, Don Howe, and Gerry Francis—adapting to varying tactical approaches while maintaining a consistent goal-scoring record.

In 1995, Ferdinand made a high-profile move to Newcastle United for £6,000,000.

Due to a sell-on clause from his transfer to QPR, Hayes received £600,000, which they used to build a function suite named in his honour, 'The Ferdinand Suite'.

Ferdinand's transfer to Newcastle United came nearly three years after the club had previously made an offer of £3,300,000, which QPR had rejected. His arrival at St James' Park marked the beginning of the most successful club spell of his career.

At Newcastle United, Ferdinand made an immediate impact, scoring 29 goals in his first season and helping the team challenge for the Premier League title. The Geordies, under Kevin Keegan, were known for their attacking style and exhilarating play, and Ferdinand fit perfectly into this system.

As mentioned, many times in this book, the club led the league by 12 points at one stage, though Manchester United ultimately overtook them in the final three months.

In both of his seasons at Newcastle United, Ferdinand finished with runners-up medals in the Premier League.

In total, he scored 50 goals in just 84 games, forming a formidable partnership with Alan Shearer that became one of the most feared strike duos in English football. His influence at the club was such that

fans affectionately referred to him as 'Sir Les', and he remains a beloved figure on Tyneside.

Ferdinand's emotional connection to Newcastle United was evident when he returned to St James' Park as a Tottenham Hotspur player.

During a lap of honour intended to celebrate Shearer, Ferdinand became overwhelmed with emotion, breaking down in tears and struggling to wear Shearer's number 9 shirt correctly. He later returned for Shearer's testimonial, receiving another standing ovation and even scoring during the match.

His contributions to Newcastle United were formally recognised when he was inducted into the Newcastle United Foundation Hall of Fame in 2017, cementing his legacy at the club.

In 1997, Ferdinand joined Tottenham Hotspur, the club he had supported since childhood, for £6,000,000.

Injuries disrupted his early years at Spurs, but he formed an effective striking partnership with Jürgen Klinsmann.

Their goals were crucial in helping Tottenham avoid relegation during difficult seasons. Ferdinand also helped Spurs win the League Cup in 1999, defeating Leicester City 1–0 in the final at Wembley.

Over the next few seasons, he gradually increased his goal-scoring output, contributing 10 goals in the 2000/01 season and 15 in the 2001/02 campaign. He also scored the 10,000th goal in Premier League history during a 4–0 victory over Fulham in December 2001.

Later in his career, Ferdinand played for West Ham United, Leicester City, Bolton Wanderers, and Reading.

Despite being in the latter stages of his career, he remained a valuable player, scoring 14 Premier League goals for Leicester City at 37. He also scored a memorable goal for Bolton Wanderers against Manchester United in the final minutes of a match, nearly securing a win before United equalised in injury time. Ferdinand's career concluded with a brief non-playing stint at Watford, retiring a few months shy of his 40th birthday.

Internationally, Ferdinand made his England debut in February 1993 against San Marino, scoring in a 6–0 victory at Wembley.

He was part of England's squads for Euro 1996 and the 1998 World Cup, although he did not feature in any tournament matches. Over the course of his international career, he earned 17 caps and scored five goals.

After retiring, Ferdinand transitioned to coaching and football administration.

In 2008, he joined Tottenham Hotspur's coaching staff to work with the strikers, a role he held until 2014.

He then became head of football operations at Queens Park Rangers before being appointed director of football in February 2015. Ferdinand held this position for eight years, stepping down in June 2023 after overseeing a period of significant development and stability at the club.

Les Ferdinand's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring three goals against Wimbledon in a 6-1 win at St James' Park in the 1995/96 season.

David Ginola

Ginola began his senior career with Sporting Toulon in 1985 at the age of 18, making 14 appearances in his first season and becoming a regular by 1986.

He moved to Racing Paris in 1988 and then to Brest in 1990, where his flamboyant style of play began to attract attention. In 1991, he played a key role in Brest's 3–2 victory over Paris Saint-Germain.

Ginola joined Paris Saint-Germain in January 1992 and quickly became a fan's favourite for his elegant first touch and pace.

In the 1992/93 season, he won the Coupe de France, scoring in the final, and helped the team reach the UEFA Cup semi-finals. He was named French Footballer of the Year at the end of 1993.

In 1993/94, PSG won the league title, with Ginola contributing 13 goals in 38 matches, making him the club's top scorer.

The following season, PSG won another Coupe de France and the first Coupe de la Ligue.

At the same time, Ginola played a standout role in the Champions League, helping the team knock out Barcelona before losing to AC Milan. A proposed transfer to Barcelona fell through due to foreign player restrictions.

In 1995, Ginola moved to Newcastle United for £2,500,000. He made his debut against Coventry City and scored his first league goal against Sheffield Wednesday.

In his first season, Newcastle United finished second in the Premier League, narrowly missing out on the title. He almost joined Barcelona in 1996, but the transfer was blocked. Newcastle United again finished second that season, and after Kevin Keegan resigned mid-season, Ginola fell out of favour.

Ginola signed for Tottenham Hotspur in July 1997 for £2,500,000, joining former teammate Les Ferdinand.

In the 1998/99 season, he scored a memorable FA Cup goal against Barnsley and won both the PFA Players' Player of the Year and FWA Footballer of the Year awards. He also won the 1999 League Cup with Tottenham Hotspur and was later inducted into the club's Hall of Fame in 2008.

In July 2000, Ginola joined Aston Villa for £3,000,000. He responded to criticism about his fitness by revealing his toned physique after scoring a goal.

In January 2002, he was banned for two matches and fined for stamping on an opponent. He joined Everton in February 2002, making five appearances before retiring in May after his contract was not renewed.

Internationally, Ginola played 17 times for France. He was named best player at the 1987 Toulon Tournament with the under-21 team. He is remembered for a critical mistake in a 1993 World Cup qualifying match against Bulgaria, which led to France failing to qualify for the finals. Gérard Houllier famously blamed Ginola, calling him the ‘assassin of French football’. He was mainly used as a substitute under Aimé Jacquet and was never selected for Euro 1996, playing his last match for France in 1995.

In 2012, a French court dismissed Ginola's defamation case against Houllier.

Ginola is remembered for his flamboyant style, pace, and skill on the field, as well as his charismatic personality off it.

He remains a celebrated figure at PSG, Newcastle United, and Tottenham Hotspur.

David Ginola’s Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring his first Newcastle United goal in a 2-0 win at Sheffield Wednesday in the 1995/96 season.

Shay Given

Given was born in Lifford, County Donegal, Ireland, and began his football career with local amateur side Lifford Celtic, gaining attention at age 14.

He trained with Celtic’s youth team in 1991 and signed with the club a year later, but never made a first-team appearance.

Shay moved to Blackburn Rovers in 1994, where he was primarily a backup to Tim Flowers.

He had loan spells at Swindon Town and Sunderland, during which he performed well and actually helped Sunderland win promotion to the Premier League.

He made his Blackburn Rovers first-team debut in 1996 but requested a transfer due to limited playing time.

In 1997, Given joined Newcastle United for £1,500,000.

He became the first-choice goalkeeper, competing with Steve Harper.

Given played in two FA Cup finals, both of which Newcastle United lost, and set club records for European appearances. He played every Premier League match over multiple seasons, with highlights including key penalty saves and overcoming injuries, such as a bowel tear in 2006. The goalkeeper left Newcastle United in 2009 after making over 400 appearances.

He was signed by Manchester City in February 2009 for £6,000,000, made a strong debut, and earned recognition for his penalty-saving abilities.

He was named Premier League Goalkeeper of the Noughties, but later lost his place to Joe Hart due to injuries and squad changes.

In 2011, he joined Aston Villa on a five-year contract. He played into his late 30s but suffered a hamstring injury in 2011 and eventually lost his first-team place to Brad Guzan.

He captained Villa during their run to the 2015 FA Cup final. He also spent time on loan at Middlesbrough, keeping ten clean sheets in 16 league games.

Shay signed for Stoke City in 2015 as backup to Jack Butland, occasionally playing when injuries arose. He was released in 2017 and retired from professional football on 21 April 2018 at the age of 42.

Internationally, Given made his Republic of Ireland debut in 1996 and went on to earn 134 caps. He played in the 2002 FIFA World Cup and Euro 2012 and was part of the Euro 2016 squad. He retired from international football twice, first in 2012, then finally in 2016, becoming Ireland's longest-serving player and donating all his international playing fees to charity.

Given was known for being agile, athletic, courageous, and an excellent shot-stopper with strong reflexes and anticipation. He was occasionally criticised for dealing with crosses due to his height.

After retiring, Given became a coach at Derby County from 2018 to 2021, initially as a goalkeeping coach and later as first-team coach. He was part of an interim coaching quartet with Wayne Rooney before leaving due to the club's financial constraints.

Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Making his Champions League debut against Barcelona in 1997.

Steve Harper

Harper began his career in 1993, signing for Newcastle United from his local club, Seaham Red Star.

Over the next several years, he was constantly on the outside of the starting lineup, serving as back-up to stars like Pavel Srníček, Shaka Hislop, and most notably, Shay Given.

This lengthy apprenticeship necessitated multiple loan spells at clubs including Bradford City, Gateshead, Stockport County, Hartlepool United, and Huddersfield Town. By the time he made his first-team debut for Newcastle United as a substitute in 1998, he had achieved the rare feat of playing in all five top divisions of the English game.

Despite his backup status, Harper had several notable moments in the spotlight. Under manager Ruud Gullit, he started in the 1999 FA Cup Final, which Newcastle United lost to Manchester United.

Later, he gained acclaim for his performances in the UEFA Champions League, most notably keeping a clean sheet in a crucial 1–0 victory over Juventus in 2002. His talent sparked occasional interest from major clubs like Liverpool.

Still, he consistently chose to remain at St James' Park, often signing new contracts even after handing in transfer requests due to a lack of regular first-team football.

He even famously appeared as a striker in a friendly against Celtic in 2007, showcasing his good humour and commitment to the squad.

Harper's ultimate reward for his patience came in January 2009 when Shay Given transferred to Manchester City. At 33 years old and after nearly 16 years at the club, Harper finally became the undisputed first-choice goalkeeper. He rose to the occasion during the 2009/10 Championship season, putting in numerous fine performances that helped secure the club's promotion back to the Premier League.

He set a club record by keeping 21 clean sheets in 37 matches, later calling the title victory the highest point of his career.

However, Tim Krul's emergence led to Harper losing his spot again, prompting a brief loan spell at Brighton & Hove Albion in 2011.

His remarkable tenure with Newcastle United concluded in May 2013, after 20 years of service. He captained the team in his final match against Arsenal.

Following his release, he continued his playing career for two more seasons as a back-up keeper at Hull City, and then finished his professional career with a brief spell at his boyhood club, Sunderland, in 2016.

In recognition of his loyalty, Newcastle United honoured him with a testimonial match against an A.C. Milan XI in 2013, which successfully raised funds for charity.

Harper is currently the head of the Newcastle United Academy.

Steve Harper's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Making his debut as a half-time substitute for Shay Given in a 3-1 win against Wimbledon at St James' Park in the season 1998/99.

Alan Shearer

Shearer was promoted to the Southampton first team after spending two years with the youth squad.

He made his professional debut for them on 26 March 1988, coming on as a substitute in a First Division fixture at Chelsea, before making national headlines in his full debut at The Dell two weeks later. He scored a hat-trick, helping the team to a 4–2 victory against Arsenal, becoming the youngest player at 17 years and 240 days to score three goals in the top division, breaking Jimmy Greaves' 30-year-old record.

Shearer ended the 1987/88 season with three goals in five games and was rewarded with his first professional contract.

Despite this strong start, the striker was gradually eased into the first team, making 10 goalless appearances the following season.

Known for his strength, which helped him hold the ball and create opportunities for teammates, Shearer played as a lone striker between Rod Wallace and Matt Le Tissier, scoring three goals in 26 appearances in the 1989/90 season and four in 36 games the following year.

His consistent performances led fans to vote him Southampton's Player of the Year for 1991.

In 1991, Shearer starred for England's under-21 team at the Toulon Tournament, scoring seven goals in four games.

During the 1991/92 season, his 13 goals in 41 appearances for Southampton earned him an England call-up, and he scored on his debut.

Media speculation linked him with moves to Manchester United and Liverpool, but he chose to stay with Southampton until the end of the season.

In July 1992, he joined Blackburn Rovers for £3,600,000, a British record fee at the time, with David Speedie moving the other way.

Over four years at Southampton, Shearer made 158 appearances and scored 43 goals.

At Blackburn Rovers, Shearer made an immediate impact, scoring twice on the opening weekend of the first Premier League season in August 1992. He suffered a serious knee injury that kept him out for half the season, but still scored 16 goals in 21 games. Returning to full fitness in 1993/94, he scored 31 goals in 40 games as Blackburn Rovers finished Premier League runners-up, earning the Football Writers' Association Footballer of the Year award.

The following season, he formed a prolific partnership with Chris Sutton, known as 'the SAS', scoring 34 goals as Blackburn Rovers won the 1994/95 Premier League title. His powerful and clinical finishing made him one of Europe's top strikers, and he was named PFA Players' Player of the Year in 1995.

In 1995/96, Shearer again finished as the league's top scorer with 31 goals as Blackburn Rovers ended seventh. By then, he had scored over 100 Premier League goals and 130 in all competitions for the club.

In the summer of 1996, following a stellar Euro 96 campaign where he finished as the tournament's top scorer with five goals, Shearer joined his boyhood club Newcastle United for a world record £15,000,000.

Shearer made an immediate impact at Newcastle United, scoring 25 goals in his first season and helping them finish Premier League runners-up again.

Injuries hampered his second season, limiting him to two goals, but he returned to form, scoring regularly and eventually becoming club captain.

Under Bobby Robson, Shearer rediscovered his best form, scoring five goals in one game against Sheffield Wednesday and leading Newcastle United to Champions League qualification. He remained the club's talisman, combining leadership and consistent goalscoring well into his thirties.

After initially announcing plans to retire in 2005, Shearer was persuaded to play one more season, during which he broke Jackie Milburn's long-standing club record, becoming Newcastle United's all-time top scorer with 206 goals.

A knee injury late in the 2005/06 season ended his playing career. His testimonial against Celtic in May 2006 drew a capacity crowd at St James' Park, where he scored a farewell penalty and received an emotional send-off.

Shearer's England career began in 1990 with the under-21s, scoring 13 goals in 11 games.

He made his senior debut in 1992, scoring against France. After a series of injuries affected his early international career, Euro 96 established him as one of Europe's top forwards, as he led the tournament in scoring and helped England reach the semi-finals.

Appointed England captain in 1996, he led the team through the 1998 World Cup, scoring twice, and retired from international football after Euro 2000 with 30 goals in 63 appearances.

Shearer was widely regarded as one of the greatest English strikers of all time. A classic centre-forward, he combined strength, aerial ability, and a powerful shot, making him deadly in and around the box. He was known for his leadership, composure, and penalty-taking prowess, scoring 56 times from the spot in his career, including 45 for Newcastle United.

Despite his physical style sometimes attracting criticism, his consistency, determination, and professionalism earned him respect across football.

After retiring, Shearer initially declined coaching roles, preferring time away from the game.

In 2009, he returned to Newcastle United as caretaker manager for the final eight games of the season, attempting to save the club from relegation. Despite his efforts, the club were relegated, and Shearer was not retained as permanent manager.

His legacy remains immense, both as the Premier League's all-time top scorer and as one of England's most admired footballing figures.

Alan Shearer's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Joining his favourite boyhood club in the summer of 1996 for a world record fee of £15,000,000.

Gary Speed

Speed began his career with Leeds United in June 1988, signing professional terms shortly after leaving school.

He started as Peter Swan's boot boy, earning the respect of the senior players through his work ethic and humility.

Leeds United manager Howard Wilkinson noticed him playing for the youth team and was impressed by his composure and intelligence, even when deployed at left back.

He promoted him to the senior squad, and Speed made his first-team debut at age nineteen in a goalless draw against Oldham Athletic in the Second Division.

He soon established himself as one of the most versatile players at the club, capable of playing in nearly every outfield position, though he was most often used on the left side of midfield. Speed became an integral part of the team as Leeds United progressed under Wilkinson.

His tireless running, strong tackling, and ability to score important goals made him a key contributor.

During the 1991/92 season, he played in 41 of 42 league matches.

He scored seven goals as Leeds United won the First Division championship, the final top-flight title before the creation of the Premier League.

That championship-winning midfield, consisting of Speed, Gordon Strachan, Gary McAllister, and David Batty, is still remembered as one of the finest in English football history.

Eddie Gray, a former Leeds United player and manager, called it one of the greatest midfield line-ups of the modern era. Wilkinson named Speed the club's player of the season, and the Welshman became a fan favourite.

In the following season, Speed continued to impress. In the 1992/93 UEFA Champions League campaign, Leeds United were drawn against VfB Stuttgart.

After losing 3–0 in Germany, Leeds United won 4–1 in the second leg at Elland Road, with Speed scoring a stunning left-foot volley that he later described as the best goal of his career.

Although Leeds United initially went out on away goals, the club was reinstated when VfB Stuttgart was found to have fielded an ineligible player. Speed's performances earned him a place in the Professional Footballers' Association Team of the Year, confirming his status as one of the best midfielders in England.

Speed remained with Leeds United until 1996, appearing in over 300 matches and scoring 57 goals. He featured in the 1996 League Cup final, though Leeds United lost to Aston Villa. After eight successful seasons at Elland Road that same year, he joined Everton for £3,500,000.

Signing for Everton was a dream come true for Speed, as he had supported the club as a child.

He made an immediate impact, scoring on his debut against Newcastle United and becoming a driving force in midfield.

His strong all-around performances earned him the Everton Player of the Year award.

During his first season, he was also the joint top scorer alongside Duncan Ferguson with 11 goals.

In the summer of 1997, Howard Kendall returned as Everton manager and appointed Speed as club captain.

However, by early 1998, relations between player and manager had deteriorated. Speed played his final game for Everton on 18 January

1998, scoring in a 3–1 victory over Chelsea. He was left out of the next match and, shortly afterwards, sold to Newcastle United for £5,500,000.

The reasons for his departure were never fully revealed. Speed said, ‘You know why I’m leaving, but I can’t explain myself publicly because it would damage the good name of Everton Football Club, and I’m not prepared to do that’.

Speed joined Newcastle United in February 1998 under manager Kenny Dalglish. He made his debut the following day and quickly became an essential figure in the team. He helped the Geordies reach the FA Cup Final that season, though they lost 2–0 to Arsenal.

The following season, he appeared in another FA Cup Final, this time against Manchester United, which Newcastle United again lost.

Speed was admired for his leadership and consistency during his time at Newcastle United. He scored in an 8–0 win over Sheffield Wednesday in 1999, a match famous for Alan Shearer’s five goals. He also played an essential role in their UEFA Champions League campaign in 2002/03, scoring in a 2–1 win over Dynamo Kyiv.

After six years at St James’ Park, he joined Bolton Wanderers in 2004 for £750,000.

At his new club, managed by Sam Allardyce, Speed continued to display his trademark fitness and work ethic.

In December 2006, he became the first player in Premier League history to make 500 appearances. His influence extended beyond the pitch; he briefly served as player-coach in 2007, though he soon returned to playing full-time.

Speed scored in every Premier League season from its inception in 1992 until 2007, an achievement later matched only by Ryan Giggs.

His experience and professionalism were highly valued at Bolton Wanderers, where he served as a mentor to younger players.

In January 2008, he joined Sheffield United on loan and made the move permanent soon after.

He played regularly and even captained the side on several occasions.

Despite suffering a serious back injury that eventually ended his playing career, Speed remained involved with the club as a coach. His final professional appearance came in 2008, bringing to a close a remarkable career spanning over two decades.

At international level, Speed was equally influential. He made his debut for Wales in May 1990 in a friendly against Costa Rica and earned 85 caps, captaining the side 44 times. He scored seven goals for his country and became Wales's most capped outfield player, a record later surpassed by Chris Gunter.

His leadership, discipline, and fitness made him a cornerstone of the national side throughout the 1990s and early 2000s.

Speed retired from international football in 2004 after a 3–2 defeat to Poland in a World Cup qualifier.

The midfielder was known for his versatility, tactical intelligence, and professionalism. He could play as a left midfielder, central midfielder, or left-back, though he was most comfortable on the left side of midfield, where he combined defensive awareness with attacking power. He was strong in the air and known for his powerful headers and ability to score spectacular goals. Teammates described him as hardworking, honest, and self-critical, someone who led by example rather than words. He was also known for his exceptional fitness, rarely missing a game and playing at the top level well into his late thirties.

After retiring as a player, Speed moved into management. In August 2010, he was appointed manager of Sheffield United on a three-year contract following Kevin Blackwell's dismissal.

Although his time at the club was brief, it demonstrated his intelligence and calm authority.

In December 2010, the Football Association of Wales approached him about taking over as national team manager. He accepted the offer and became their new manager on 14 December 2010.

Speed's impact on the Welsh national team was immediate. He modernised the setup, focusing on professionalism, tactical discipline, and belief. He appointed the young midfielder Aaron Ramsey as captain, making him the youngest in Welsh history.

Although his first few results were mixed, the team began to improve rapidly.

Wales rose from an all-time low of 117th in the FIFA world rankings to 45th within less than a year. His final match as manager, a 4–1 victory over Norway in November 2011, showcased the attacking, confident style he was developing. Many players who later reached the semi-finals of Euro 2016 under Chris Coleman credited Speed with laying the foundation for that success.

Off the pitch, Speed was widely respected for his character. He married his fiancée, Louise, in 1996, and they had two sons, Thomas and Edward.

Friends, teammates, and colleagues consistently described him as humble, generous, and down-to-earth. He was known for taking the time for everyone, from young players to fans, and was admired for his modesty despite his success.

In 2010, he was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) for his services to football.

On 26 November 2011, Gary Speed appeared on the BBC's Football Focus programme, where presenter Dan Walker described him as being in good spirits.

He later met up with his close friend Alan Shearer to watch Newcastle United play Manchester United at Old Trafford before returning home to Cheshire that evening.

The next morning, 27 November 2011, his wife Louise found his body in the garage of their home in Huntington. Emergency services were called, but he was pronounced dead at the scene.

Police confirmed that there were no suspicious circumstances, and reports soon indicated that his death was a suicide by hanging. He was 42 years old.

The news shocked the football world, and tributes poured in from across the sport and beyond.

The Football Association of Wales confirmed his death and expressed deep sorrow. Former teammates such as Alan Shearer, Ryan Giggs, Robbie Savage, and Craig Bellamy shared emotional messages. Prime Minister David Cameron and opposition leader Ed Miliband also sent condolences.

UEFA president Michel Platini and FIFA president Sepp Blatter paid tribute, with flags at FIFA headquarters flown at half-mast.

On the day of his death, Swansea City played Aston Villa in the Premier League. The scheduled silence before the match became a spontaneous minute's applause as fans chanted his name.

Players and managers were visibly affected, with former teammates Shay Given and Jermaine Jenas seen in tears.

Similar tributes were held across the country that week. At Leeds United, Everton, Newcastle United, Bolton Wanderers, and Sheffield United, flowers, shirts, and scarves were laid in his memory. His father, Roger, and his sons attended several of these events.

A memorial international match between Wales and Costa Rica was played in February 2012, chosen to mirror Speed's debut fixture. Wales lost 1–0, but the game served as a celebration of his life and career.

In later years, further tributes followed. Fans at Leeds United and Everton regularly honoured him with chants, and in 2022, Leeds United supporters began the Gary Speed Walk, a 92-mile charity trek to raise awareness of men's mental health. His mother, Carol, saw off the walkers at the start.

The inquest into his death, held in January 2012, recorded a narrative verdict. The coroner stated that there was not enough evidence to determine whether Speed had intended to take his own life, suggesting that his death might have been the result of a moment of despair or a gesture gone wrong. It was revealed that he and his wife had argued the previous night, but Louise told the inquest that

they had also discussed their future positively and that her husband had seemed excited about what lay ahead.

Speed's death prompted widespread reflection within football about mental health, pressure, and wellbeing.

Teammates and friends described him as the last person they would have expected to suffer in silence.

In 2018, his widow revealed that when he was seventeen, he had written a letter expressing feelings of depression, showing that his struggles may have begun long before his public life.

Gary Speed's influence on Welsh football remains profound. His leadership and vision transformed the national team's mentality, instilling professionalism and belief.

Players such as Gareth Bale, Aaron Ramsey, and Joe Allen have often credited him for changing the culture of Welsh football.

The Wales team's success at Euro 2016 and their qualification for later tournaments were widely seen as part of his legacy.

As a player, he was among his generation's most consistent and respected professionals. With over 850 senior appearances and more than 100 goals across a 22-year career, he was admired for his ability and attitude.

He was a model of dedication, sportsmanship, and quiet leadership, setting a standard for others to follow.

Gary Speed's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring his first Newcastle United goal in a 3-1 FA Cup 6th Round tie at St James' Park.

Steve Watson

Watson began his professional career with Newcastle United, joining one of English football's most iconic clubs at a time when the team was undergoing significant changes.

He made his first-team debut as a substitute on 10 November 1990 against Wolverhampton Wanderers. At just 17, he became the youngest player ever to appear for Newcastle United.

Making a first-team debut at such a young age was a clear indication of both his talent and the trust placed in him by the coaching staff.

He featured 24 times in his debut season, showcasing his versatility and readiness to compete at a professional level.

The season was challenging for Newcastle United, who were struggling in the Second Division at the time. Still, Watson's ability to adapt to the rigours of professional football marked him as a promising prospect.

The 1991/92 season saw Kevin Keegan return to Newcastle United as manager, bringing with him a vision of attacking, entertaining football.

Watson played a prominent role during this period, helping the team to avoid relegation to the Third Division and establishing himself as a reliable, all-around player.

Over the course of his seven years at Newcastle United, Watson wore every shirt number from 2 to 11 at least once, highlighting his adaptability and the manager's confidence in his ability to perform in multiple positions.

His versatility allowed him to contribute both defensively and offensively, fitting seamlessly into Keegan's style of play, which demanded energy, technical skill, and tactical awareness from every member of the squad.

One of the key moments of his time at Newcastle United came in the 1998 FA Cup Final, where he appeared as a 77th-minute substitute.

Despite the team's 2–0 loss to Arsenal, Watson's inclusion in such a high-profile match underscored his importance to the squad and the club's faith in his abilities.

In October 1998, Watson signed for Aston Villa for a fee of £4,000,000, marking a significant step in his career as he moved to a Premier League club with ambitions of competing at the highest level.

His time at Villa saw him continue to demonstrate his versatility, although goals were rare; he scored once for the club, in a 4–0 League Cup win over Southampton on 1 December 1999. While at Aston Villa, Watson faced the challenge of adapting to a new team, manager, and tactical setup, yet his professionalism and consistent performances allowed him to remain a valued squad member.

Watson's next career move came in July 2000 when he joined Everton on a five-year contract for a transfer fee of £2,500,000. There, he faced both opportunities and challenges. Manager Walter Smith occasionally used him as a striker alongside Tomasz Radzinski due to injuries in the squad, harking back to a position Watson had played earlier in his career before settling into defence.

Although injuries frequently disrupted his time at Goodison Park, he had periods where he made a significant impact on the first team.

One of the highlights of his Everton career came on 28 September 2003, when he scored a hat-trick against Leeds United, becoming the first Everton player to do so in any competition since 2000. This remarkable achievement demonstrated not only his goal-scoring ability but also his capacity to perform under pressure, despite being primarily considered a defensive player.

In July 2005, Watson joined West Bromwich Albion on a free transfer after rejecting a new one-year contract with Everton.

His move to The Hawthorns marked a new chapter in his career, where he aimed to provide experience and leadership to a squad competing in the Premier League.

Watson made his debut for the club on 13 August 2005 in a goalless draw against Manchester City. He scored his only goal for West Bromwich Albion on 2 January 2006 in a 2–1 home defeat to Aston Villa, illustrating his knack for contributing crucial moments even from a primarily defensive position.

Despite not being a prolific goal scorer, he was valued for his tactical awareness, work ethic, and ability to organise the defence.

In February 2007, Watson joined Sheffield Wednesday on loan due to limited opportunities at his home club.

His impact at Wednesday was immediate; he made his debut the following day in a 1–1 draw against Burnley and quickly became a key figure in the team.

Prior to his arrival, Sheffield Wednesday had endured a difficult period, losing five matches in a row. With Watson in the squad, the team won six, drew four, and lost only once, demonstrating his influence on both results and morale.

His performances earned him a permanent move in July 2007. He scored his first goal for the club on 6 November, an equaliser in the fifth minute of stoppage time in a 1–1 draw against West Bromwich Albion, highlighting his ability to deliver in crucial moments.

Watson's leadership qualities became increasingly important during his time at Sheffield Wednesday.

He succeeded Lee Bullen as club captain for the 2008/09 season, taking responsibility for off-the-field matters while Richard Wood remained the on-field captain. This division of leadership duties underscored Watson's role as a stabilising presence within the squad, providing guidance, support, and mentorship to younger players.

One of the standout moments of his time at Wednesday was scoring the winning goal in the Steel City derby against Sheffield United on 19 October 2008. His volleyed lob over the goalkeeper, Paddy Kenny, secured a 1–0 victory, cementing his place in the hearts of Wednesday supporters.

Unfortunately, long-term injuries ultimately led to his release in May 2009, after which he retired from professional football.

Following his retirement, Watson transitioned into coaching, beginning with a development coaching role at Huddersfield Town in November 2010, where he worked alongside former Newcastle United teammate Lee Clark.

His experience as a versatile player and team leader provided valuable insights for developing younger players and helping them navigate the challenges of professional football.

In August 2012, Watson joined Birmingham City as a coach in the Championship.

He remained in this role until October 2014, when he and Clark were dismissed.

In July 2016, Watson took on the position of assistant manager at Macclesfield Town in the National League, furthering his coaching experience and gaining exposure to the demands of managing a senior football team.

Watson's managerial career began in October 2017 when he was appointed manager of Gateshead in the National League.

This role provided him with the opportunity to implement his own tactical philosophy and demonstrate his ability to motivate and manage players at a senior level.

In January 2019, he took over as manager of York City in the National League North, succeeding Sam Collins with the team in 15th place in the table. Watson brought in Micky Cummins as his assistant, continuing a working relationship that had begun at Gateshead.

His time at York City saw notable success; he was awarded the National League North Manager of the Month for October 2021 following three wins from four league games.

He left the club in November 2021, having established a reputation for improving team performance and fostering a positive, results-driven environment.

In December 2021, Watson was appointed manager of Chester in the National League North, initially on a contract until the end of the 2021/22 season.

He guided the team through the remainder of the season before leaving by mutual consent at the conclusion of the campaign.

Watson continued his managerial journey by joining Darlington as manager on 31 December 2023, initially on a contract until the end of the season.

His leadership proved crucial in steering the club clear of relegation, and he and assistant manager Terry Mitchell subsequently signed two-year contract extensions. For his impressive work in guiding the team to safety, Watson was named National League North Manager of the Month for April 2024, a testament to his ability to motivate, organise, and achieve results under pressure.

At the time of writing, Watson is still the manager of Darlington.

Steve Watson's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Becoming Newcastle United's youngest ever player when he featured against Wolves in the 1990/91 season, taking over the mantle from Neil McDonald.

Lewis Miley took the record from McDonald in the 2023/24 season.

Chapter Five

A Brief History of the 2000s

At the turn of the millennium, Newcastle United were a club searching for stability and renewed direction. The late 1990s had seen flashes of brilliance under Kevin Keegan and then Kenny Dalglish, but by 1999, the excitement of ‘The Entertainers era’ had faded.

Sir Bobby Robson brought not only an experienced hand but also a deep connection to the club and its people.

Born in County Durham and a lifelong Newcastle United fan, he immediately set about rebuilding both the squad and the spirit of Tyneside football.

The early years of the 2000s under Robson were among the most positive of Newcastle United’s modern history. The team combined attacking flair with youthful energy, driven by talented players such as Craig Bellamy, Kieron Dyer, Jermaine Jenas, and Laurent Robert, together with seasoned leaders like Alan Shearer and Shay Given.

Robson’s influence restored confidence and professionalism to a side that had underachieved in the years following Keegan’s departure.

He insisted on attacking play, pace on the flanks, and the ability to excite the crowd — qualities that resonated deeply with Newcastle United supporters.

The 2001/02 season marked a significant turning point. Newcastle United, playing their best football for years, finished fourth in the

Premier League, securing qualification for the UEFA Champions League for the first time since 1997.

This achievement was remarkable given the competitive strength of English football at the time, with clubs like Arsenal, Manchester United, and Liverpool dominating the top of the table. Robson's Newcastle United became known for their ability to outscore opponents, especially at St James' Park, where the crowd once again felt part of something special.

Alan Shearer, still prolific despite injuries, led the line with trademark determination, while Bellamy's pace and Robert's creativity added dynamism to the attack.

The following season, 2002/03, was arguably the peak of Robson's reign. Newcastle United finished third in the Premier League, ahead of Chelsea and Liverpool, and their return to the Champions League brought memorable nights on Tyneside.

After losing their first three matches in the initial group stage, Newcastle United staged an extraordinary comeback, defeating Juventus, Dynamo Kyiv, and Feyenoord to progress. Though they eventually fell short in the second group phase, the campaign rekindled the city's sense of pride and belief that Newcastle United could once again compete among Europe's elite.

In the 2003/04 season, Newcastle United continued to perform respectably, finishing fifth in the league and reaching the semi-finals of the UEFA Cup. However, cracks were beginning to appear.

Some of Robson's trusted players struggled with form and fitness, and internal tensions began to surface. The club's ambitious chairman, Freddie Shepherd, had grown impatient with what he perceived as stagnation, while Robson's relationship with certain players became strained.

Despite his record of consistent top-five finishes and the revitalisation he had brought, Robson was dismissed in August 2004 after a disappointing start to the new campaign.

The decision was widely condemned by supporters and pundits alike, many of whom viewed it as short-sighted and disrespectful to one of English football's most respected figures.

Following Robson's departure, Newcastle United entered a prolonged period of instability that would define the rest of the decade. Graeme Souness was appointed as his replacement in September 2004.

The former Liverpool and Blackburn Rovers manager brought a disciplinarian approach, aiming to restore order to a dressing room he believed lacked focus. His tenure began with optimism, and he guided the team to the quarter-finals of the UEFA Cup in 2004/05. However, his strict style clashed with several senior players, and performances in the league remained inconsistent.

One of the defining moments of this period came in 2005 when Newcastle United signed England striker Michael Owen from Real Madrid for a club-record fee of £16,800,000. The move was seen as a statement of ambition, a sign that Newcastle United still aspired to challenge at the top level.

Unfortunately, Owen's time at the club was marred by injuries, including a serious knee ligament tear suffered at the 2006 World Cup that kept him out for much of the following season.

His absence, coupled with Alan Shearer's advancing years, left the team short of firepower.

Alan Shearer himself continued to lead by example on the pitch until his retirement at the end of the 2005/06 season. Having joined his boyhood club in 1996, Shearer ended his career as Newcastle United's all-time leading scorer with 206 goals.

His final season was marked by his commitment and leadership, even as the team struggled for consistency. The striker's departure proved to be the end of an era — a loss not only of goals but of identity and authority within the squad.

After Souness was sacked in early 2006, Glenn Roeder was promoted from within the club to manage the side on a caretaker basis.

Roeder steadied the team and led them to a respectable seventh-place finish, earning qualification for the UEFA Intertoto Cup, which they went on to win that summer.

Yet Roeder's success proved short-lived; the following season, injuries and poor form returned, and he resigned in 2007 amid growing frustration among supporters and players alike.

In 2007, businessman Mike Ashley purchased the club from Freddie Shepherd, promising a fresh start and a more modern approach to management.

Initially, fans welcomed Ashley's enthusiasm and accessibility; he attended matches in the stands, wearing replica shirts and mingling with supporters. However, the goodwill soon faded as his decisions came under scrutiny.

Ashley appointed Sam Allardyce, who had built a reputation for overachieving with Bolton Wanderers, as manager in the summer of 2007.

Allardyce's pragmatic and physical style of football, though effective elsewhere, did not sit well with Newcastle United's fanbase, who had long cherished attacking, expressive play. Results were underwhelming, and by January 2008, Allardyce was dismissed after just half a season in charge.

In a move that stirred nostalgia and excitement, Ashley reappointed Kevin Keegan, the beloved former manager who had led Newcastle United during their exhilarating mid-1990s run—'The return of the Messiah', as fans called him—reigniting hope. Keegan's side showed flashes of his trademark attacking style, and his presence seemed to reconnect the club to its romantic past.

Yet behind the scenes, tensions between Keegan and the club's new management structure quickly escalated.

Disagreements over player recruitment and transfer policy led to Keegan's resignation in September 2008, sparking outrage among supporters and damaging Ashley's relationship with the fanbase beyond repair.

Following Keegan's departure, Newcastle United spiralled further into crisis.

Joe Kinnear was appointed as interim manager; a decision met with disbelief by fans and the media.

His tenure was chaotic and marred by poor results and controversial media outbursts.

As the 2008/09 season unfolded, instability both on and off the pitch left the team battling near the bottom of the table. Injuries, inconsistent performances, and a lack of leadership contributed to a sense of inevitability about the club's decline.

In April 2009, with Newcastle United in serious danger of relegation, Alan Shearer was appointed interim manager for the final eight games of the season. His return was intended to inspire a late revival, but the task proved too great.

Despite moments of fight and passion, the team failed to secure enough points to stay up.

On 24 May 2009, a 1–0 defeat to Aston Villa confirmed Newcastle United's relegation from the Premier League. It was their first drop from the top flight since 1992 and marked a devastating conclusion to a decade that had begun with hope and ambition.

The relegation was a sobering moment for a club that prided itself on its stature and loyal support.

The contrast between the early years under Sir Bobby Robson and the chaos of the late 2000s could not have been greater. In just nine years, Newcastle United had gone from Champions League nights against Europe's best to the Championship, burdened by managerial turnover, ownership disputes, and the erosion of stability. All very sad, if you think about it.

Chapter Six

Ten Memorable Players from the 2000s

Warren Barton

Barton started his league career with Maidstone United after joining from Dagenham.

His move to the Football League proper came on June 7, 1990, when he signed for First Division side Wimbledon for £300,000. This sum was, at the time, the largest transfer fee ever paid for a Fourth Division player.

Barton walked straight into the Wimbledon first team, missing just one league game in the 1990/91 season as the team finished seventh. He remained a regular fixture, playing under managers including Ray Harford, Peter Withe, and Joe Kinnear. Initially playing at right-back, he had his most successful spell with the 'Crazy Gang' after a shift to midfield, where his accurate passing became instrumental in setting up goals. Barton was a vital part of the team that maintained Premiership status year after year despite having one of the smallest budgets in the top flight, and he helped them achieve a historic best finish of sixth in 1994.

In 1995, his consistent high performance led to his transfer to the pinnacle of his career on June 5, when he joined Newcastle United for £4,000,000. This fee made him the most expensive defender in English football history, joining Kevin Keegan's charismatic squad.

He made his debut on August 19, 1995. He played 31 times that season as Newcastle United famously built a ten-point lead at the top

of the Premier League by Christmas before being overhauled by Manchester United, settling for a second-place finish. He helped the Magpies achieve a second successive runner-up finish the following year and reach the FA Cup Final in 1998 and 1999.

While his first-team opportunities were briefly limited by competition from Steve Watson, he returned to the right-back position under Ruud Gullit and later Bobby Robson. He remained at the club until 2002.

Barton lost his first-team place at Newcastle United to Aaron Hughes during the 2001/02 season, leading to his transfer to Derby County for £200,000 on February 1, 2002.

Although he played in the final 14 games of the season, he could not prevent Derby County's relegation from the Premier League. He remained the first-choice right-back in the First Division the following season, but found himself out of favour under new manager George Burley.

In October 2003, he joined Division Two side Queens Park Rangers on a free transfer.

Still, he played only five first-team games before returning to a struggling Wimbledon (which later relocated to Milton Keynes and became Milton Keynes Dons) on February 27, 2004. He made just five final appearances for the club as they were relegated at the bottom of the table.

Barton concluded his senior playing career by dropping into non-League football with Dagenham & Redbridge in the Conference National, for whom he made just two appearances before retiring on May 31, 2005.

It was during his time at Wimbledon that Barton was selected for the England national team.

He made his debut in February 1995 in an away friendly against the Republic of Ireland at Lansdowne Road, a match that was controversially abandoned after only 27 minutes due to rioting English fans. Despite this unfortunate start, he was awarded a full cap.

Barton earned two further caps later that year in the Umbro Cup, against Sweden and Brazil, the latter being his final international appearance.

Following his retirement, Warren immediately moved into coaching and consultation, working part-time for Brighton & Hove Albion and Dagenham & Redbridge. His peers elected him as the chairman of England's Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) in 2002/03, and he was actively involved in the Kick Racism Out of Football campaign.

In 2008, he relocated to the United States and was named the U-18 coach for the Los Angeles Galaxy. His coaching career also included a spell as President and Head Coach of the newly reestablished San Diego Flash soccer club, and as general manager and technical director for the Los Angeles Blues. He also holds the UEFA Pro License.

Interestingly, at the time of writing, his son, Tye, currently plays for Darlington in the National League North.

Warren Barton's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Returning to the right-back position under Ruud Gullit and later Bobby Robson in the early 2000s.

Craig Bellamy

Bellamy signed his first professional contract with Norwich City at the age of 16, earning £250 a week with the option to renegotiate after ten first-team appearances.

He made his professional debut for Norwich on 15 March 1997, at age 17, under manager Mike Walker, as an injury-time substitute in a 2–0 defeat to Crystal Palace in the First Division. Bellamy recalled wearing a kit three sizes too big, touching the ball twice, and feeling the moment was over quickly.

Two further substitute appearances followed against Manchester City and Oldham Athletic before the end of the season.

Bellamy made his first start for Norwich City in a League Cup match against Barnet on 12 August 1997 and his first league start on 20 September against Manchester City. After ten first-team appearances, his contract was renegotiated despite an offer from Crystal Palace.

He scored his first senior goal on 1 November in a 2–2 draw with Bury and received his first red card on 7 February 1998 against Manchester City. Craig finished the season with 13 goals in 38 appearances, mainly as a central midfielder.

Known for his outspoken nature, Bellamy often clashed with senior teammates during training, though he formed a close friendship with Peter Grant.

Bruce Rioch became manager in 1998 and moved Bellamy to attack, which immediately paid off as he scored seven goals in his first eight games, including a hat-trick against Queens Park Rangers.

By November, he was among the division's top scorers and signed a new five-year contract.

In December 1998, Bellamy suffered a serious knee injury after a tackle by Kevin Muscat, sidelining him for two months.

Despite ongoing knee soreness, he finished the season with 19 goals in all competitions. The following pre-season, he ruptured his cruciate ligaments in a friendly and missed most of the 1999/2000 campaign. He returned late in the season and scored in back-to-back matches.

Coventry City signed Bellamy in August 2000 for a club-record £6,000,000 as a replacement for Robbie Keane.

Although reluctant, he joined after meeting manager Gordon Strachan. Bellamy struggled initially, scoring just three league goals by December, but improved later and finished the season with eight goals in 39 appearances. Coventry City were relegated that year, and Bellamy admitted he never enjoyed his time there.

Newcastle United signed him for £6,500,000 in 2001.

Under Bobby Robson, Bellamy formed a strong strike partnership with Alan Shearer and scored 14 goals in his debut season, winning the PFA Young Player of the Year award.

Injuries, suspensions, and controversies, including several clashes with teammates and staff, marked his time at Newcastle United. He finished his Newcastle United career with 42 goals in 128 appearances before being loaned to Celtic in January 2005.

In Scotland, Bellamy scored 19 goals that season and helped win the Scottish Cup, but narrowly missed out on the league title.

He returned to England and joined Blackburn Rovers under Mark Hughes, where he revived his career, scoring 17 goals in 2005/06 and earning the club's Player of the Year award.

In 2006, Bellamy joined Liverpool for £6,000,000, fulfilling a boyhood dream. He scored several key goals but was involved in a notorious incident where he attacked teammate John Arne Riise with a golf club. Despite this, he played a part in Liverpool's run to the 2007 Champions League final.

He then moved to West Ham United for £7,500,000 in 2007, but struggled with injuries.

In January 2009, he signed for Manchester City for around £14,000,000, reuniting with Mark Hughes.

He made an immediate impact, but injuries and clashes with new manager Roberto Mancini strained his time there.

Only a year later, Bellamy joined his hometown club, Cardiff City, on loan. He became captain and was instrumental in their promotion push, scoring in key matches, including the South Wales derby. After returning to Manchester City, he rejoined Liverpool in 2011 but left a year later to sign a permanent deal with Cardiff City.

In 2013, he helped them earn promotion to the Premier League for the first time in 52 years.

Bellamy retired in 2014 due to persistent injuries, having scored for seven different clubs in the Premier League —a record at the time.

Internationally, Bellamy earned 78 caps and scored 19 goals for Wales.

He made his debut in 1998 and was instrumental in several key matches, including a famous winner against Italy in 2002. He captained Wales between 2007 and 2010 and later served as vice-captain under Gary Speed.

Bellamy also represented Great Britain at the 2012 Olympics, scoring in the opening match and captaining the team once.

He retired from international football in 2013 after a 15-year career, remembered for his passion, intensity, and commitment to Welsh football.

Bellamy returned to Cardiff City as an academy coach on a voluntary basis in 2014.

In 2016, he was appointed as the club's player development manager, overseeing all age groups at the youth academy and coaching the older age-group teams.

In February 2018, after being interviewed for the Wales manager position, he was given permission to apply for the vacant managerial role at Oxford United.

Although he agreed terms with them, he withdrew his application after the club was taken over during negotiations.

Bellamy stepped down from his coaching role at Cardiff City in January 2019 to defend himself against a claim that he had bullied a youth-team player.

An internal investigation later led him to apologise for what was described as an unacceptable coaching environment, though no formal disciplinary action was taken.

He signed a three-year contract to become the under-21 coach at Belgian side Anderlecht in June 2019, following the appointment of his former Manchester City teammate, Vincent Kompany, as manager.

He later worked as Kompany's assistant before stepping down in September 2021, citing mental health reasons.

In July 2022, Bellamy rejoined Kompany at Burnley, becoming a first-team coach.

Following Kompany's departure to Bayern Munich in May 2024 after Burnley's relegation from the Premier League, Bellamy was appointed acting head coach.

The former striker was named head coach of the Wales national team in 2024.

After Wales' 1–0 victory over Montenegro in the Nations League, Bellamy became the first Wales manager in history to remain unbeaten in his first four matches.

At the time of writing, Craig is still the manager of the Welsh National team.

Craig Bellamy's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Winning the PFA Young Player of the Year award in the season 2001/02.

Lee Bowyer

Born in Canning Town, London, Bowyer grew up in a working-class family and began his football career in Charlton Athletic's youth ranks.

His talent and commitment were evident from an early age, and he made his senior debut for Charlton Athletic at 17 in 1994. During his early years, Bowyer displayed the blend of aggression, drive, and technical quality that would later define his career.

His performances quickly attracted attention from top-flight clubs, and in 1996, he joined Leeds United for a reported fee of around £2,800,000, which at the time was a record for a teenager.

At his new club, Bowyer became an integral part of a dynamic young side under managers George Graham and, later, David O'Leary.

During his seven years in Yorkshire, he was at the heart of a team that regularly competed near the top of the Premier League and made a significant impact in European competitions. He was part of the Leeds United side that reached the UEFA Cup semi-final in 2000 and went one step further the following year, helping the club reach the UEFA Champions League semi-final in 2001. Bowyer's energy, tackling, and knack for scoring important goals—particularly from midfield runs into the box—earned him widespread recognition. His performances during this period placed him among the most highly rated midfielders in England.

However, Bowyer's time at Leeds United was also overshadowed by off-field controversy.

He was involved in a high-profile court case in 2001 related to an assault incident in Leeds, though he was later acquitted.

The case and the media scrutiny surrounding it had a significant impact on his career and reputation.

Despite this, Bowyer continued to perform on the pitch and remained a key player for Leeds United until his departure in 2003, as the club entered a period of financial turmoil and began selling off its leading players.

In January 2003, Bowyer joined West Ham United, the club he had supported as a boy, but his first spell at Upton Park was short-lived.

He made only a handful of appearances as the team was relegated from the Premier League that season.

Later that year, he moved to Newcastle United, where he spent two seasons.

During his time at St James' Park, Bowyer contributed to the club's runs in the UEFA Cup and domestic competitions, but his tenure was again marred by controversy.

In April 2005, he was involved in an infamous on-pitch altercation with teammate Kieron Dyer during a match against Aston Villa, which resulted in both players being sent off. The incident drew widespread criticism and led to Bowyer's suspension and a fine.

After leaving Newcastle United in 2006, Bowyer returned to West Ham United for a second spell, where he spent three more seasons.

Though injuries limited his impact at times, he remained a dependable and combative presence in midfield. In 2009, he was loaned to Birmingham City, where he would experience one of the most positive periods of his later career.

The move was made permanent, and Bowyer became an influential figure under manager Alex McLeish. His leadership and experience proved vital as Birmingham City enjoyed a strong 2009/10 season, finishing ninth in the Premier League, their best position in years.

Bowyer's greatest triumph as a player came in 2011 when Birmingham City won the Football League Cup, defeating Arsenal 2–1 in the final at Wembley Stadium. Bowyer played an essential role throughout the competition and was widely praised for his performances during the club's cup run.

Despite Birmingham City's relegation later that season, the cup victory remained a highlight of his career.

After leaving Birmingham City, Bowyer joined Ipswich Town in 2011, where he spent one season before retiring from professional football in 2012.

Over the course of his playing career, Bowyer made 397 appearances in the Premier League, scoring 48 goals.

He earned a single England cap in 2002, appearing in a friendly match against Portugal under manager Sven-Göran Eriksson. Despite his impressive club form during his peak years at Leeds United, disciplinary issues and competition for midfield places limited his opportunities at international level.

After hanging up his boots, Bowyer initially took a break from football before moving into coaching.

In 2015, he joined Watford as part of the coaching staff, working with youth players and gaining behind-the-scenes experience.

Two years later, he returned to Charlton Athletic, the club where his professional journey had begun, as assistant manager to Karl Robinson.

When Robinson left the club in 2018, Bowyer was appointed caretaker manager and quickly made an impact.

Under his leadership, Charlton Athletic adopted a hard-working, disciplined style that mirrored Bowyer's own.

He guided the team to the League One play-offs, and in May 2019, his team won promotion to the Championship with a dramatic 2–1 victory over Sunderland at Wembley.

Bowyer's success with Charlton Athletic earned him widespread respect as an emerging English coach, particularly given the club's financial constraints and off-field instability.

His emphasis on teamwork, intensity, and player development resonated with supporters, and he was praised for fostering a strong team spirit. Charlton Athletic's first season back in the Championship proved challenging, however, and the team was relegated on the final day of the 2019/20 season.

Despite this setback, Bowyer remained in charge until March 2021, when he resigned to take over as manager of Birmingham City.

At St Andrews, Bowyer inherited a team struggling near the bottom of the Championship.

His arrival provided an immediate lift, as he steered the club to safety during the closing weeks of the 2020/21 campaign.

However, the following season was more difficult. Although his team avoided relegation, inconsistent performances and internal pressures led to Bowyer's dismissal in July 2022.

After leaving Birmingham City, Bowyer took a brief break from management before accepting a new challenge on the international stage.

In September 2023, he was appointed head coach of the Montserrat national team.

The role offered Bowyer the opportunity to apply his experience in player development and team organisation to a smaller footballing nation seeking to build competitiveness in CONCACAF.

His appointment was seen as a bold move that reflected both his willingness to take on new challenges and Montserrat's ambition to improve under a coach with top-level playing and managerial experience.

Throughout his career, both as a player and as a manager, Lee Bowyer has been defined by determination, resilience, and a passion for the game.

Lee Bowyer's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring his first Newcastle United goal against Wolves at St James's in the season 2003/04.

Titus Bramble

Bramble was born in Ipswich, Suffolk, a part of England not typically known for producing Premier League footballers.

Growing up in the quiet East Anglian town, football quickly became the centre of his world. From a young age,

Bramble stood out among his peers, his physical strength and composure on the ball marking him as a natural defender.

His path to the professional game began at Ipswich Town, the local club he had supported as a boy.

For a young player from the area, pulling on the blue shirt of Ipswich was more than a career step—it was a dream fulfilled.

Bramble's early years at Portman Road were those of a player learning quickly in a competitive environment. He made his first-team debut during the 1998/99 season, still a teenager, and it was

immediately clear that Ipswich Town saw him as one of their brightest prospects. He possessed pace and power, attributes that set him apart, and an ability to stride out from defence with the ball that drew comparisons to some of the country's most confident centre-backs. Like many young defenders, however, he was raw.

The learning curve was steep, especially in the physical lower leagues of English football, but Bramble's progress was steady.

A short loan spell with nearby Colchester United during the 1999/2000 season gave him valuable first-team experience. He returned to Ipswich Town more assured, ready to compete for a starting place.

Over the next few seasons, he became an increasingly important part of the side that achieved promotion to the Premier League under George Burley.

For a young defender from Ipswich, playing top-flight football with his hometown club was a remarkable achievement.

In total, he made 48 league appearances. He scored four goals—an impressive record for a centre-back—finding the net against Sunderland, Millwall, Coventry City, and even Torpedo Moscow in European competition.

Those early years showed the promise of a player who seemed destined for greater things.

That promise did not go unnoticed. When Ipswich Town were relegated from the Premier League in 2002, bigger clubs began to circle, and Newcastle United made their move.

Managed by Sir Bobby Robson at the time, who had deep connections with Ipswich Town himself, Newcastle United paid £6,000,000 for the 21-year-old defender.

For Bramble, it was an enormous opportunity, but also a heavy responsibility. The fee was significant for the time, and expectations at a club of Newcastle United's size were far higher than anything he had experienced before.

Under Robson, Bramble hoped to mature into one of England's best defenders. He spoke with ambition about making himself indispensable to his new manager, and for a while, it seemed that might happen.

Newcastle United were competing in Europe, playing in front of 50,000-strong crowds, and Bramble was learning from seasoned professionals.

Yet life at St James' Park was far from straightforward. While his natural athleticism and calmness on the ball were undeniable, his game was often undermined by lapses in concentration. This unfortunate habit became a recurring theme throughout his career.

Supporters could see both sides of him. On his day, he could dominate strikers and look unflappable under pressure; on another, he could make an error that cost his team dearly.

The inconsistency became part of his reputation, and by the end of the 2003/04 season, his name had become a regular target for critics.

In a light-hearted yet telling poll by a football newsletter, he was voted the worst player in the Premier League. It was harsh, perhaps, but it reflected the frustration of fans who sensed that Bramble had the talent to be outstanding yet often fell short.

Despite the criticism, there were moments of redemption. One of the highlights of his time at Newcastle United came in May 2006 when he scored a superb volley against Chelsea, the reigning league champions. That goal not only silenced his doubters temporarily but also helped Newcastle United secure qualification for the Intertoto Cup.

Later that summer, he scored again, this time in Europe, with a header against Latvian side FK Ventspils in the UEFA Cup. These flashes of excellence kept him in the conversation, reminding everyone why he had once been regarded as one of England's brightest defensive prospects.

Injuries, however, began to take their toll. During the 2006/07 season, he suffered a serious calf problem that required hospital treatment when the muscle swelled alarmingly.

Though he eventually returned to action, it was becoming clear that his time at Newcastle United was drawing to a close.

After five years on Tyneside, he left the club at the end of the season, ready for a fresh start.

That next chapter came with Wigan Athletic. In June 2007, Bramble signed for the Lancashire club on a free transfer.

Wigan Athletic were not a glamour club, but they offered stability and the chance for regular football under manager Steve Bruce, who had been a defender himself and understood the demands of the position. It proved to be a good move.

Away from the intense scrutiny that surrounded him at Newcastle United, Bramble found a new rhythm and consistency. He scored a memorable equaliser against Liverpool at Anfield in January 2008, a powerful 20-yard strike that secured a valuable point for Wigan Athletic, and later netted against his former club Newcastle United in a 2–2 draw at St James' Park.

More importantly, his performances improved markedly. Where once he had been known for errors, he now became a leader in Wigan's defence.

By the end of the 2008/09 season, his transformation was complete: he swept the board at the club's annual awards night, taking home four trophies, including Player of the Year and Players' Player of the Year. For Bramble, it was vindication.

The years of criticism and doubt had been replaced, at least for a time, with respect and appreciation.

He extended his contract in 2009, committing to Wigan Athletic until 2012, and spoke of how settled he felt under Bruce's management.

That relationship with Bruce would shape the next move in his career. When Bruce became manager of Sunderland in 2009, he quickly looked to bring Bramble to the Stadium of Light.

In July 2010, a £1,000,000 deal was agreed, and the defender crossed the divide to join Wigan Athletic's Premier League rivals.

It was a controversial transfer for some Sunderland fans, who remembered his mistakes at Newcastle United, but Bruce's faith in him was unshakeable. Bramble repaid that faith with professionalism and many strong performances.

He scored once for Sunderland, in a 4–0 win over Stoke City in September 2011, and became a steady presence in the side despite occasional injuries and off-field scrutiny.

His time at Sunderland lasted three years, during which he made 51 appearances.

By the summer of 2013, however, the club chose not to renew his contract. At 31, Bramble found himself without a team for the first time in his professional life.

He trained with West Ham United during pre-season, even featuring in a friendly against Cork City, but no deal materialised. A return to Ipswich Town for training raised hopes of a homecoming, yet again, no contract was offered.

It was a difficult period for a player who had spent more than a decade in the Premier League and was now facing the reality of life after top-flight football.

After four years away from the professional game, Bramble resurfaced in 2017, joining Stowmarket Town as a player-coach. The club competed in the Eastern Counties Football League, several levels below where he had once played, but for Bramble it represented a new beginning rather than a step down. He was returning to his roots, not for fame or money, but for the love of the game.

At Stowmarket Town, he could share his experience with younger players and enjoy football without the glare of national attention.

By that time, Bramble had already begun to forge a path in coaching.

He took up a role with Ipswich Town's academy, working with the Under-11s. For someone who had come through that very same system, it was a full-circle moment. Coaching children brought a different kind of satisfaction. No longer judged on his own performances, Bramble could instead focus on helping others develop.

Those who worked with him spoke of his patience and understanding, qualities that perhaps grew from the ups and downs of his own playing career.

Titus Bramble's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring a superb volley against Chelsea in the season 2005/06.

Andy Carroll

Carroll's professional story began at his boyhood club, Newcastle United.

Signing his first professional contract in 2006, he became the youngest player to represent the club in European competition at the time, making his debut against Palermo in the UEFA Cup.

His early years included a vital six-month loan spell at Preston North End in 2007, during which he scored his first professional league goal, demonstrating the physicality that would become his trademark.

Upon his return, he gradually cemented his place in the Newcastle United first team.

Following the club's shocking relegation from the Premier League in 2009, Carroll stepped up as the team's spearhead in the Championship. That season, 2009/2010, was his true breakthrough. He scored 17 goals in 39 league appearances, his power and aerial dominance proving irresistible against Championship defences.

His performances were crucial in securing Newcastle United's immediate return to the top flight as champions.

The momentum carried into the 2010/2011 Premier League season, where Carroll, wearing the legendary number 9 shirt, continued to flourish, scoring 11 goals by January.

His commanding form earned him his first England cap in November 2010, a friendly against France, validating his status as one of the country's most promising young strikers.

The most seismic moment of Carroll's career occurred on the final day of the January 2011 transfer window.

Following Fernando Torres's shock move from Liverpool to Chelsea, the Reds reinvested heavily, signing Carroll from Newcastle United for an extraordinary £35,000,000.

This fee made him, at the time, the most expensive British footballer in history. The transfer instantly placed immense pressure on the young striker.

Beyond the price tag, Carroll was expected to fill the void left by a club legend and adapt immediately to an entirely new style of play under manager Kenny Dalglish.

Unfortunately, a thigh injury upon arrival delayed his debut, setting a troubling precedent for his future fitness.

His time at Liverpool was challenging. While he scored a memorable brace against Manchester City and a crucial late goal against Everton in the FA Cup semi-final, his overall goal return was sparse, tallying just six league goals in 44 appearances.

He struggled to integrate his particular style—reliant on quality crosses and direct play—into a team often focused on shorter passing.

However, his finest hour came in the 2012 FA Cup Final, scoring a goal and having a stunning header saved, showcasing his genuine, albeit fleeting, world-class potential.

His season ended with him scoring for England against Sweden at UEFA Euro 2012, a highlight of his nine international caps.

In August 2012, Carroll moved to West Ham United, initially on a season-long loan, a transfer orchestrated by former Newcastle United manager Sam Allardyce, who understood Carroll's aerial strengths. The loan was made permanent in 2013 for a fee of £15,000,000. The six years Carroll spent in East London were defined by brilliant, match-winning performances interspersed with long, frustrating periods on the sidelines.

His physical, all-action style made him a nightmare for defenders, yet it ultimately put an unsustainable strain on his body. Hamstring, knee, ankle, and other muscle problems limited his Premier League appearances for the club to just 102 across six seasons, during which he scored 26 league goals. When fit, he could be devastating, epitomised by his spectacular bicycle kick goal against Crystal Palace in 2017.

Despite fitness issues, he remained a potent, impactful striker when available and was beloved by West Ham United fans for his commitment.

He was eventually released in 2019 at the end of his contract.

Carroll returned to Newcastle United in 2019, taking on a role as an experienced squad player. His second spell at St. James' Park was unfortunately hampered by the same fitness issues that plagued his time at West Ham United, and he was released in 2021.

His career continued in the English Football League, with spells at West Bromwich Albion and Reading.

His time at Reading was particularly notable, as he returned to the club for a second spell in 2022 and scored nine goals in 30 Championship matches, proving he could still deliver goals when given consistent playing time.

A more surprising chapter followed when he moved abroad, first to Amiens in Ligue 2. Then, to the financially troubled French giants Bordeaux (then in the fourth tier), a move he stated was motivated purely by his love for football, often at a high personal cost.

In the summer of 2025, Andy Carroll returned to England to be closer to his family, making a headline-grabbing move to National League South club Dagenham & Redbridge.

The signing, facilitated by a new Qatari ownership group, saw the former England international and record British transfer join a non-league side, signing a three-year deal and even reportedly taking a minority share in the club.

This final chapter illustrates a man committed to the beautiful game, willing to play at any level simply for the joy of being on the pitch, bringing his illustrious, rollercoaster career full circle from the UEFA Cup stage to the sixth tier of English football.

Andy Carroll's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Becoming Newcastle United's youngest ever player to represent the club in European competition when he featured against Palermo in the season 2006/07.

Tim Krul

Krul began his football career at his hometown club, RAS, before moving to local Eredivisie club ADO Den Haag.

In the summer of 2005, he transferred to Premier League club Newcastle United on a three-year deal after failing to sign professional terms with ADO.

This move led to a compensation dispute, eventually settled by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in February 2007, ordering Newcastle United to pay €220,000 to ADO Den Haag.

Krul made his debut for Newcastle United in the UEFA Cup on November 2, 2006, against Palermo, keeping a clean sheet.

His early time with the club was disrupted by injury, including two cartilage operations that kept him out of action for nearly six months until April 2007.

Following his recovery, he signed a new four-year contract with Newcastle United. That summer, he was part of the Netherlands Under-21 squad that won the European Championships.

To gain experience, Krul went on loan to Scottish side Falkirk in August 2007.

His debut was a 4-0 win with a clean sheet, and the loan was extended, though it also included challenging games, including a 7-0 defeat to Rangers. A dislocated shoulder ended his season early.

In November 2008, he had another loan spell, joining Carlisle United for one month, which was later extended.

Krul returned to Newcastle United to serve as the backup goalkeeper. He made his senior league debut in the Football League Championship in August 2009.

Krul signed a new four-year contract in July 2010. He made his Premier League debut the following September as a substitute for the injured Steve Harper. His good form under manager Alan Pardew eventually saw him become the first-choice keeper.

The 2011/12 season was a highlight, and he was named Toon Talk's Newcastle United Player of the Year. He signed a new five-year contract in March 2012.

The following seasons were marked by several injuries, including an elbow injury, an ankle injury, and a dislocated shoulder that required surgery and ended his 2012/13 season.

He performed strongly in the 2013/14 season, delivering impressive displays, including 14 saves in a game against Tottenham Hotspur, which earned him the Premier League Player of the Month award for November.

In August 2016, Krul signed a contract extension with Newcastle United before going on loan to Ajax in the Eredivisie, a deal that was cut short. He then joined fellow Eredivisie side AZ Alkmaar on loan for the remainder of the 2016/17 season.

He moved to Premier League club Brighton & Hove Albion in August 2017, initially on a season-long loan, but he signed a permanent deal the following day, ending his twelve-year history with Newcastle United. He left Brighton & Hove Albion at the end of the season.

Krul signed for Championship club Norwich City in July 2018 and later signed a new three-year deal.

He was named Norwich City's Player of the Season for the 2019/20 campaign and was a key player in their subsequent promotions to the Premier League.

Injuries affected his later seasons at Norwich City, and by the 2022/23 season, he had lost his place as first-choice goalkeeper.

In August 2023, Krul joined newly promoted Premier League club Luton Town. The club announced in May 2025 that he would be released at the end of his contract in June. Krul officially announced his retirement from professional football on September 23, 2025, at the age of 37.

Internationally, Krul represented the Netherlands at the youth level.

He earned his first senior cap in a friendly against Brazil in June 2011, keeping a clean sheet. He was selected for the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil, where he had his most memorable moment. In the quarter-final against Costa Rica, manager Louis van Gaal famously substituted him on in the 120th minute solely for the penalty shootout. Krul saved two penalties, leading the Netherlands to victory and making history as the first goalkeeper to be brought on purely for a penalty shootout at the World Cup.

Tim Krul's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Keeping a clean sheet on his Newcastle United debut in a UEFA Cup tie against Palermo in the season 2006/07.

James Milner

Born and raised in Leeds, West Yorkshire, Milner showed early athletic promise, excelling in football, cricket, athletics, and cross-country running during his school years.

From an early age, he supported Leeds United, the club of his hometown, and joined their youth academy in 1996.

His natural fitness, intelligence, and dedication quickly set him apart from his peers, and by the age of sixteen, he had progressed through the ranks to make his senior debut for Leeds United in 2002.

That same year, Milner became the youngest player ever to score in the Premier League.

This record brought him national attention and marked the beginning of a remarkably long and successful career. To gain more first-team experience, he spent a brief loan spell at Swindon Town, where his professionalism and maturity impressed even seasoned teammates.

Unfortunately for Milner and many of his contemporaries, Leeds United suffered severe financial difficulties in the early 2000s, culminating in relegation from the Premier League at the end of the 2003/04 season. As part of the club's efforts to balance the books, Milner was sold to Newcastle United in 2004.

At his new club, Milner developed from a promising young winger into a more versatile footballer.

He made over 100 appearances for the club across all competitions and became known for his relentless energy and willingness to play in a variety of positions.

In 2006, he won his first senior trophy, the UEFA Intertoto Cup, with Newcastle United, and continued to feature regularly under several different managers.

Despite his success, Milner was loaned to Aston Villa for the 2005/06 season, where he impressed manager David O'Leary and fans alike with his tireless performances on the wing.

His form during that loan spell convinced Villa to pursue him permanently, but Newcastle United initially chose to retain him.

Eventually, in 2008, after several years of speculation, Milner completed a permanent move to Aston Villa.

His time at Aston Villa was a turning point in his career. Under Martin O'Neill, Milner matured into one of the Premier League's most reliable midfielders. He added greater tactical awareness and versatility to his game, often playing both in central midfield and on the flanks.

His work rate, composure, and growing leadership qualities helped Aston Villa achieve consistent top-half finishes in the Premier League and compete strongly in domestic cup competitions.

The 2009/10 season proved to be Milner's best at Villa Park, as he was named the Professional Footballers' Association Young Player of the Year, a recognition of his development into one of England's top young talents.

His performances that season attracted the attention of several major clubs, and in August 2010, he signed for Manchester City.

Milner's move to Lancashire coincided with the club's transformation into one of the most successful teams in English football, driven by significant investment.

Under the management of Roberto Mancini and later Manuel Pellegrini, Milner became an integral member of a star-studded squad, appreciated for his adaptability and professionalism.

While he was rarely the most high-profile player in a team filled with international stars, his contributions were vital to City's rise. During his five years at the club, he won two Premier League titles, the FA Cup, the League Cup, and the FA Community Shield. Milner's ability to fill multiple roles—right-back, central midfielder, winger, and even false nine—made him invaluable to managers who trusted his tactical discipline and work ethic.

In 2015, seeking more regular playing time in his preferred central midfield position, Milner signed for Liverpool on a free transfer.

He was immediately appointed vice-captain by manager Brendan Rodgers, and his leadership qualities became even more influential under Jürgen Klopp, who arrived later that same year.

James quickly became a respected figure in Liverpool's dressing room, known for setting high standards in both training and matches. Klopp frequently praised his professionalism, mentality, and fitness, qualities that helped extend his career well beyond the age at which most players begin to decline.

Milner's time at Liverpool brought him some of the greatest successes of his career. He was a key member of the squad that reached the UEFA Champions League final in 2018 and went on to win the competition the following year, defeating Tottenham Hotspur in Madrid. In 2019/20, he helped Liverpool end their thirty-year wait for a league title by winning the Premier League, adding to a collection of honours that already included the UEFA Super Cup and FIFA Club World Cup.

In domestic competitions, he also lifted both the FA Cup and the EFL Cup with Liverpool, cementing his status as one of the most decorated English players of his generation.

Though often deployed as a substitute or in rotation later in his Liverpool career, Milner remained a crucial leader within the squad, setting an example of professionalism and dedication for younger players.

Internationally, Milner represented England at every youth level and became one of the most experienced players in the national setup's history.

He made 46 appearances for the England Under-21 team, featuring in the 2007 and 2009 UEFA European Under-21 Championships and helping the side finish as runners-up in 2009.

His senior international career spanned from 2009 to 2016, during which he earned sixty-one caps and scored once, against Moldova in a World Cup qualifier. Milner represented England at two FIFA World Cups (2010 and 2014) and two UEFA European Championships (2012

and 2016). Though rarely the team's star, he was a trusted option for several England managers thanks to his consistency, versatility, and experience. After Euro 2016, he announced his retirement from international football to focus on his club career.

Beyond statistics and trophies, Milner's reputation has been built on his professionalism, work rate, and adaptability.

Teammates and managers frequently describe him as one of the most dedicated professionals in football. His discipline extends off the pitch as well, where he is known for maintaining peak physical condition through rigorous training and lifestyle habits. His longevity is a testament to this dedication: with a Premier League career spanning twenty-four years, Milner holds the record for the longest playing career in the competition's history. He has also made the second-highest number of Premier League appearances in history, behind only Gareth Barry.

He remains one of the few players to have played in the league across three decades.

James Milner's journey from a Leeds United academy prospect to one of the most respected professionals in football encapsulates what can be achieved through consistency, adaptability, and hard work.

Though he has never been the flashiest player, his influence has been profound, both on and off the pitch.

Over more than two decades at the highest level, Milner has proven that intelligence, effort, and dedication can yield a career every bit as remarkable as that of the game's biggest stars.

As he continues to extend his record-breaking Premier League career with Brighton and Hove Albion, his legacy as a model professional and a consummate team player remains secure at the time of writing.

James Milner's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Winning the Intertoto Cup in 2006, his first senior trophy.

Laurent Robert

Over the course of his career, Robert played for several clubs across Europe and North America, earning a reputation as a technically gifted yet occasionally controversial figure.

His career reflected both his immense talent and the difficulties that sometimes accompanied his outspoken personality.

Growing up on the island of Réunion, a French overseas department in the Indian Ocean, Robert showed a natural aptitude for football from an early age.

At the age of 16, he left his home to move to mainland France, where he joined Montpellier Hérault Sport Club's youth system.

It was at Montpellier that he began to develop his distinctive playing style: quick, direct, and blessed with a powerful left foot that would become his trademark.

His performances for Montpellier attracted the attention of bigger clubs, and by the mid-1990s, Robert had established himself as one of the most promising wide players in French football.

After several seasons with Montpellier, Robert made a significant career move to Paris Saint-Germain (PSG), one of France's most prominent clubs. At PSG, he continued to refine his attacking abilities and became a key player in the team's domestic and European campaigns.

His pace, dribbling, and ability to deliver precise crosses from the left flank made him a valuable asset, while his thunderous free kicks became a constant threat to opposing goalkeepers.

During his time in Paris, Robert also gained experience in the UEFA Champions League, scoring memorable goals and helping the club compete against Europe's elite.

His performances at PSG earned him national recognition and a place in the France national team, where he made his debut in 1999.

In the summer of 2001, Robert made a high-profile move to the English Premier League, signing for Newcastle United for a transfer fee of around £10,000,000.

Their manager at the time, Bobby Robson, saw in Robert the kind of flair and attacking drive that could help his side challenge for European qualification.

Robert quickly became a fans favourite at St James' Park, thrilling supporters with spectacular goals, especially from free kicks and long-range efforts.

His partnership on the left wing with full-back Olivier Bernard and striker Alan Shearer provided Newcastle United with a potent attacking combination.

Robert's ability to score and create goals helped the team secure qualification for European competitions, and during the 2002/03 season, Newcastle United reached the second group stage of the Champions League. The following season, they advanced to the semi-finals of the UEFA Cup, a significant achievement for the club.

However, Robert's time at Newcastle United was not without controversy. Known for his outspoken nature, he sometimes clashed with management and coaching staff.

His relationship with Sir Bobby Robson remained largely positive, but after his departure, tensions grew under new manager Graeme Souness. Robert became frustrated with his perceived lack of support from Souness and publicly criticised him in the media, questioning his tactics and man-management.

The club fined and disciplined him for his comments, and his position in the team became increasingly untenable.

By the 2005/06 season, Robert's time at Newcastle United had effectively come to an end, and he was loaned to Portsmouth.

Though he showed flashes of his talent during his brief spell there, he could not rediscover his earlier form and soon sought opportunities elsewhere.

In January 2006, Robert moved to Portugal to join Benfica, one of the country's most successful and historically significant clubs. His arrival generated excitement among Benfica fans, and he made an immediate impact.

In one of his most memorable moments for the club, Robert scored a winning free kick against arch-rivals Porto in the O Clássico, instantly endearing himself to supporters. His experience and technique helped Benfica reach the quarter-finals of the UEFA Champions League that season, where they faced top European competition.

Despite his contributions, Robert's stay in Lisbon was short-lived. He left the club after only six months, continuing a pattern of frequent transfers that marked the later stages of his career.

Following his departure from Benfica, Robert joined Levante in Spain's La Liga. Although he continued to display his technical ability, he struggled to fully adapt to the Spanish league and had a limited impact.

After leaving Levante, he returned to England to play for Derby County, but his time there was brief once more.

As his career entered its final stages, Robert sought new challenges abroad, joining Toronto FC in Major League Soccer. His move to Canada was part of a growing trend of experienced European players finishing their careers in North America. Despite showing glimpses of his old brilliance, particularly from set pieces, his stay at Toronto was short. He later had a brief spell with Larissa in Greece before retiring from professional football.

On the international stage, Robert represented France between 1999 and 2001.

During that time, he earned nine caps and scored one goal for his country.

Though competition for places on the French national team was fierce, with world-class players like Zinedine Zidane, Thierry Henry,

and Robert Pirès, Robert made valuable contributions when called upon.

One of the highlights of his international career was being part of the squad that won the FIFA Confederations Cup in 2001, adding an international honour to his list of achievements.

While he never became a regular fixture for France, his time with the national team underscored his status as one of the more talented wingers of his generation.

Off the pitch, Laurent Robert's family has strong footballing connections. His younger brother, Bertrand Robert, also pursued a professional football career, playing for several clubs in France and abroad. Robert's son, Thomas Robert, has followed in his father's footsteps as well, embarking on his own journey as a professional footballer.

The continuation of the family football tradition reflects both the sporting environment in which Laurent was raised and the passion for the game he passed down to the next generation.

In retrospect, Robert's career illustrates the dual nature of footballing artistry and personality.

He was not merely a consistent performer but an entertainer, someone capable of transforming an ordinary match into a memorable spectacle through his audacious style.

Laurent Robert's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring his first Newcastle United goal in the away fixture at Middlesbrough in the 2001/02 season.

The Geordies won the game, 4-1.

Pavel Srníček

Born in Ostrava, Czechoslovakia, Srníček (now sadly no longer with us) grew up in modest surroundings.

His father worked as a woodcutter, and Pavel's path into professional football began after he completed his compulsory service in the Czechoslovak People's Army.

His early professional years were spent with Baník Ostrava, where he made 30 appearances in the Czechoslovak First League between the 1989/90 and 1990/91 seasons.

His solid performances attracted attention beyond his homeland, and in January 1991, English manager Jim Smith signed him for Newcastle United for £350,000. It was a bold move for the time, as few Czechoslovak players were moving to Western Europe, and even fewer to England.

Srníček arrived at Newcastle United as part of a large recruitment drive by Smith, who brought in 23 players during his tenure.

Unfortunately, Smith departed just two months after Srníček's arrival, leaving the young goalkeeper to adapt under a new manager, Ossie Ardiles.

Despite the upheaval, Srníček managed to establish himself as the club's first-choice goalkeeper ahead of veterans John Burridge and Tommy Wright.

His early months were difficult; in his first 15 games of the 1991/92 season, he conceded 32 goals, including six in one match against Tranmere Rovers.

Ardiles eventually replaced him with Wright, and Newcastle United found themselves close to the relegation zone in the Second Division by February 1992. This poor run of form prompted the appointment of Kevin Keegan as manager, a move that transformed the club's fortunes.

Newcastle United narrowly avoided relegation that season, confirming their safety with an away victory over Leicester City on the final day.

Under Keegan, Srníček's career flourished.

The 1992/93 season marked a turning point for the club and for him personally. After losing his place early in the campaign, he regained it from Tommy Wright.

He became an integral part of a side that stormed to promotion to the Premier League, winning 11 consecutive games at the start of the season and finishing with 96 points.

The following years saw Newcastle United rise to prominence under Keegan's attacking philosophy. Srníček's consistency and shot-stopping ability made him a reliable presence in goal.

Despite the arrival of competition from Mike Hooper from Liverpool in 1993, he remained a key figure in the squad.

The 1994/95 season began dramatically for Srníček. In the opening match, a 3–1 win against Leicester City, he was sent off; later that year, a costly mistake against Liverpool drew criticism in the press. Glenn Moore of *The Independent* questioned how long he could retain his place after his error allowed Ian Rush to score.

Nevertheless, Srníček's resilience saw him regain form, and when Shaka Hislop joined in 1995, he responded with determination.

During Hislop's injury later that season, Srníček returned to the first team and impressed, earning man of the match honours in a 1–0 win over Everton.

By the mid-1990s, he had become Newcastle United's longest-serving foreign player, surpassing the record held by the Chilean Robledo brothers.

In Europe, Srníček also contributed to Newcastle United's growing reputation.

During the 1996 UEFA Cup campaign, he made a vital save from Amara Traoré as Newcastle United beat Metz 2–0 to progress to the quarter-finals.

His calm presence and professionalism made him a fan favourite, and although he was not always the first choice in later seasons, he remained highly respected at the club.

After leaving Newcastle United in 1998, he returned briefly to Baník Ostrava, playing six matches in the Czech First League before seeking a new challenge.

That challenge came with Sheffield Wednesday, where Srníček joined after a five-day trial in October 1998. His debut came at St James' Park against his former club, Newcastle United, in a 1–1 draw that earned him a warm reception from the home crowd.

He soon became a reliable deputy for Kevin Pressman, and one of his most memorable performances came in December 1999 when he saved two penalties, one from Dion Dublin and another from Paul Merson, in a match against Aston Villa. Despite his heroics, Wednesday lost 2–1 and was relegated at the end of the 1999/2000 season.

Srníček left the club under the Bosman ruling in June 2000.

In July of that year, he signed a three-year contract with Italian side Brescia, embarking on a new chapter in Serie A.

During a league match against Reggina in November 2000, he was struck by a firework thrown from the crowd, leading referee Pierluigi Collina to abandon the game after multiple dangerous incidents. Srníček continued to play in Italy until 2003, maintaining his reputation as a dependable goalkeeper.

He returned to England in September 2003, joining newly promoted Premier League side Portsmouth on a free transfer. He cited his former Newcastle United teammate Shaka Hislop and compatriot Patrik Berger as key influences in his decision to move.

Srníček made his debut for Portsmouth in a League Cup match against Southampton, which ended in a 2–0 defeat, and soon after made his league debut in a 0–0 draw against Middlesbrough.

Despite his experience, he found himself the third choice behind Hislop and Harald Wapenaar.

In February 2004, he joined West Ham United on a one-month loan and later signed a permanent contract until the end of the season.

His debut came in a 4–1 defeat to Millwall, known as the Mothers' Day Massacre, after replacing an outfield player following the goalkeeper's dismissal. He started two further games, against Derby County and Crystal Palace, before leaving the club at the season's end.

After trials with Coventry City and a short training spell with Opava in the summer of 2004, Srníček moved to Portuguese side Beira-Mar.

He made his debut in September, but despite his efforts, the team finished bottom of the league and were relegated at the end of the season.

In 2006, he made an emotional return to Newcastle United, signing a short-term contract on 29 September to provide cover for the injured Shay Given. On 23 December 2006, he returned to the St James' Park pitch for the first time in almost a decade, coming on as a substitute in a 3–1 win over Tottenham Hotspur.

The Newcastle United crowd greeted him with a thunderous ovation, reflecting the affection fans still held for him. Three days later, he made his first start for Newcastle United since 1997 against Bolton Wanderers.

Having made two appearances in his initial three-month deal, his contract was extended until the end of the 2006/07 season. He was released in May 2007, marking the end of his playing career.

On the international stage, Srníček made 49 appearances for the Czech Republic between 1994 and 2001.

He was part of the squad for Euro 1996, where he served as backup to Petr Kouba as the Czechs reached the final, losing to Germany.

After the tournament, Srníček became the first-choice goalkeeper, playing 15 consecutive matches. He was the starting keeper at the 1997 FIFA Confederations Cup, where the Czech Republic finished third.

At Euro 2000, he played in all three group matches, including a narrow 1–0 defeat to the Netherlands in which he saved several key chances but was beaten by a late penalty from Frank De Boer.

He retired from international football in 2001 after the team failed to qualify for the 2002 World Cup.

Following his retirement from playing, Srníček turned his attention to coaching.

He founded the Srníček School of Goalkeeping, offering young players from around the world the chance to learn from his experience.

Known for his approachable personality and professionalism, he dedicated himself to nurturing the next generation of goalkeepers. In January 2012, he joined the coaching staff of Sparta Prague, one of the most prestigious clubs in his homeland.

He was also active in various charitable initiatives, maintaining strong ties with fans and communities in both the Czech Republic and Newcastle United.

In December 2015, Srníček returned to Tyneside to promote his autobiography, titled 'Pavel is a Geordie', which reflected his deep affection for Newcastle United and its supporters.

Later that month, on 20 December, he suffered a cardiac arrest while jogging in Ostrava.

He was placed in an induced coma in hospital, but despite medical efforts, he passed away nine days later on 29 December 2015, aged 47, after doctors confirmed irreversible brain damage.

His death was met with widespread grief across the football world. Former teammates, fans, and players from various clubs paid tribute to his warmth, humility, and contribution to the game.

His funeral took place on 4 January 2016 in his hometown, attended by figures such as Steve Harper, his former understudy at Newcastle United, and Czech legend Pavel Nedvěd.

Pavel Srníček's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Making his second debut for the club as a substitute in a 3-1 win over Tottenham Hotspur in the season 2006/07.

Steven Taylor

Taylor was born in Greenwich, London, to a family originally from Newcastle upon Tyne.

Only a few weeks after his birth, his family returned to the North East of England, where he would spend his childhood. He grew up in Whitley Bay, North Tyneside, and attended Valley Gardens Middle School.

It was there that he first met and became friends with Peter Ramage, who would later become both his teammate and fellow product of the Newcastle United youth system.

From an early age, Taylor demonstrated an exceptional passion for football.

Despite living in the North East, he and his family made regular long trips to the Midlands so that he could train and play for Anstey Nomads, a Leicestershire-based junior side.

Twice a week, he would travel south to train on Wednesdays and play matches at weekends, a routine that required significant commitment from both him and his parents.

His time at Anstey Nomads came to an end when he was fourteen, following the advice of Newcastle United's youth coaching staff, who wanted him to concentrate his efforts locally and fully commit to their academy setup.

Initially, Taylor played as a striker. His goal-scoring ability and natural athleticism stood out from a young age, attracting the attention of scouts.

He played for several local youth teams, including Cramlington Juniors and the renowned Wallsend Boys Club, a team famous for producing professional footballers such as Alan Shearer, Peter Beardsley, and Michael Carrick.

While playing for Cramlington Juniors, Taylor was scouted by Newcastle United and invited to join their youth academy.

His close friend, Peter Ramage, was also part of that setup, and the two progressed through the ranks together.

At around 13 years old, Taylor was converted from a striker to a defender, a change that would ultimately define his football career. The switch suited his physical attributes, leadership qualities, and natural reading of the game.

Coaches at Newcastle United quickly recognised his defensive potential, and he developed into a commanding presence at the back.

Taylor was part of a robust generation of young players at the club and played a central role in helping the under-17 side win the old Premier Academy League title during the 2001/02 season.

His performances at the youth level marked him out as one of Newcastle United's most promising academy players.

After completing his GCSEs at Monkseaton High School, Taylor continued to impress within Newcastle United's youth setup.

His commitment and professionalism earned him a first-year scholarship with the club's academy.

It was a reward for years of hard work, dedication, and long commutes as a teenager trying to make it in professional football.

When he turned seventeen, Taylor signed his first professional contract with Newcastle United, officially beginning his senior football career.

In the early stages of his professional development, Taylor gained valuable first-team experience through a short loan spell away from Newcastle United.

During the 2003/04 season, he joined Wycombe Wanderers on a month-long loan deal.

The move was significant for Taylor, not only because it was his introduction to senior football, but also because Wycombe Wanderers' manager at the time was Tony Adams, the former Arsenal and England defender whom Taylor had admired since childhood.

Playing under Adams, Taylor learned directly from one of the most respected defenders in English football history.

He made his league debut in December 2003 against Notts County in the old Second Division.

Although the loan spell was brief, it gave him a valuable taste of competitive senior football and prepared him for the challenges of the Premier League.

Taylor returned to Newcastle United soon after, more confident and mature from his time away.

Within a short period, he broke into the first team, making his debut for Newcastle United in European competition during the 2003/04 season in a UEFA Cup match against Real Mallorca.

His early performances displayed a mixture of determination, physicality, and leadership that endeared him to supporters. Taylor's willingness to throw himself into tackles, block shots, and defend with total commitment became hallmarks of his style of play.

Over the next several years, Taylor established himself as a key figure in Newcastle United's defence.

His combination of bravery and passion made him a fan favourite, while his local background strengthened his connection with the supporters.

Despite being born in London, Taylor identified deeply with the club and the city, embodying the pride and fighting spirit associated with Newcastle United. He formed defensive partnerships with several teammates over the years and often served as a vocal presence on the pitch, organising the back line and encouraging those around him.

Throughout his time at Newcastle United, Taylor faced a series of injuries that interrupted his progress.

These setbacks often came just as he was finding consistency in his performances.

Nevertheless, his resilience and determination to return stronger each time earned him respect within the club.

When fit, he was capable of commanding performances at centre-back and also contributed occasional goals, often from set-pieces, where his aerial ability was an asset.

Taylor's career at Newcastle United spanned more than a decade, during which he experienced both highs and lows with the club. He was part of the squad that reached the semi-finals of the UEFA Cup in 2004 and later experienced the pain of relegation in 2009.

However, he also played a role in helping the team bounce back to the Premier League the following year.

His loyalty to Newcastle United remained unwavering throughout multiple managerial changes and fluctuating fortunes on the pitch.

As his career progressed, Taylor became one of the more senior figures in the dressing room.

He was viewed as a leader and mentor for younger players coming through the academy, just as others had guided him in his youth.

His dedication to the club was evident not only in his performances but also in his attitude off the field.

After leaving Newcastle United, Taylor continued his professional career with several other clubs, including spells with the Portland Timbers in Major League Soccer and the Wellington Phoenix in the A-League. His time abroad demonstrated his adaptability and willingness to embrace new challenges.

Even in the later stages of his career, Taylor maintained the same competitive edge that had defined his playing days in England.

Steven Taylor's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Making his debut for Newcastle United in European competition during the 2003/04 season in a UEFA Cup match against Real Mallorca.

Chapter Seven

A Brief History of the 2010s

Chris Hughton secured a respectable 12th-place finish in Newcastle United's first season back in the Premier League.

This initial stability was a welcome change after the turmoil of the relegation season, and Hughton was widely credited with restoring pride and a cohesive team spirit. He fostered strong dressing-room unity and put into place a playing style that made the most of the team's strengths.

The club's decision to dismiss him in December 2010, however, remains one of the most controversial in recent memory. Hughton was seen as having the dressing room's respect and the fans' unwavering support, which sowed seeds of distrust between the ownership and the terraces. This distrust would fester for years.

The arrival of Alan Pardew as his successor marked a significant shift in the club's direction.

While he eventually guided the team to its highest Premier League finish in years, his appointment was met with resentment from a fanbase still reeling from Hughton's departure.

The club's announcement that Pardew had been signed a five-and-a-half-year contract, only upset the fans further.

This immediate friction persisted throughout his time at the club, meaning that success was celebrated but failures were magnified against the backdrop of his unpopular hiring.

The following season, 2011/12, proved to be a remarkable success, with Newcastle United challenging for European places and finishing fifth in the Premier League.

This was unexpected, powered by Demba Ba's goals and the midfield creativity of players like Yohan Cabaye.

Ba, signed on a free transfer, proved to be a really good recruit, and his partnership with Papiss Cissé in the second half of the season produced a torrent of goals.

This era briefly promised a return to the club's past glories and suggested that the managerial gamble might pay off, as the team played an exciting, high-tempo brand of football. The euphoria of that fifth-place finish was a powerful reminder of the club's potential when operating at its best.

However, this period was short-lived, primarily due to the club's transfer policy.

The sale of homegrown star Andy Carroll to Liverpool in January 2011 for a then-record fee of £35,000,000 was a flashpoint for fan fury.

The sentiment was that the club's ownership had gone for profit over progress, taking from the team its most potent attacking focal point. The failure to reinvest the entire substantial fee immediately became a recurring theme and a significant source of fan discontent.

The subsequent seasons saw a notable decline in league performance, even as the club enjoyed a memorable run in Europe. The 2012/13 season culminated in a campaign that reached the Europa League quarter-final.

This European adventure, which saw the team travel to places like Metalist Kharkiv and Anzhi Makhachkala, provided a welcome distraction from a difficult domestic season. They navigated the group stages and knockout rounds with typical European grit, eventually losing to Benfica.

The squad was significantly bolstered during this time by what became known as the 'French Revolution', a period of aggressive

recruitment from Ligue 1. Key signings such as Moussa Sissoko, Yoan Gouffran, and Mapou Yanga-Mbiwa arrived, offering a new, dynamic, but ultimately inconsistent core to the team.

While this influx of players had its moments, it also meant the team no longer had the English backbone and local identity many fans cherished, leading to accusations from some quarters that it lacked passion and commitment.

Managerial instability continued to plague the club. Pardew eventually departed in December 2014 for Crystal Palace, ending a spell that was remembered for deepening hostility from sections of the fanbase regarding his initial appointment.

After a brief, unsuccessful spell under caretaker John Carver, the club turned to Steve McClaren.

His tenure was disastrous, littered with poor results and a growing disconnect between the players and the fans.

Despite heavy investment in players like Aleksandar Mitrović and Georginio Wijnaldum, the team struggled for cohesion and fight, spending the entire season mired in the relegation zone.

This downward spiral culminated in the 2015/16 season, marked by both poor performances and even worse management.

The team suffered from poor tactics and a demoralised dressing room.

The inevitable happened when, with ten games remaining and the threat of relegation looming large, the club made a desperate, high-profile managerial change, bringing in the globally respected figure of Rafa Benítez.

Benítez's arrival offered a massive injection of hope and belief. He was a manager of European pedigree, having won the Champions League and La Liga, and his willingness to take on the challenge galvanised the fanbase.

He immediately introduced discipline and organisation, but the task proved too great. The team was eventually relegated to the Championship.

The disappointment was profound, but the immediate reaction was unique: the fans, rather than turning on the club, rallied around Benítez.

His commitment to stay and manage the team in the second tier, despite having far bigger options, was seen as an act of genuine faith in the club and the supporters.

This act marked the true beginning of the 'Rafalution'.

The 2016/17 Championship season became a testament to Benítez's organisational skills and to the supporters' loyalty.

The manager oversaw a comprehensive overhaul of the playing staff, bringing in 12 new players—a blend of experience and youth, including Matt Ritchie and Dwight Gayle—to create a squad tailored for the rigours of the Championship.

This rebuild required a mentality shift, focusing on tactical discipline.

The season was not without its difficulties, including a poor run of form over the Christmas period.

Still, Benítez guided the team through the demanding campaign, securing the Championship title on the final day in a dramatic finish, pipping Brighton & Hove Albion to the post.

This immediate return to the Premier League was crucial to the club's long-term health and served as robust validation of the manager's approach and the fans' loyalty. St James' Park was regularly packed, with attendances well above the second-tier average, demonstrating the unique bond between the manager and the faithful.

The subsequent Premier League return seasons, 2017/18 and 2018/19, were marked by solid, if unspectacular, performances. The team secured mid-table finishes — first 10th and then 13th — mainly

through the tactical shrewdness of Benítez and the defensive organisation he implemented.

The club operated under tight financial constraints, which prevented the kind of ambitious spending needed to truly push for European places.

Despite this, Benítez consistently punched above his weight, often transforming a group of players into a cohesive unit greater than the sum of its parts, a testament to his coaching acumen.

The narrative of this decade cannot be completed without mentioning one of the most emotional and inspiring moments: the return of Jonas Gutiérrez. After battling testicular cancer, the Argentine midfielder made a triumphant return to the pitch. His performance in the final match of the 2014/15 season, in which he scored a crucial goal against West Ham United and assisted another, helped secure the club's Premier League status, ensuring the fans never forgot him.

This moment was a reminder of the human spirit within the game and remains a cherished memory for all who witnessed it. Gutiérrez's fighting spirit embodied the resilience that the fans desperately wanted to see from the team.

The 2010s were therefore a cycle of exhilarating promotions, managerial infighting, European ambition, two painful relegations, and two hard-won, crucial promotions.

It was a decade that tested the patience and devotion of the Newcastle United faithful like few others, leaving a legacy defined by the boardroom's financial prudence, in conflict with the passionate aspirations of the supporters.

The eventual departure of Rafa Benítez in 2019, unable to agree on a contract extension and frustrated by the lack of transfer funds, brought to an end another exciting era and left the club facing another period of uncertainty.

The turbulence of these ten years created stories of triumph, betrayal, and incredible resilience that will be discussed on Tyneside for generations to come.

Chapter Eight

Ten Memorable Players from the 2010s

Demba Ba

Raised in a large Senegalese family in the suburbs of Paris, Ba grew up in a football-loving environment.

From a young age, he showed an interest in the sport, though his path to professional football was not straightforward.

As a teenager, he had several unsuccessful trials with professional clubs in France, including Lyon and Auxerre, and in England with Watford, before finally finding an opportunity to play senior football with FC Rouen in 2005.

His debut with Rouen in the French lower divisions marked the beginning of a journey that would take him across several countries and top-flight leagues.

After impressing with his athleticism and eye for goal, Ba earned a move to Belgian side Excelsior Mouscron in 2006.

His time in Belgium was short but successful.

He quickly established himself as a reliable goal scorer, and his performances drew the attention of scouts from across Europe.

However, his progress was interrupted by a serious injury that sidelined him for several months.

Despite that setback, his potential was clear, and in 2007, he secured a move to German club TSG Hoffenheim, which was then

climbing through the ranks of German football under the ownership of software billionaire Dietmar Hopp.

At his new club, Ba became a central figure in one of the most remarkable football stories in Germany.

He helped the club achieve promotion to the Bundesliga for the first time in its history in 2008.

During Hoffenheim's debut season in the top flight, Ba formed part of a dynamic attacking unit that shocked the league with its fearless play. He scored consistently, gaining a reputation as a powerful forward with a knack for finishing chances under pressure.

His performances in Germany attracted interest from Premier League clubs, but a move to England initially fell through in 2011 due to medical concerns following a failed transfer to Stoke City.

Despite doubts about his long-term fitness, West Ham United decided to take a chance on him in January 2011, signing him on a pay-as-you-play contract.

Ba quickly proved his worth at West Ham United, scoring seven goals in just twelve appearances during the second half of the 2010/11 Premier League season. His goals almost saved the club from relegation, but despite his best efforts, they were relegated to the Championship.

As part of a clause in his contract, Ba was allowed to leave the club on a free transfer following relegation, and he soon joined Newcastle United.

It was there that Ba truly established himself as one of the Premier League's most effective strikers.

During the 2011/12 season, he scored sixteen league goals, including a memorable hat-trick against Blackburn Rovers, helping the Geordies to a surprising fifth-place finish.

The following season, he continued his scoring form and became a fans favourite for his work rate and ability to produce decisive moments.

In January 2013, Ba moved to Chelsea for an undisclosed fee, marking a significant step in his career.

Although he was not always a regular starter at Stamford Bridge, he made some unforgettable contributions.

One of the most iconic moments of his Chelsea career came in April 2014, when he scored the crucial goal against Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League quarter-final, helping his club progress on away goals.

Another memorable goal came against Liverpool in the same season, when he capitalised on a famous slip by Steven Gerrard to score in a match that ultimately derailed Liverpool's title challenge.

While Ba's spell at Chelsea was relatively short, he left with a UEFA Europa League winner's medal from the 2012/13 season.

After a year and a half in London, Ba transferred to Turkish club Beşiktaş in 2014 for a reported fee of €6,000,000.

In Turkey, he rediscovered his scoring touch, netting 27 goals in all competitions during his first season. His performances made him one of the top forwards in the Turkish Super League and attracted the attention of clubs in Asia.

In 2015, he signed for Shanghai Shenhua in the Chinese Super League, joining the growing wave of international stars moving to China at the time.

He made a strong start in Shanghai, scoring regularly and becoming a key player for the club. However, his time in China was marred by a horrific leg injury in July 2016 that left his career in jeopardy. The injury, sustained in a clash during a league match, was so severe that many believed he would never play professional football again.

True to his resilient character, Ba fought back from the injury and made an inspiring return to football less than a year later. He briefly rejoined Beşiktaş before signing for Göztepe, another Turkish club, where he continued to contribute goals and experience.

Later in his career, he also played for İstanbul Başakşehir, helping them win their first-ever Turkish Super League title in 2020 —a remarkable achievement for both the club and Ba personally. Toward the end of his playing days, he had a short stint with Swiss club Lugano before announcing his retirement from professional football on 13 September 2021.

Internationally, Ba represented Senegal, the country of his parents' birth, even though he was raised in France.

He made his debut for the Senegal national team in 2007 and went on to earn 22 caps, scoring four goals.

He was part of the squad that competed at the 2012 Africa Cup of Nations. While his international career was not as prolific as his club career, he remained a respected figure in Senegalese football and a role model for aspiring players in both France and Africa.

After retiring from playing, Ba turned his attention to football development and management. He became the chairman of Albion San Diego, a club competing in the United States' National Independent Soccer Association.

His post-playing career has reflected his deep passion for the sport and his commitment to promoting opportunities for young players and contributing to the growth of football globally.

Demba Ba's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring three goals against Blackburn Rovers in a 3-1 win at St James' Park in the 2011/12 season.

Hatem Ben Arfa

Ben Arfa is one of the most gifted yet enigmatic footballers of his generation.

Born in Île-de-France, he began playing football at a very young age and quickly displayed an extraordinary natural talent.

As a child, he joined local clubs Boulogne-Billancourt and Versailles, where coaches immediately noticed his flair, creativity, and technical control. His ability to manipulate the ball seemed instinctive, and his confidence set him apart from other young players in his age group.

In 1999, when he was just twelve years old, Ben Arfa was selected to attend the prestigious Clairefontaine academy, the French Football Federation's national training centre known for producing some of the country's greatest talents.

At Clairefontaine, he refined his game over three years, developing his dribbling, movement, and tactical understanding alongside other promising young players who would later become professionals.

After his three years were up, Ben Arfa joined Olympique Lyonnais, one of France's top clubs and a dominant force in Ligue 1 at the time. At Lyon, he transitioned from youth football to the professional ranks really easily, making his senior debut in 2004.

He was only seventeen but was already being spoken of as one of the brightest young talents in French football. His early years at Lyon coincided with one of the most successful periods in the club's history. Playing alongside established stars such as Juninho Pernambucano, Florent Malouda, and Sidney Govou, Ben Arfa helped Lyon dominate domestic competition.

The club won four consecutive Ligue 1 titles during his time there, and though he was not always a starter, he was part of a team that played attacking, fluid football that suited his natural style.

Initially, Ben Arfa played as a centre forward. Still, as his game matured, he was moved into wider attacking positions where he could use his dribbling and pace to greater effect.

However, his time at Lyon was not without difficulty.

Known for his strong personality and occasional clashes with authority, Ben Arfa sometimes found himself at odds with teammates and coaches.

These disagreements, coupled with a desire for more regular playing time, ultimately led him to seek a new challenge.

In the summer of 2008, Ben Arfa transferred to Olympique de Marseille for around €11,000,000. The deal was controversial and required the intervention of the Ligue de Football Professionnel due to disputes between the two clubs.

Still, the move went through, giving Ben Arfa a fresh start at another of France's great football institutions.

At Marseille, he continued to build his reputation as one of the most technically gifted players in the country.

His dribbling ability and flair for the spectacular thrilled supporters, and he could turn a match on its head with a single moment of inspiration.

During his time at the club, Marseille won the 2009/10 Ligue 1 title and the Coupe de la Ligue, giving Ben Arfa his fifth league championship overall.

Yet even in success, tensions were never far away. His relationships with specific coaches and teammates were sometimes strained, and questions about his temperament persisted.

Nevertheless, on the pitch, he was capable of magic, producing goals and assists that reminded everyone why he was considered one of France's most talented attacking players.

After two seasons in Marseille, Ben Arfa looked abroad for a new challenge and in 2010 moved to England to join Newcastle United on loan for the 2010/11 season.

The Premier League offered him a stage to showcase his skills against some of the world's best players.

His impact was immediate. In only his second league appearance, he scored a stunning long-range goal against Everton, showcasing his confidence and technical ability. However, just as he was beginning to settle in, disaster struck.

In a match against Manchester City, he suffered a double leg fracture following a challenge from Nigel de Jong. The injury ruled him out for most of the season, stalling his progress at a crucial point in his career.

Despite this setback, Newcastle United chose to make his move permanent later that year, a sign of the club's belief in his potential.

When he returned from injury, Ben Arfa became a firm favourite at St James' Park.

His flair and audacity endeared him to Newcastle United supporters, who appreciated his willingness to take risks and entertain.

He scored several unforgettable goals during his time with the club, including remarkable solo efforts against Blackburn Rovers and Bolton Wanderers that highlighted his extraordinary dribbling and composure.

For a time, it seemed Ben Arfa had found the perfect environment to thrive in. Yet, as had happened before, tensions with management began to surface. His relationship with manager Alan Pardew deteriorated, and questions arose about his work rate and defensive contribution.

By the 2014/15 season, he was loaned to Hull City, where he struggled to make an impact. His time there was short-lived, and by the end of the season, he found himself without a club and facing uncertainty about his future.

In early 2015, Ben Arfa returned to France and signed with Nice. However, administrative complications prevented him from playing immediately, as FIFA rules barred him from representing three clubs in a single season, having already played for both Newcastle United Reserves and Hull City.

He had to wait until the following campaign to make his official debut.

The 2015/16 season turned out to be one of the most remarkable of his career. Free from injury and seemingly more focused than ever, Ben Arfa played with joy and confidence. He scored seventeen goals

in thirty-two league appearances for his new club, often dazzling opponents with his dribbling and creativity.

His form once again brought interest from Europe's top clubs and restored his reputation as one of the most exciting attacking talents in French football.

His performances that season were a celebration of skill and freedom, reminding fans of his early promise.

In July 2016, Ben Arfa signed for Paris Saint-Germain, the biggest club in France, joining a star-studded squad that included players like Zlatan Ibrahimović, Edinson Cavani, and Ángel Di María.

The move was seen as both a reward for his comeback and an opportunity for him to finally fulfil his potential at the highest level.

Initially, he contributed positively, but competition for places was fierce, and as the season progressed, his playing time diminished. Off-field tensions resurfaced, this time involving coach Unai Emery.

By the following season, Ben Arfa was excluded entirely from the squad and made no competitive appearances throughout the 2017/18 campaign.

The situation was frustrating and disheartening, but he remained patient until the end of his contract, determined to continue his career elsewhere.

When his time at PSG ended, Ben Arfa joined Rennes in 2018. There, he rediscovered his passion for the game and quickly became an essential figure in the team. His creativity and experience were instrumental in Rennes' successful 2018/19 campaign, which culminated in the club's Coupe de France victory.

In the final, Rennes defeated Paris Saint-Germain on penalties after a 2–2 draw, a result that carried extra significance for Ben Arfa given his difficult exit from PSG.

His composure and leadership during that cup run earned him respect from fans and teammates alike. It was one of the most

satisfying achievements of his career and a fitting response to those who had doubted his determination.

After leaving Rennes, Ben Arfa continued his journey across Europe, signing with Real Valladolid in Spain's La Liga.

His time in Spain was brief, and he soon returned to France, joining Bordeaux. Although flashes of brilliance were still evident, he struggled to maintain consistency and fitness.

In 2022, he signed for Lille, hoping to bring experience and creativity to a talented squad.

However, familiar patterns emerged: disputes with management and differences in opinion led to another premature departure, underlining once again the complex nature of his footballing personality.

Ben Arfa's international career followed a similar pattern to his club journey—full of promise but ultimately limited in its achievements. He represented France at every youth level and was part of the under-17 team that won the 2004 UEFA European Under-17 Championship, a tournament that showcased his technical excellence.

His performances at the youth level earned him widespread recognition.

In October 2007, he was called up to the senior French national team for the first time, making his debut in the UEFA Euro 2008 qualifying match against the Faroe Islands.

Over the years, he made fifteen appearances for France, scoring twice.

Despite his evident talent, he was never able to secure a regular spot in the senior squad, partly due to the fierce competition for attacking places and partly because of his unpredictable relationship with managers and teammates.

Hatem Ben Arfa's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring a stunning long-range shot against Everton in a 1-0 win at Goodison Park in the 2010/11 season.

Papiss Cisse

Beginning his journey in Senegal, Cissé developed his skills at Génération Foot, an academy known for producing talent that often transitions to Europe, and later played for Douanes Dakar.

European scouts quickly noticed his potential, and in the summer of 2005, he secured a move to the French club Metz.

However, opportunities were limited during his first season, and after only a month of the 2005/06 campaign, he was loaned to Cherbourg, a French side competing in the lower divisions.

During his time there, he made 26 appearances and scored 11 goals, an impressive return that demonstrated his natural finishing ability and composure in front of goal.

Upon his return to Metz, he continued to develop but was again loaned out, this time to Châteauroux in early 2008, before rejoining his home club later that year.

Cissé's breakthrough came after signing with German Bundesliga club SC Freiburg on 28 December 2009 for a fee of €1.620,000. SC Freiburg had been monitoring him since a friendly match in which he scored and assisted against them while playing for Metz, but no agreement had been reached then.

After joining SC Freiburg, Cissé made an immediate impact, scoring six goals in 16 appearances during his first partial season.

The following season, 2010/11, marked his emergence as one of the most lethal strikers in Germany. He scored 22 goals in the Bundesliga, finishing as the league's second-highest scorer behind Mario Gómez of Bayern Munich, who netted 28.

This total set a new single-season scoring record for SC Freiburg and also established a new benchmark for African players in the Bundesliga, surpassing Tony Yeboah's long-standing record of 20 goals.

His performances earned him the EFFIFU award as the league's most efficient striker, confirming his clinical edge in front of goal and cementing his status as a rising star in European football.

In January 2012, Cissé completed a move to Newcastle United in the English Premier League for an estimated £9,300,000, linking up with fellow Senegalese forward Demba Ba.

The club handed him the famous number 9 shirt, a number previously worn by Newcastle United legend Alan Shearer.

His debut could not have been more memorable. Coming on as a substitute against Aston Villa at St James' Park, Cissé scored the winning goal with a stunning left-footed volley that announced his arrival in England in style. He followed that up with a series of remarkable performances that turned him into an instant favourite with the fans.

In the 2011/12 season, he scored 13 goals in just 14 appearances, including a string of braces against West Bromwich Albion, Liverpool, and Swansea City.

His second goal against Chelsea on 2 May 2012 at Stamford Bridge, a looping, curling strike with the outside of his foot from 37 yards, was later voted the BBC Goal of the Season and is still remembered as one of the Premier League's most significant goals.

His extraordinary finishing helped Newcastle United secure a fifth-place finish and qualification for European competition, their best league result in years.

The 2012/13 season was more challenging. Newcastle United refused to release Cissé for Senegal's 2012 Olympic campaign, citing the club's need for him during a demanding season with Europa League commitments.

His scoring form dipped in the early months, though he contributed important goals in domestic and European competitions, including strikes against Bordeaux, West Bromwich Albion, and Manchester United.

In the Europa League, he became Newcastle United's hero with last-minute winners against Stoke City and Anzhi Makhachkala, sending the club into the quarter-finals. He also scored in both legs of the quarter-final tie against Benfica, although Newcastle United were eventually eliminated.

Despite a lower overall goal tally, his knack for scoring crucial goals maintained his reputation as a player who thrived on big occasions.

In the 2013/14 season, Cissé struggled to be consistent. His first goal of the campaign came in a League Cup win over Leeds United, and he managed only two goals in the Premier League.

His season ended prematurely when he suffered a broken kneecap during a match against Swansea City, forcing him to undergo surgery.

Recovery was slow, but by September 2014, he had returned to fitness and made an immediate impact.

Coming off the bench against Hull City, he scored twice to rescue a 2–2 draw. His goals were celebrated with a message of support for teammate Jonás Gutiérrez, who had revealed his battle with testicular cancer.

Cissé continued his resurgence with further braces against Swansea City and against Chelsea, whose defeat at St James' Park ended their unbeaten start to the 2014/15 season.

By December, he had nine league goals in just 14 appearances, an impressive record given his recent injury history. However, disciplinary issues marred his campaign.

He was banned for three matches for elbowing Everton's Séamus Coleman. He later received a seven-match suspension for a spitting incident involving Manchester United defender Jonny Evans, in addition to the earlier offence.

Despite this setback, he finished the season as Newcastle United's top scorer.

The 2015/16 season marked the end of his time at Newcastle United. He scored in the opening match against Southampton and netted against Crystal Palace and Liverpool later in the season. Still, his influence waned as the club struggled and ultimately suffered relegation from the Premier League.

Over his four and a half years with Newcastle United, Cissé scored 44 goals in 131 appearances, leaving a legacy defined by breathtaking moments and flashes of brilliance.

In July 2016, Cissé joined Shandong Luneng in the Chinese Super League.

The move followed a wave of high-profile transfers to China at the time, and he quickly adapted, scoring on his second appearance in a 4–1 win over Hangzhou Greentown.

After two seasons in China, he sought a new challenge and moved to Turkey in August 2018, signing with Alanyaspor in the Süper Lig.

He made his debut against Göztepe and soon opened his scoring account with a brace against Kasımpaşa, leading his team to victory.

In April 2019, tragedy struck when the Alanyaspor team coach was involved in a crash that claimed the life of teammate Josef Šural. Cissé escaped with minor injuries, but the incident deeply affected him and the club.

Despite this, he continued to perform at a high level, finishing the season among the top scorers in Turkey.

His form earned him a move to one of Turkey's biggest clubs, Fenerbahçe, in October 2020.

He spent the 2020/21 season in Istanbul before returning to France in August 2022 to join Amiens SC in Ligue 2. After a single season, he was released in July 2023.

Later that year, Cissé trained with English non-league side Macclesfield to maintain fitness and eventually resumed his playing career with Al Qabila FC in the United Arab Emirates.

On the international stage, Cissé made his debut for Senegal on 12 August 2009 in a friendly against DR Congo, scoring both goals in a 2–1 victory.

He quickly became a key player for the national team, known for his clinical finishing and leadership qualities.

One of his standout performances came in October 2010 when he scored a hat-trick in Senegal's 7–0 win over Mauritius during qualification for the 2012 Africa Cup of Nations. Cissé went on to captain Senegal between 2012 and 2013, contributing vital goals in both competitive and friendly matches.

His final international goal came in November 2014 against Botswana, marking his 16th for his country.

Over his international career, he earned 36 caps and scored 17 goals, ranking among Senegal's most reliable strikers of his era.

Papisse Cisse's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring on his debut in a 2-1 win at St James' Park against Aston Villa in the 2011/12 season.

Dwight Gayle

Gayle was born in London and began his footballing education at Arsenal's academy. He spent several years developing his skills there, but in 2007, he was released from the club's youth system.

For many young players, such a release can mark the end of professional ambitions, but Gayle's story was different.

Determined to continue pursuing a football career, he began playing for Ryan, a local side in the Essex Olympian Football League.

This represented a huge step down from the professional environment of Arsenal, but it provided him with the platform to play regular football and rebuild his confidence.

During his time in the lower leagues, Gayle's goal-scoring instincts began to stand out. His time at Ryan led to a move to Stansted, where he continued to impress with his pace and finishing ability.

It was at Stansted that he started to attract attention from clubs higher up the football pyramid. Gayle's performances in non-league football were characterised by his tenacity and tireless work ethic for his team, qualities that would become trademarks throughout his career.

In 2011, Gayle earned a move to Bishop's Stortford, who were playing in the Conference South, a significant step up from his previous levels.

There, he began to establish himself as a serious prospect, scoring regularly and showing he could perform against more vigorous opposition.

His success with Bishop's Stortford caught the attention of Dagenham & Redbridge, a Football League Two club, and in 2011, he made the jump into professional football. This marked the true beginning of his professional career.

Gayle's transition to league football was seamless. His performances for Dagenham & Redbridge quickly made him one of the standout forwards in the division, and his eye for goal continued to develop.

After impressing during the 2012/13 season, he was loaned to Peterborough United in the Championship. He adapted quickly to the higher level, scoring freely and demonstrating that his ability to find the back of the net was not limited to the lower leagues. His successful loan spell led to a permanent move later that season.

Although Peterborough United were ultimately relegated from the Championship at the end of the 2012/13 campaign,

Gayle's individual performances did not go unnoticed. His tally of goals in a struggling team drew the attention of Premier League clubs, and in July 2013, he completed a transfer to Crystal Palace for a reported fee of around £4,500,000.

The move represented a remarkable rise for Gayle, who only a few years earlier had been playing in the Essex Olympian League.

At Selhurst Park, Gayle proved himself capable of performing at the top level. His pace, composure, and finishing ability made him a practical option both as a starter and as an impact substitute. He scored several vital goals for Palace, including memorable performances against Liverpool and Aston Villa.

One of his most notable moments came in May 2014 when he scored twice in a dramatic 3–3 draw against Liverpool, a match that ended Liverpool's hopes of winning the Premier League title that season.

Despite competition for places, Gayle remained a popular figure among supporters for his work ethic and ability to make an impact when called upon.

In 2016, after three seasons with Crystal Palace, Gayle signed for Newcastle United, who were then competing in the Championship following relegation.

The move proved to be an inspired one for both player and club. Under the management of Rafael Benítez, Gayle flourished, becoming the focal point of Newcastle United's attack.

During the 2016/17 season, he scored 23 league goals, playing a vital role in Newcastle United's successful campaign to win the Championship title and secure promotion back to the Premier League.

His performances earned him widespread praise and re-established him as one of the most lethal finishers outside the top flight.

Over the following seasons, Gayle remained a valuable squad member for Newcastle United, though injuries and tactical changes sometimes limited his playing time.

He contributed crucial goals when called upon and remained a respected figure within the dressing room.

During his six years at St James' Park, he made 122 appearances and scored 34 goals in all competitions. His professionalism and commitment earned him the admiration of both teammates and fans alike.

In July 2022, Gayle moved to Stoke City in the Championship, seeking regular first-team football.

His experience was seen as a valuable addition to the squad, though his time at the club was challenging.

Despite his efforts, goals proved hard to come by, and he left Stoke City in February 2024.

Shortly after his departure, he joined Derby County on a short-term deal. Although he featured intermittently for the Rams, his spell there was brief, and he was released at the end of the 2023/24 season.

In September 2024, Gayle moved to Scotland, signing with Hibernian in the Scottish Premiership. The move represented the final chapter of his playing career.

There, he brought valuable experience to a young side and contributed both on and off the pitch. While injuries and age limited his playing time, he continued to demonstrate the same dedication that had characterised his entire career.

At the end of the 2024/25 season, Gayle announced his retirement from professional football, bringing to an end a remarkable journey spanning almost two decades.

Dwight Gayle's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring 23 league goals in the 2016/17 season.

Jonas Gutierrez

Gutiérrez began his footballing journey in the youth ranks of Vélez Sarsfield, one of Argentina's most respected clubs.

He made his professional debut for the team in 2001 at the age of 18, quickly establishing himself as a dynamic, hardworking midfielder.

His pace and ability to operate effectively on either wing or through the centre made him an essential part of Vélez's tactical setup.

During his time with the club, he contributed to their success in the 2005 Clausura Championship, helping Vélez secure the Argentine league title.

His performances attracted the attention of European scouts, and in 2005, he moved abroad to Spain, joining RCD Mallorca in La Liga.

At RCD Mallorca, Gutiérrez developed into a consistent and reliable performer in one of Europe's toughest leagues. He adapted well to the Spanish style of play, which emphasised technical ability and tactical awareness.

His direct running, defensive work rate, and willingness to track back made him a valuable asset for the team.

Over three seasons in Mallorca, he made close to one hundred appearances, scoring several key goals and earning a reputation as a player who gave everything for the shirt.

His performances in Spain also brought him to the attention of the Argentine national team selectors, marking the start of his international career.

In 2008, Gutiérrez made another significant move, this time to England, signing for Newcastle United in the Premier League. His arrival coincided with a turbulent period in the club's history. Newcastle United were struggling both on and off the pitch, but he quickly endeared himself to supporters through his tireless effort, humility, and commitment. He became a regular starter and a symbol of resilience during difficult seasons.

His Premier League debut came against Manchester United, where his strong performance made an immediate impression.

Unfortunately, Newcastle United were relegated to the Championship at the end of the 2008/09 season.

While many foreign players left for other clubs, Gutiérrez remained loyal, determined to help Newcastle United regain its top-flight status.

During the 2009/10 campaign, he played a crucial role in their successful promotion bid, contributing assists, goals, and leadership on the field.

Newcastle United won the Championship title, returning to the Premier League with Gutiérrez at the heart of their resurgence.

In the years that followed, Gutiérrez continued to be a fixture in the Newcastle United lineup.

His versatility allowed him to play as a winger, full-back, or even a central midfielder, depending on the team's needs. His partnership with fellow Argentine defender Fabricio Coloccini became one of the defining features of Newcastle United's squad during that era. Known for his distinctive running style and relentless pressing, Gutiérrez earned the nickname 'El Galgo' for his ability to cover large distances throughout a match.

His most iconic nickname, however, came from his memorable goal celebration. Whenever he scored, Gutiérrez would pull out a Spider-Man mask and put it on, celebrating in a playful yet passionate way that captured the imagination of fans.

The celebration became a signature gesture and a reflection of his cheerful personality both on and off the field.

In 2013, Gutiérrez faced the most challenging period of his life. He was diagnosed with testicular cancer, forcing him to step away from football to undergo surgery and treatment.

The diagnosis shocked the football world, but Gutiérrez's response was inspirational.

With support from family, friends, and fans, he fought through the illness with remarkable strength and determination. After successful treatment and a long recovery, he returned to professional football, a moment that was widely celebrated across the sport.

His comeback was not only a personal triumph but also a powerful story of resilience that inspired many beyond the world of football.

Upon his return to Newcastle United, Gutiérrez made one of the most emotional appearances of his career.

On the final day of the 2014/15 Premier League season, Newcastle United faced a must-win game to avoid relegation. Coming off the bench, Gutiérrez set up one goal and scored another in a 2–0 victory over West Ham United, securing Newcastle United's place in the Premier League.

His goal and post-match celebration, filled with tears and gratitude, remain one of the most memorable moments in recent club history. It symbolised not only his recovery from cancer but also his unbreakable bond with the Newcastle United fans who had supported him throughout his ordeal.

Despite his heroics, Gutiérrez was released by Newcastle United in the summer of 2015, bringing his seven-year spell with the club to an end.

During his time there, he made 205 appearances and scored twelve goals in all competitions.

Many supporters considered his departure poorly handled by the club's management, but his legacy among the fans remained intact. To them, he was more than just a player; he was a symbol of loyalty, courage, and heart.

After leaving Newcastle United, Gutiérrez continued his career in Europe and South America.

He joined Deportivo La Coruña in Spain, where he played briefly before returning to Argentina to feature for clubs such as Defensa y Justicia and his beloved Vélez Sarsfield.

Later, he also played for Independiente and Banfield, continuing to contribute with experience and leadership even in the twilight of his career.

He officially retired from professional football in 2021, bringing to a close a career defined as much by character as by skill.

On the international stage, Gutiérrez represented Argentina between 2007 and 2011, earning 22 caps. Coach Diego Maradona selected him for the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, where he played a key role as a defensive midfielder and right-back. Maradona held Gutiérrez in particularly high regard, famously describing his side as ‘Mascherano, Messi, Jonás, and eight more’. Though not the most technically gifted player in a squad filled with stars, Gutiérrez’s work rate, tactical discipline, and team-first mentality made him a valuable component of Argentina’s setup during that period.

Throughout his career, Gutiérrez was respected not only for his footballing ability but also for his sportsmanship and kindness. Whether in Argentina, Spain, or England, he built strong relationships with teammates and fans alike.

His story resonated with people beyond the boundaries of sport because it embodied perseverance, optimism, and gratitude in the face of life’s difficulties.

In retirement, Gutiérrez has remained involved in football, participating in charity events and offering his perspective on the game through interviews and media appearances.

His journey from Buenos Aires to the Premier League, his battle with cancer, and his emotional return to the pitch have cemented his status as one of football’s most inspiring figures.

His legacy is that of a player who never gave up, played with passion and heart, and showed the world that true strength comes not only from talent but also from the spirit to keep moving forward, no matter the obstacles.

Jonas Gutiérrez's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Upon his return to Newcastle United (from illness), Gutiérrez made one of the most emotional appearances of his career.

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Aleksander Mitrović

Mitrović has developed a reputation as a prolific goal scorer, known for his physical presence, aerial dominance, and relentless competitiveness on the field.

His journey from the youth ranks of Partizan Belgrade to becoming Serbia's all-time top scorer is a story of determination, talent, and consistency.

Mitrović's passion for football emerged at an early age. Growing up in Smederevo, he showed an intense competitive spirit and an instinct for goal-scoring.

He joined the youth academy of Partizan Belgrade, one of Serbia's most successful clubs, where his raw power and attacking instincts were quickly noticed.

During his formative years, he spent time on loan at FK Teleoptik, a satellite club of Partizan, which provided him the opportunity to play regular senior football and gain valuable experience.

His performances at Teleoptik, marked by his strength and finishing ability, earned him a call-up to Partizan's first team.

In the 2012/13 season, Mitrović became a regular player for Partizan. He made an immediate impact, contributing goals and assists as Partizan secured the Serbian SuperLiga title.

His performances attracted attention across Europe, and at just 18, UEFA reporters named him among the top 10 football talents under 19 on the continent. His combination of aggression, composure in front of goal, and maturity beyond his years made him one of the most promising young strikers in European football at that time.

In the summer of 2013, Mitrović made a significant move to Anderlecht in Belgium for a club-record fee of €5,000,000.

This transfer marked the first important step in his international career. At Anderlecht, he quickly adapted to the Belgian Pro League and demonstrated his goal-scoring prowess.

In his first season, he helped Anderlecht win the Belgian league title and contributed crucial goals throughout the campaign. Over the course of his two seasons at the club, he scored 44 goals in 90 appearances across all competitions.

His second season was awe-inspiring as he became the top scorer in the Belgian league, cementing his reputation as one of Europe's emerging goal scorers.

Mitrović's performances in Belgium attracted attention from several major European clubs. In the summer of 2015, he signed for Newcastle United in England's Premier League for a reported fee of £13,000,000.

The move represented both an exciting opportunity and a challenge, as he was joining one of the most competitive leagues in the world.

Flashes of brilliance and occasional disciplinary issues characterised Mitrović's time at Newcastle United. His passion and fiery temperament were both his greatest strengths and weaknesses.

In his debut Premier League season, he scored goals against some of the top clubs, but his aggressive style of play sometimes led to suspensions.

Despite Newcastle United's relegation to the Championship at the end of the 2015/16 season, Mitrović remained popular among fans for his work rate and intensity.

In the Championship, Mitrović contributed to Newcastle United's push for promotion under manager Rafael Benítez, though he often found himself competing for a starting spot.

After Newcastle United secured promotion, Mitrović's playing time became limited, and in January 2018, he was loaned to Fulham, who were competing in the Championship.

The move to Fulham would prove to be one of the defining decisions of his career.

Under the management of Slaviša Jokanović, a fellow Serb, Mitrović rediscovered his form and confidence.

He scored 12 goals in 17 appearances, helping Fulham secure promotion to the Premier League through the play-offs. His performances on loan convinced Fulham to sign him permanently later that summer.

Over the following seasons, Mitrović became the focal point of Fulham's attack and one of the most consistent goal scorers in English football.

Despite Fulham's struggles to maintain Premier League status, Mitrović's commitment and ability to find the net never wavered.

During the 2021/22 Championship season, he delivered one of the greatest individual campaigns in the history of the division, scoring a record-breaking 43 goals in a single season as Fulham won the Championship title.

His scoring feats earned him the Golden Boot and numerous accolades, and he was once again instrumental in securing Fulham's return to the Premier League. Mitrović's tally of more than 100 goals for the club across all competitions made him one of their most beloved modern players.

Mitrović's international career has been equally distinguished. He first represented Serbia at the youth level, and his breakthrough came in 2013 when he led Serbia's under-19 team to victory in the UEFA European Under-19 Championship.

His performances throughout the tournament earned him the award for best player, and his leadership and finishing ability stood out.

Later that same year, he made his debut for the senior national team. Over the years, Mitrović became an indispensable part of the Serbian squad, known for scoring decisive goals in crucial qualifiers and tournaments.

One of his most memorable moments for the national team came during qualification for the 2018 FIFA World Cup, where his goals played a vital role in securing Serbia's return to the world stage.

He represented his country at the 2018 World Cup in Russia and again at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, scoring and performing that showcased his determination and pride in wearing the national colours. In the 2022 World Cup qualifiers, he scored a dramatic late goal against Portugal in Lisbon, securing Serbia's qualification for the tournament and etching his name in the memories of Serbian fans.

By 2024, Mitrović had become Serbia's all-time leading scorer with 63 goals, surpassing the previous record held by Stjepan Bobek, and he continued to be a central figure for the national team, representing them at the UEFA Euro 2024.

In August 2023, Mitrović made another significant career move, joining Al Hilal in the Saudi Pro League for a reported fee of over €50,000,000.

His arrival in Saudi Arabia was part of a broader trend of high-profile European players moving to the Middle East, drawn by both competitive opportunities and lucrative contracts. Mitrović adapted quickly to his new environment, scoring consistently and maintaining his reputation as a reliable striker.

After a successful stint in Saudi Arabia, he later joined Al Rayyan in Qatar, where he continued to demonstrate his goal-scoring instincts and leadership.

Mitrović's playing style is characterised by his strength, aerial ability, and positional awareness. Standing over 1.90 meters tall, he is a powerful presence in the box, capable of holding up play, winning headers, and finishing with both feet.

His ability to read the game allows him to anticipate opportunities inside the penalty area, making him one of the most effective poachers of his generation.

Despite being known primarily as a target man, Mitrović's technical ability and understanding of space have improved significantly over the years, allowing him to link up play and contribute creatively as well as through goals. His emotions on the pitch have sometimes led to disciplinary issues. Still, it also fuels his passion and drive, qualities that have endeared him to supporters wherever he has played.

Aleksander Mitrović's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring his first Newcastle United goal in a 6-0 win at Loftus Road in the 2016/17 season.

Ayoze Pérez

Pérez began his football career at his hometown club CD Tenerife, coming through their youth academy before making his senior debut.

During the 2013/14 Segunda División season, he enjoyed a breakout year, earning several individual awards for his performances, including recognition as one of the division's most promising players.

His creativity, dribbling, and goal-scoring ability attracted interest from top clubs across Europe.

In the summer of 2014, he joined English side Newcastle United for a reported transfer fee of around €3,000,000.

At his new club, Pérez quickly established himself as a versatile and technically gifted forward capable of playing across the attacking line.

Over five seasons at St James' Park, he became a firm favourite for his work ethic and knack for scoring crucial goals.

He contributed to his team's promotion back to the Premier League in 2017 after their brief relegation, and he consistently featured as a key player in the top flight.

By the time he left the club in 2019, he had made over 190 appearances. He scored more than 40 goals across all competitions, leaving a strong impression on both supporters and teammates for his professionalism and consistency.

In 2019, Pérez signed for Leicester City, continuing his career in the Premier League. There, he adapted to several roles under manager Brendan Rodgers, including right winger, attacking midfielder, and false nine.

He played an essential part in Leicester City's attacking system. He contributed to their historic FA Cup victory in 2021, when the club lifted the trophy for the first time in its history after defeating Chelsea in the final. Pérez also featured in Leicester City's Community Shield win later that year, again against Chelsea.

Despite competition for places and a few injury setbacks, he remained a reliable squad member, noted for his intelligence, link-up play, and tactical awareness.

In January 2023, with his contract nearing its end, Pérez returned to Spain on loan to Real Betis for the final months of the 2022/23 season.

The move offered him a chance to play more regularly and reconnect with Spanish football after nearly a decade abroad.

His performances at Betis impressed both fans and the coaching staff, leading to a permanent move to the club later that summer on a free transfer.

During the 2023/24 season, he contributed with goals and assists in both domestic and European competitions, helping Betis maintain their strong position in La Liga and qualify for continental football.

After one season with Betis, Pérez transferred to Villarreal in 2024, joining a team known for its attacking football and emphasis on technical play.

At his new club, he brought valuable experience from his years in England.

He continued to demonstrate the qualities that had defined his career: vision, composure on the ball, and an ability to find space between defensive lines.

His move was seen as an opportunity to play a more central role within a competitive Spanish side and to extend his influence in La Liga.

Internationally, Pérez represented Spain at the under-21 level earlier in his career, making several appearances and showcasing his potential within a talented generation of players.

However, it was not until 2024 that he made his senior debut for the Spanish national team, following years of consistent club performances.

His debut came in June of that year, and he was subsequently included in Spain's squad for the UEFA Euro 2024 tournament.

Spain went on to win the championship, marking a historic achievement for Pérez, who contributed to the team's depth and attacking versatility during the competition.

Throughout his career, Ayoze Pérez has been praised for his technical ability, football intelligence, and adaptability across various tactical systems.

Whether operating as a winger drifting inside to create chances or as an advanced playmaker linking midfield and attack, he has shown a refined understanding of the game. His journey from the Canary Islands to England and back to Spain reflects his persistence and professional growth, evolving from a promising young talent into a mature and experienced footballer capable of influencing matches at the highest level.

Off the pitch, Pérez is known for his calm personality and dedication to his craft.

His career history stands as an example of steady development, resilience, and versatility, as he continues to contribute to Villarreal and the Spanish national team with the same creativity and commitment that have defined his playing style since his early days at CD Tenerife.

Ayoze Pérez's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring his first Newcastle United goal in a 2-1 win at Tottenham Hotspur in the 2014/15 season.

Jonjo Shelvey

Growing up in a footballing environment, Shelvey displayed a strong natural talent for the game from a young age.

He joined the youth setup at Arsenal before moving to West Ham United, and later Charlton Athletic, where his talent began to attract widespread attention.

His development through Charlton Athletic's youth system was rapid, and he soon established himself as one of the most promising young midfielders in the country.

At Charlton Athletic, Shelvey was viewed as a technically gifted player, confident in possession, and capable of orchestrating play well beyond his years.

His ability to control matches from midfield and to score from distance sets him apart from many players in his age group.

Shelvey made his professional debut for Charlton Athletic in April 2008, at the age of 16 years and 59 days, becoming the youngest player in the club's history. This marked the beginning of a senior career that would span multiple leagues and countries.

Despite his youth, he quickly demonstrated a maturity on the ball and a willingness to take responsibility in key moments.

During his time at Charlton Athletic, he scored notable goals and became a regular feature in the side, earning praise for his energy, composure, and creativity.

His performances attracted interest from several Premier League clubs, and it became clear that his time in the lower divisions would be short-lived.

In May 2010, Shelvey signed for Liverpool for an initial fee of £1,700,000, a significant move for both player and club.

His move to Merseyside saw him become a dynamic, controlling presence in midfield, capable of linking defence and attack with intelligence and flair.

The transfer represented a significant step in his career, moving from the Championship to one of the best clubs in English football.

Shelvey joined Liverpool during a transitional period for the team, as they sought to rebuild following the Rafael Benítez era. His early appearances came under manager Roy Hodgson and later Kenny Dalglish, who valued Shelvey's technical skill and eye for goal.

Although competition for places was fierce at Anfield, Shelvey gradually worked his way into the first-team picture.

His early seasons involved a mix of substitute appearances, cup outings, and loan spells.

In September 2011, he joined Blackpool on a short-term loan, gaining valuable first-team experience in the Championship.

The midfielder's performances there were impressive, and he scored several goals, including a memorable hat-trick against Leeds United, which demonstrated his attacking instincts from midfield. On his return to Liverpool, Shelvey continued to feature intermittently, particularly in domestic cup competitions and European fixtures.

During the 2011/12 season, Shelvey was part of a Liverpool squad that won the League Cup, defeating Cardiff City in the final after a penalty shootout, and reached the FA Cup final, which they lost to Chelsea.

Although he was not always a starter, his involvement in both campaigns helped him gain experience in high-pressure matches and the demands of playing at a top club.

In his time at Liverpool, he made notable contributions, including a strong showing in the UEFA Europa League.

His goal against Young Boys in a 5–3 win was particularly well-received, highlighting his long-range shooting ability.

However, Shelvey's time at Liverpool was also marked by inconsistency and occasional disciplinary issues. He was sent off in a high-profile match against Manchester United in 2012 following a clash with Jonny Evans, and his fiery temperament sometimes overshadowed his performances.

By 2013, despite showing flashes of brilliance, it became apparent that securing regular first-team football at Liverpool would be challenging, given the competition for midfield spots. Shelvey therefore decided to move on in search of greater opportunities.

In July 2013, he joined Swansea City for £5,000,000. The Swans, managed by Michael Laudrup at the time, were known for their possession-based style of play, which suited Shelvey's strengths.

He quickly became an integral part of the team, operating as a deep-lying playmaker or attacking midfielder, depending on the tactical setup.

Shelvey's first season at Swansea City was productive, as he contributed goals and assists, most notably a spectacular strike against

Aston Villa that was later nominated for Goal of the Season. His passing range and ability to unlock defences were key attributes in Swansea's attacking approach.

However, his occasional lapses in discipline and tendency to take risks sometimes drew criticism from pundits and supporters alike.

Shelvey continued to develop at Swansea City under subsequent managers, including Garry Monk.

He was often relied upon as the creative fulcrum in midfield, and his leadership qualities began to emerge as he matured.

However, his time at the club was not without controversy. In some matches, he was accused of being inconsistent, alternating between moments of brilliance and frustration.

Nevertheless, his overall contribution was valuable, and he helped Swansea City achieve several mid-table finishes in the Premier League, consolidating their reputation as a stable top-flight club.

In January 2016, Shelvey made another significant move in his career, signing for Newcastle United for £12,000,000. The Mags, managed at the time by Steve McClaren, were struggling near the bottom of the Premier League table and sought Shelvey's creativity to spark their revival.

He made an immediate impact on his debut against West Ham United, delivering an impressive performance that showcased his passing range and leadership.

Within a month of joining the club, he was appointed stand-in captain in the absence of Fabricio Coloccini, highlighting the trust placed in him by the coaching staff.

Despite his best efforts, Newcastle United were relegated at the end of the 2015/16 season. However,

Shelvey decided to remain with the club and play in the Championship, a decision that would prove instrumental in their promotion campaign.

Under manager Rafael Benítez, Shelvey thrived as one of the team's key players, dictating play from midfield and using his vision to control matches. Newcastle United won the Championship title in the 2016/17 season, securing an immediate return to the Premier League, as mentioned several times in this book.

Shelvey's performances during that campaign were widely praised, and he was seen as a leader both on and off the pitch.

Back in the Premier League, Shelvey continued to play an essential role for his club.

His range of passing, ability to switch play, and composure in possession made him one of the team's most technically gifted players. Benítez often used him as the main man in midfield, responsible for initiating attacks and providing balance between defence and attack.

However, Shelvey's reputation for occasional disciplinary issues persisted. He was sent off in Newcastle United's opening match of the 2017/18 season against Tottenham Hotspur for a stamp on Dele Alli, which drew criticism and a suspension.

Despite this, he recovered his form and remained a key figure for the club in subsequent seasons, earning praise for his professionalism and commitment.

During his time at Newcastle United, Shelvey was also named vice-captain and became one of the more experienced voices in the dressing room. He forged a strong relationship with the supporters, who appreciated his passion and willingness to take responsibility in challenging moments.

Over the years, Shelvey developed a reputation as one of the best long passers in the Premier League, frequently splitting defences with diagonal balls or through passes from deep positions.

After several years on Tyneside, Shelvey's role at Newcastle United began to diminish, particularly following the club's takeover and the arrival of new signings in midfield.

In early 2023, after more than seven years at Newcastle United, he departed to seek new challenges.

His next move was to Nottingham Forest, who had recently been promoted back to the Premier League. The transfer offered Shelvey another opportunity to play at the top level, but his time there proved short-lived. He struggled to secure a consistent place in the starting lineup and reportedly clashed with management, resulting in his premature departure.

Following his departure from Forest, Shelvey moved abroad to Turkey, signing with Çaykur Rizespor.

His time there allowed him to experience a different footballing culture and environment. Though his stay was relatively brief, it demonstrated his willingness to continue testing himself in new surroundings.

Afterwards, he joined Eyüpspor, a team competing in the Turkish second tier, where he contributed his experience to a squad seeking promotion. His technical skills and ability to control the tempo of play remained evident, even as his pace and physical intensity naturally declined with age.

In 2025, Shelvey returned to England, joining Burnley. His move to Burnley represented both a homecoming and a final chapter in a career that had seen him compete across multiple divisions and countries.

At Burnley, his role evolved into that of a seasoned professional guiding younger players while still capable of influencing games with his passing ability and intelligence.

On the international stage, Shelvey represented England at various youth levels, including under-16, under-17, under-19, and under-21 teams. He captained the under-19s, demonstrating leadership qualities that were evident throughout his club career.

His performances for the youth teams earned him a call-up to the senior England squad in 2012, and he made his debut later that year in a World Cup qualifier against San Marino.

Although his international career did not develop as extensively as some had predicted, partly due to intense competition for midfield positions, Shelvey's inclusion in the national setup reflected the recognition of his technical ability and potential.

As of the mid-2020s, Shelvey's career reflects a journey marked by early promise, moments of brilliance, and a series of reinventions across different clubs and leagues. From breaking records as Charlton Athletic's youngest-ever player to representing Liverpool, Swansea City, and Newcastle United in the Premier League, and experiencing football in Turkey before returning to England, his path has been one of determination, adaptability, and enduring technical quality. Though his international career was brief, his influence at the club level, particularly during Newcastle United's Championship-winning campaign and their subsequent years in the Premier League, has left a lasting impression.

Jonjo Shelvey's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Being Newcastle United's top scorer in the 2019/20 season.

Ryan Taylor

Taylor began his professional football career at Tranmere Rovers in 2002 after progressing through the club's youth system.

A versatile player capable of operating both as a right-back and a midfielder, he quickly established himself as a key member of the team.

His technical ability, composure on the ball, and set-piece proficiency made him stand out at Prenton Park.

During his three full seasons with Tranmere Rovers, Taylor made a total of 122 appearances in league and cup competitions.

His performances were consistently strong, and he was a vital figure as Tranmere Rovers sought promotion from the lower divisions of English football.

The 2004/05 season was particularly memorable for Taylor, as his efforts earned him recognition from both his club and his peers. He was voted Tranmere Rovers' Player of the Year. He was also named in the Professional Footballers' Association Team of the Year, confirming his reputation as one of the most promising young players outside the top flight.

In July 2005, Taylor's performances attracted the attention of Premier League side Wigan Athletic, who signed him for a fee of £750,000.

The move represented a significant step up for Taylor, giving him the chance to test himself at the highest level of English football.

However, his early years at Wigan Athletic were disrupted by a series of injuries that limited his chances of establishing a regular place in the team.

Despite these setbacks, he showed glimpses of his quality, particularly through his ability to score from free-kicks and long-range shots.

His reputation among Wigan Athletic supporters grew notably due to an unusual scoring record: he scored in four consecutive matches against Newcastle United. This feat drew attention and a degree of infamy among Newcastle United fans.

In January 2009, football's unpredictable nature brought an ironic twist to that narrative when Taylor joined Newcastle United in a part-exchange deal that saw Charles N'Zogbia move in the opposite direction.

At that point, Newcastle United were struggling in the Premier League, and Taylor's arrival was seen as a move to add both experience and versatility to the squad.

His ability to play across the defence or midfield made him a valuable addition to the club.

Unfortunately, Newcastle United's form did not improve enough to avoid relegation, and the club dropped into the Championship at the end of the 2008/09 season.

Taylor stayed at St James' Park and played a role in the club's immediate return to the Premier League.

Under the management of Chris Hughton, Newcastle United dominated the Championship in the 2009/10 season, finishing as champions and securing automatic promotion.

Taylor contributed to that success both on the pitch and as part of a strong, unified dressing room determined to restore the club to the top division.

However, as Newcastle United re-established itself in the Premier League, Taylor's career once again became plagued by injuries.

Over the next several seasons, he endured a series of serious setbacks that would have tested the resolve of any professional athlete.

In the 2010/11 campaign, he fractured a metatarsal, a common but frustrating injury that kept him sidelined for an extended period.

Upon his return, he worked hard to regain match fitness and form, but his momentum was halted again when he suffered a broken leg, forcing him back into rehabilitation.

Perhaps the most devastating of his injuries came in August 2012, when he sustained a cruciate knee ligament injury, one of the most severe setbacks a footballer can face. This required major surgery and a lengthy recovery, followed by another serious knee injury that further delayed his return to action.

Despite these obstacles, Taylor showed remarkable determination to keep on playing. His commitment and professionalism earned him great respect from teammates, coaches, and fans alike.

In total, he played 106 matches for Newcastle United across all competitions.

However, the latter years of his time at the club were dominated by his rehabilitation and recovery efforts, with only 18 appearances coming across his final three seasons.

By May 2015, after more than six years with the club, Newcastle United released him as they sought to rebuild the squad.

Following his departure from Tyneside, Taylor joined Hull City for the 2015/16 season.

Managed at the time by Steve Bruce, his new club were competing in the Championship and pushing for promotion.

Taylor's experience was expected to be a valuable asset, particularly in a squad with several younger players. However, his playing time was again limited, and he made only occasional appearances, usually as a substitute.

Although Hull City achieved promotion to the Premier League that season, Taylor's contribution was minimal, and he was released at the end of his one-year deal.

In October 2016, Taylor signed with Port Vale, who were competing in League One.

The move offered him a chance to play more regularly and rebuild his career after several years disrupted by injuries and limited opportunities.

He made a positive impression through his professionalism and leadership, though his stay was short-lived.

After leaving the club in January 2017, he rejoined Port Vale briefly in March of the same year to help cover for injuries in the squad.

While his time there was not long enough to make a lasting impact statistically, it was another demonstration of his enduring desire to play and contribute wherever possible.

Later that year, Taylor took his career in a new direction by signing for ATK in the Indian Super League in December 2017.

The move to India offered him the chance to experience football in a different culture and environment. ATK, based in Kolkata, was one of the most high-profile clubs in the competition, and Taylor's arrival brought both experience and quality to their squad.

He featured for the club during the 2017/18 season before deciding to return to England when the campaign ended.

In September 2018, Taylor signed for Fleetwood Town, a League One side managed by Joey Barton.

It was at Fleetwood Town that Taylor played the final season of his professional career in the English Football League.

Although no longer a regular starter, he provided valuable experience and mentorship for the younger players in the team.

At the end of the 2018/19 season, after 17 years of professional football in the English leagues, Taylor retired, bringing to a close a career that had seen him make 350 competitive appearances and score 42 goals.

Retirement, however, did not mark the end of Taylor's connection with the game.

After spending some time away from professional football, he decided to return to playing at a lower level.

In October 2020, he came out of retirement to sign for non-League side Colne, who played in the Northern Premier League.

The move reflected both his enduring love for football and his willingness to contribute his experience to smaller clubs outside the professional tiers.

His presence was a boost for the team, and he continued to show the technical ability and competitive spirit that had defined his career.

In January 2022, Taylor made another move within non-League football, joining Buxton.

The club had ambitions of climbing the non-League pyramid, and Taylor's experience at higher levels was seen as an essential asset in their push for promotion.

Even in the later stages of his career, he maintained high professional standards and remained a respected figure both on and off the pitch.

Ryan Taylor's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring in Newcastle's 4-3 win at Chelsea in the Carling Cup 3rd Round in the season 2010/11.

Cheick Tioté

Tioté began his footballing journey with FC Bibo, a local club in the Ivory Coast known for nurturing young talent.

His performances there caught the eye of European scouts, particularly from Belgium, a country with strong football ties to West Africa.

In 2005, he signed his first professional contract with R.S.C. Anderlecht, one of Belgium's top clubs.

Moving from West Africa to Europe at the age of 19 was a significant challenge. The language, weather, and culture were all unfamiliar to him, and he had to adapt quickly both on and off the field.

At Anderlecht, he was initially considered a raw prospect rather than a finished player.

His strength and defensive ability were clear, but he needed time to adjust to the tactical and technical demands of European football.

Tioté made his professional debut in 2005, though opportunities were limited. He spent much of his early time at the club learning and waiting for a regular place in the first team.

In the 2007/08 season, Tioté was loaned out to Dutch club Roda JC Kerkrade in the Eredivisie. It was there that he began to flourish as a footballer.

The Dutch league, known for its emphasis on technical skill and intelligent positioning, helped him develop the tactical awareness that would later define his game.

At Roda JC, Tioté's physicality and work rate made him a key player in midfield. His ability to break up play, win duels, and

distribute the ball efficiently earned him recognition as one of the most promising defensive midfielders in the league.

His performances attracted attention from several clubs, and in 2008, he made a permanent move to FC Twente, another Eredivisie side with growing ambitions.

Under Steve McClaren's management, FC Twente were building a team capable of challenging for the Dutch title. Tioté became an essential part of the team's midfield, providing the steel and balance that allowed the team's attacking players to flourish.

His first season saw him adapt well to FC Twente's system, but it was during the 2009/10 campaign that he truly made his mark.

Twente enjoyed a remarkable season, defying expectations to win their first-ever Eredivisie title. Tioté's tireless energy, ball-winning ability, and midfield leadership were crucial components of that success.

He played 58 matches across all competitions for Twente and was regarded as one of the team's most consistent performers.

Winning the Dutch title was his first significant career achievement and established him as a player ready for a bigger stage.

In August 2010, Newcastle United, newly promoted to the English Premier League, signed Tioté for £3,500,000.

It was a significant move for both the player and his new club, who were rebuilding their squad under manager Chris Hughton.

Tioté quickly became a favourite at St James' Park. His tough tackling, relentless work rate, and fearless attitude made him the heartbeat of Newcastle United's midfield. Supporters appreciated his no-nonsense style and willingness to give his all for the team.

He made his debut against Everton in September 2010 and impressed immediately with his composure in the middle of the park.

Tioté's most famous moment in a Newcastle United shirt came on 5 February 2011, in a Premier League match against Arsenal. Newcastle United had fallen 4–0 behind in the first half, but in one of

the greatest comebacks in Premier League history, they fought back to 4–4. Tioté scored his only goal for the club that day—a stunning left-footed volley from outside the box that flew into the net and sent St James’ Park into chaos. It was a goal that captured his spirit: powerful, fearless, and unforgettable. That strike remains one of the most iconic moments in Newcastle United’s modern history and secured Tioté’s place in club folklore.

Over the next six and a half years, Tioté became one of Newcastle United’s most reliable and respected players. He made 156 appearances for the club across all competitions, anchoring the midfield through several managerial changes and turbulent seasons.

Though not a prolific scorer, he was valued for his consistency, defensive solidity, and leadership. Tioté was known for his ability to break up opposition attacks, shield the defence, and provide simple but effective passing from deep.

His style was unglamorous but essential—every successful team needs a player like him, someone who does the hard work that allows others to shine. His teammates often praised his commitment in training and his determination to win, while fans admired his humility off the field.

Injuries began to affect Tioté’s playing time in later years, and as Newcastle United went through periods of instability, his appearances became less frequent.

After the club’s relegation to the Championship in 2016, he sought a new challenge.

In February 2017, he transferred to China League One side Beijing Enterprises Group.

The move was seen as an opportunity for him to experience a new culture and continue his career in a growing football market. Tioté arrived in Beijing with enthusiasm and professionalism, quickly earning respect for his attitude and work ethic.

Sadly, his time there would be tragically short.

On 5 June 2017, during a routine training session with Beijing Enterprises, Tioté collapsed on the field.

Despite immediate medical attention and efforts to revive him, he was pronounced dead shortly afterwards.

The cause was reported as cardiac arrest. He was only 30 years old. The news of his sudden death sent shockwaves through the football world.

Teammates, former managers, and fans from across the globe paid tribute to him, remembering not only his talent as a player but his warmth and humility as a person. Newcastle United released a heartfelt statement expressing their sadness, and tributes poured in from the Ivory Coast national team, FC Twente, Anderlecht, and countless fans who had admired his dedication and fighting spirit.

Cheick Tioté's international career was equally distinguished. He made his debut for the Ivory Coast national team in 2009, during a period when the country's golden generation was making its mark on world football.

He earned 55 caps and scored once for his country. Tioté represented the Ivory Coast at two FIFA World Cups—in 2010 in South Africa and 2014 in Brazil—and featured in four Africa Cup of Nations tournaments.

Despite several near misses, he eventually lifted the Africa Cup of Nations trophy in 2015, when the Ivory Coast defeated Ghana in a dramatic penalty shootout. Tioté's contribution to that team was immense. He was a quiet leader, respected by his peers, and known for his relentless energy in midfield. His role in helping the Ivory Coast achieve continental glory was a fitting reward for years of dedication.

Off the pitch, Tioté was known for his humility and deep religious faith.

He was a devout Muslim who lived a simple and disciplined life, often described as quiet and modest despite his success.

Those who knew him personally spoke of his kindness, generosity, and sense of humour.

He maintained strong ties to his family and his homeland, frequently supporting charitable causes in the Ivory Coast. Even after years in Europe, he remained proud of his roots and often spoke about the importance of giving back to the community that had supported him in his youth.

His tragic passing at such a young age left a void not only in the football community but also among those who looked up to him as an inspiration.

The legacy Tioté left behind is one of resilience, hard work, and dedication.

Cheick Tioté's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring his only goal for Newcastle United in a 4-4 draw at St James' Park in the 2010/11 season.

Chapter Nine

A Brief History of the 2020s

The 2020s have so far been one of the most dramatic periods in Newcastle United's history.

The decade began in an uncertain fashion, marked by the lingering discontent of supporters during the final years of Mike Ashley's ownership, a period of lost ambition.

Yet within a few short years, the club would experience a major shift in direction, driven by a change in ownership.

The change was neither immediate nor without controversy, scrutiny but overall, it has been one of improvement on the pitch.

The journey from the relegation battles of 2021 to the lifting of a major domestic trophy in 2025 marked a symbolic reclaiming of identity for a club with a rich history and passionate following.

In the seasons leading up to the takeover, Newcastle United found themselves stuck in a cycle of survival and mediocrity.

Steve Bruce, appointed in 2019, managed the team through a period that coincided with the never-before-seen challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 2020/21 season was mostly played behind closed doors, which meant there were no fans at the matches.

Despite the absence of fans, the team's performances were good overall, finishing 12th in the Premier League and reaching the FA Cup quarter-finals.

When the 2021/22 season began, the team's form was poor to say the least.

By October 2021, the club was winless and sat in the relegation zone; performances were not up to expectations and confidence was low, fears of relegation took hold.

Everything changed on October 7, 2021, when a consortium led by the Saudi Arabian Public Investment Fund, alongside PCP Capital Partners and the Reuben Brothers, completed the £300,000,000 purchase of the club.

The deal ended Mike Ashley's 14-year tenure and immediately triggered celebrations among supporters, many of whom had long campaigned for change.

Yet the takeover also caused criticism outside the club, with concerns about sportswashing, human rights, and the broader implications of sovereign wealth involvement in football.

Supporters, however, focused mainly on the renewed possibility of ambition after years in which they felt the club had lacked direction and competitive purpose.

Shortly after the takeover, Steve Bruce departed from his role as manager by mutual consent.

The club appointed Eddie Howe in November 2021, a decision that would prove to be the correct one.

He inherited a squad struggling with confidence, fitness issues, and tactical clarity, and he set about reshaping both mentality and style.

The January 2022 transfer window became the first idea of the club's new direction.

Signings such as Kieran Trippier, Dan Burn, Chris Wood, Bruno Guimarães, and Matt Targett were not superstars. Still, they were character-driven players who improved the team's spine, which was the most important thing at that time.

Performances improved almost instantly.

The team's form in the second half of the 2021/22 season was one of the strongest in the league.

The Mags club rose from the relegation zone to finish 11th, comfortably clear of danger, and supporters began to believe that a new era was not just promised but actually happening.

Things completely changed in the 2022/23 season. Eddie Howe's men became one of the Premier League's most tactically impressive and hard-working teams.

The recruitment strategy remained focused, with players such as Alexander Isak, Sven Botman, and Nick Pope joining the squad.

These signings improved both the quality of the starting lineup and the depth of the squad.

Newcastle United reached the Carabao Cup final — its first major Wembley final since 1999 — and ultimately lost to Manchester United, but reaffirmed its growing reputation in all competitions.

More significantly, they finished fourth in the Premier League. This secured qualification for the UEFA Champions League for the first time in two decades, quite an achievement!

Competing in the Champions League in the 2023/24 season brought new challenges. Newcastle United found themselves placed in a formidable group alongside Paris Saint-Germain, Borussia Dortmund, and AC Milan.

Despite being considered underdogs, the team rose to the occasion with intensity and bravery. The high point of the campaign came in a memorable 4–1 victory over Paris Saint-Germain at St James' Park, a performance that electrified the stadium and showcased the team's ability to compete at the highest level.

Unfortunately, the group's difficulty, combined with injuries to key players and the strain of balancing domestic and European demands, resulted in the club finishing third in the group, ending their Champions League journey earlier than supporters had hoped.

Nonetheless, the campaign was viewed as a valuable learning experience and reinforced the team's growth.

The most historic moment of the decade arrived in the 2024/25 season when Newcastle United ended a 70-year wait for a major domestic trophy.

On March 16, 2025, they defeated Liverpool 2–1 in the Carabao Cup final, a symbolic and emotional achievement.

Supporters who had endured decades of frustration, near misses, and unfulfilled potential were finally rewarded with silverware.

The victory represented not only sporting success but also validation of the project that had been built since 2021. Something that all concerned could be proud of.

Alongside on-pitch progress, significant off-field developments shaped the new era.

The club invested in upgrading training facilities, which were long overdue.

Plans to expand St James' Park were considered, driven by the recognition that demand for match tickets had surged beyond capacity.

Additionally, an essential cultural step was taken in August 2022 when Newcastle United Women came under the whole structure and backing of the club for the first time.

This alignment signalled a broader, more inclusive vision for the club's future across both the men's and women's teams.

Throughout this period, questions remained about the broader implications of ownership and the role of financial power in football.

These debates did not disappear, and they continued to shape impressions of Newcastle United's rise. Yet for supporters, the return of competitiveness was deeply felt, and to most of them, was more important.

The city and the club are uniquely intertwined, and for many fans, the team's revival represented something more meaningful than mere sporting achievement.

The 2020s marked a journey from stagnation to revitalisation, driven by strategic leadership and on-pitch change.

Newcastle United rediscovered its voice and got back its place in the football landscape.

Chapter Ten

Ten Memorable Players from the 2020s

Miguel Almirón

Almirón's career has taken him from the youth pitches of Asunción to international competitions and major club stages across South and North America and Europe.

He began his career with Cerro Porteño, one of Paraguay's biggest clubs and a team that has traditionally played a significant role in developing domestic talent.

As a young player, Almirón showed high potential, particularly in his vision, dribbling, and willingness to run at defenders.

His early years were marked by the discipline and work ethic that would later become defining traits throughout his professional life.

The Paraguayan league environment helped him develop his technical style, and his performances drew the attention of clubs abroad.

His next significant step came in 2015 when he transferred to Lanús in Argentina.

The move marked his introduction to one of South America's most competitive football environments, where the tempo is higher, the marking tighter, and tactical understanding is crucial.

At Lanús, Almirón developed rapidly. He became known for linking midfield to attack, driving the ball forward, and operating effectively in transitions.

His work contributed significantly to Lanús' success, particularly during the 2016 Argentine Primera División campaign.

That season was a significant milestone, not only because Lanús won the league, but also because Almirón emerged as one of the most creative and dynamic midfielders in the region.

The exposure he gained during this period elevated his reputation and opened the door for his move to Major League Soccer.

In 2017, Almirón signed for Atlanta United for a transfer fee of around \$8,000,000, which was substantial for MLS standards at the time. Atlanta United, a new club in the league, aimed to build a competitive and entertaining squad, and Almirón was central to that vision.

His playing style fit perfectly with his new team's fast-paced, attacking approach under head coach Gerardo Martino.

During his time in MLS, Almirón became not only one of the league's standout midfielders but also one of its most symbolized players. His pace, eagerness to press, technical sharpness, and ability to break defensive lines made him a consistent threat.

He was named to the MLS Best XI in both of his seasons at the club and received the MLS Newcomer of the Year award in 2017, reflecting his immediate impact on the league.

The peak of his time with Atlanta came in 2018, when he helped the club win the MLS Cup.

His contributions throughout the season and playoffs were instrumental, both in scoring and creating chances, and in the relentless energy he brought to the midfield. The connection he formed with striker Josef Martínez became one of the most effective partnerships in MLS history. Their dynamic understanding, timing, and shared attacking instincts made Atlanta one of the most feared in the league.

Following the title-winning campaign, it was clear that Almirón was ready for a new challenge on a larger stage.

His performances had attracted interest from European clubs, especially those looking for a player capable of influencing matches from the attacking midfield role.

In January 2019, he signed for Newcastle United for a fee of around £21,000,000. The move set a club record and was the highest transfer fee paid for an MLS player.

Almirón's time in England was marked by both adaptation and growth.

The Premier League demands pace, physicality, and tactical flexibility, and his early months at his new club required adjustment as he adapted to a league that was faster and more complex defensively than MLS.

Despite initial challenges with scoring, his work rate, pressing, and movement won the admiration of supporters and the coaching staff.

Over time, he became known for his relentless running, defensive contributions, and occasional moments of attacking brilliance, including goals scored from tight angles or swift counterattacks.

At the international level, Almirón has represented Paraguay since his debut in 2015.

Playing for the national team carries a particular emotional weight for him, reflecting the pride and responsibility of representing his home country.

He has participated in several editions of the Copa América, including the 2016 tournament in the United States and the 2019, 2021, and 2024 tournaments.

While Paraguay have not achieved major titles during this period, Almirón has consistently been one of the team's most influential and creative players. His ability to progress the ball and carry the attack forward has often been crucial in Paraguay's efforts to remain competitive against strong South American opponents.

In January 2025, Almirón returned to Atlanta United, marking a significant homecoming in his career.

The return seemed like more than a transfer; it reconnected him with a club and a city where he had enjoyed remarkable success and the affection of supporters.

His style of play and personality left a memorable imprint during his first spell, and his return generated enthusiasm and excitement among fans eager to see him once again drive the midfield, press opponents, and link up with new teammates.

The move suggested a full-circle moment, reconnecting player and club at a stage where his experience in Europe could contribute leadership and maturity to the squad.

Throughout his career, Almirón has developed a reputation not only for his athletic and technical qualities but also for his character. Coaches, teammates, and supporters often comment on his humility, friendliness, and willingness to work relentlessly on and off the pitch.

He has not been defined by controversy or ego but instead by perseverance, consistency, and a personal commitment to improvement.

Whether playing in Paraguay, Argentina, the United States, or England, he has carried himself with dedication to the sport and significant pride in representing both club and country.

Almirón's journey stands as an example of how talent, when combined with discipline and resilience, can transcend borders and leagues.

His story reflects the modern football pathway, where South American players increasingly move to MLS as a stepping stone to Europe, and, upon returning to a former club, it cannot be a step backwards but a meaningful continuation of a shared project and identity.

His contributions for club and country continue to be followed closely, and his legacy remains tied to his energetic style, creative instincts, and consistent professionalism.

Miguel Almirón's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring twice for Newcastle United against Southampton in a 3-2 win at St James' Park in the 2020/21 season.

Dan Burn

Burn's early footballing development included time in youth systems, but he did not emerge from the academy of a major Premier League club.

After setbacks in his youth career, he worked to establish himself at Darlington, a smaller club playing in the lower divisions of English football.

Debuting in the Football League for the North-East-based club in 2009, he stood out immediately for his exceptional height.

At around 6 feet 6 inches, he possessed an uncommon physical profile for a defender, even at the professional level.

Early on, however, he lacked the refined touch and positional understanding that his later career would demonstrate.

His performances for Darlington showed promise and attracted attention from higher-tier clubs.

By the end of the 2010/11 season, after making 19 appearances for Darlington, he moved to Fulham, then a Premier League club, for around £300,000.

His time there represented a step up in training intensity, technical expectation, and tactical preparation. However, breaking into a Premier League starting lineup as a young defender is rarely straightforward, and Burn spent much of his early time at Fulham developing his game outside the first-team environment.

To gain valuable match experience, he went on loan to Yeovil Town for the 2012/13 season.

They competed in League One at the time, and Burn quickly became a key figure in their defensive unit. He made 41 appearances for the club during the season, contributing significantly to their successful campaign. One of the highlights of his time with Yeovil Town was playing in the League One play-off final at Wembley, where they secured promotion to the Championship.

The experience of playing in high-stakes matches was important in his development.

The following season, Burn spent part of his campaign on loan with Birmingham City, who were competing in the Championship.

During his time with The Blues, he continued to develop as a left-sided central defender.

Birmingham City's defensive shape required him to refine his aerial abilities both defensively and offensively, and his physical presence became increasingly influential.

This loan spell gave Burn the experience he needed to transition towards regular first-team football at a higher level.

After returning to Fulham, Burn found opportunities to play in the Premier League, particularly during the 2013/14 season when Fulham were struggling to maintain their league status.

Burn's height and discipline allowed him to compete effectively against physically imposing attackers, and at times, he was tasked with stopping some of the league's most accomplished forwards.

However, Fulham's collective difficulties meant they faced relegation, and Burn found himself experiencing the challenges of a club moving downward in the league structure.

Although this period was difficult, it demonstrated his ability to maintain composure on a struggling side and to continue improving individually.

At the conclusion of the 2015/16 season, Burn's contract with Fulham came to an end, and he moved to Wigan Athletic.

Joining The Latics represented a fresh chapter and an opportunity to assert himself as a central figure in a club seeking stability and eventual success.

At Wigan Athletic, Burn became a leader and central defensive anchor.

He featured regularly and showed confidence in his role, helping to organise the defensive shape and contributing to transitions from defence to midfield.

His passing improved during this period. Wigan Athletic relied on strong defensive cohesion and counter-attacking opportunities, and Burn flourished in the responsibilities entrusted to him. His work ethic and character earned him respect among teammates and supporters.

One of the memorable periods of his Wigan Athletic tenure came during their FA Cup campaign, notably their 2018 defeat of Manchester City. That match showed Burn's composure and defensive resilience against one of the strongest attacking sides in the country.

Performance in such games helped raise his profile and demonstrated his ability to operate successfully against the highest level of opposition.

Ahead of the 2018/19 season, Burn signed for Brighton & Hove Albion, who were in the Premier League.

However, as part of the agreement, he remained on loan with Wigan Athletic until January 2019. This allowed him to maintain continuity with his former team while also preparing for the next step in his career.

When he officially joined Brighton & Hove Albion recognised not only his defensive reliability but also his capacity to adapt to different roles.

Under their coaching staff, Burn improved his passing range, his awareness in positional rotations, and his comfort operating in wide channels.

At Brighton & Hove Albion, he eventually established himself as a regular Premier League player from the 2019/20 season onward.

Notably, he often played as a left-sided defender, including at left-back or wing-back, despite his height being more typical of a central defender.

Burn demonstrated that he was not simply a tall defender reliant on aerial dominance; he could contribute to build-up play, make overlapping or supporting runs, and defend effectively in wider spaces. His time at Brighton & Hove Albion earned him widespread respect for his professionalism and his continuous improvement. His first Premier League goal came on 1 January 2022 against Everton, a milestone reflecting both his sustained effort and his growing influence on the pitch.

In January 2022, Burn signed for Newcastle United, the club he had supported since childhood. The move held personal significance for him.

By joining The Mags, he not only returned to the North East of England but also became part of a club undergoing transformation and renewed ambition.

At St James' Park, he quickly established himself as a key figure in the defensive line.

Often playing as the left-sided centre-back in a back four, he provided stability, leadership, and aerial strength. His calmness on the ball and his ability to read the game made him a reliable presence.

He contributed to Newcastle United's impressive defensive record during the 2022/23 season, helping the team secure a top-four finish and qualification for the UEFA Champions League.

Burn also played in the 2023 EFL Cup final, where Newcastle United faced Manchester United at Wembley. Although his team did not win the match, the event marked an important milestone in the club's journey toward renewed competitiveness.

Burn's role in helping Newcastle United reach the final highlighted his influence and consistency. He demonstrated the ability to perform on major stages and remained composed even under high pressure.

Throughout his career, Burn has been frequently characterised as a player who disproves assumptions. His height initially led some to assume limitations in mobility, ball control, or tactical versatility. Yet across multiple clubs and tactical systems, he has shown adaptability and growth.

Coaches have trusted him because of his work ethic, attention to detail, and willingness to contribute wherever needed.

He is known for being a steady presence in the dressing room and is respected by teammates for his grounded character and professional attitude.

Burn's physical attributes obviously form a notable part of his game. His height makes him one of the tallest outfield players in English football, and this gives him a commanding presence in aerial duels. Whether defending crosses, contesting long balls, or attacking set pieces, he provides a constant advantage in the air. However, his career progression shows that he has never relied solely on height. He has worked to improve footwork, positional timing, defensive angles, and distribution.

Another key aspect of Burn's career is his resilience.

During his formative years, he was not considered a standout youth prodigy destined for immediate impact in the Premier League.

Instead, he developed gradually, moving through clubs and leagues, gaining experience in lower-division environments where physical and mental strength are tested continuously.

Those early years shaped his mentality. He learned to value training, to persevere through setbacks, and to remain focused even when opportunities were not guaranteed.

Burn's journey also reflects the importance of finding the right environment at the right time. At Brighton & Hove Albion, he was part of a team that valued tactical intelligence and collective structure.

At Newcastle United, he joined a club with renewed ambitions and a passionate fan base that connected strongly with his background and commitment.

Playing for the team he supported as a boy added an emotional dimension to his performances and strengthened his bond with supporters.

His story resonates with many fans because it is not one of immediate stardom but of gradual achievement. It demonstrates how determination, humility, and professionalism can build a successful career at the highest level.

Players like Burn show that football is not only shaped by raw talent but also by character, learning, and persistence.

As his career at Newcastle United has continued, Burn has remained a consistent and trusted defender. His ability to contribute in multiple defensive roles offers valuable flexibility. His teammates and coaches appreciate his communication, experience, and reliability. Supporters view him not only as a strong performer but also as someone who represents the region and understands the club's identity.

As he continues to play for Newcastle United, he stands not only as a crucial defensive presence but also as a reminder that football careers can take many paths.

That determination and consistency can eventually lead to the fulfilment of long-held dreams.

Burn has also become an England International, making his debut against Albania in March 2025.

Dan Burn's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Being a massive part of the squad that qualified for the UEFA Champions League in the 2022/23 season.

Martin Dúbravka

Born in Žilina, Slovakia, Dúbravka began his football journey in the youth system of MŠK Žilina, one of the country's most successful clubs.

He progressed through the ranks and made his senior debut, becoming part of a team that regularly contested domestic titles and participated in European competition.

Playing in the Slovak top flight gave him an early platform to develop his reading of the game and comfort with the ball at his feet.

This skill set later became particularly valuable as he moved to leagues with faster tempo and higher pressure.

After establishing himself in Slovakia, Dúbravka's career took him abroad.

He first moved to Denmark, joining Esbjerg fB, where he experienced the demanding physicality and direct play typical of the Danish Superliga.

The adjustment period was vital for him, not only on the pitch but culturally, as he got used to living and working in new environments.

Following his time in Denmark, he continued his career in the Czech Republic, first with Slovan Liberec and later with Sparta Prague.

In the Czech league, he developed further as a goalkeeper who blended shot-stopping instincts with leadership qualities. His performances, especially for Sparta Prague, caught attention beyond the region and suggested he could handle the intensity of a more globally visible league.

The turning point of his career arrived in January 2018, when he joined Newcastle United in the English Premier League, initially on loan.

Managers, supporters, and analysts noticed almost immediately how composed he looked despite the Premier League's speed and scrutiny.

His loan quickly proved successful, leading Newcastle United to make the transfer permanent.

Over time, he became one of the club's most reliable players, trusted to keep his team competitive even under heavy pressure.

His efforts were recognised in the 2019/20 season when he was named Newcastle United's Player of the Year. This award reflected not only consistent saves but his influence on the team's defensive confidence.

Dúbravka's time in England included both challenges and successes.

Injuries and competition for the starting role occasionally shuffled his lineup spot, but he remained professional and prepared, returning to form when called upon.

During the 2022/23 season, he spent part of the campaign on loan at Manchester United.

There, he played twice in the EFL Cup, helping the team advance in the competition that Manchester United ultimately won. Although his loan meant he did not feature in the final and did not receive the winner's medal, the experience added another important chapter to his career by exposing him to a different environment and internal standards at a club with global expectations.

After the loan period, he returned to Newcastle United and continued to provide competition and depth in goal until he signed for Burnley ahead of the 2025/26 season.

On the international stage, Dúbravka represented Slovakia at youth levels before making his senior debut in May 2014.

Over time, he became the first-choice goalkeeper and a familiar figure in major qualifying campaigns.

His steady presence and ability to organise defenders made him a central part of the national team setup.

He started all of Slovakia's matches at UEFA Euro 2020, a tournament postponed to 2021, where he produced memorable saves but was also part of some dramatic moments, including a widely

discussed own-goal incident that drew attention beyond typical football headlines.

Throughout it, he remained composed in public, and his response demonstrated resilience above all else.

Goalkeepers often face situations where a single moment overshadows a whole game's work, and Dúbravka handled the scrutiny in a way that reinforced his professionalism.

He continued to serve as Slovakia's first-choice goalkeeper at UEFA Euro 2024. His experience was valuable for a team balancing veteran leadership with emerging talent.

By this point, he had become one of the most recognisable faces of Slovak football, known for consistently representing his country with dedication.

While Slovakia has historically been a team that plays with structure, patience, and defensive organisation, Dúbravka fits naturally into that identity, often relied upon to make essential saves in tight, tactical matches.

Throughout his club and international career, Dúbravka has developed a reputation for reading attacking movements well, responding quickly to close-range attempts, and maintaining composure under sustained pressure. His approach to leadership tends to be understated.

Rather than dramatic gestures or vocal displays, he communicates in calm, simple instructions that help stabilise defenders around him.

His handling and positioning often limit the need for spectacular diving saves, though he has shown on many occasions that he can deliver those too when required.

Beyond his technical qualities, what stands out is his steady advancement across different leagues and cultural environments without losing the foundation of his game.

Many goalkeepers peak later in their careers, and his curve fits that pattern: early development at home, refinement in nearby European leagues, and a mature breakthrough in England.

His journey reflects persistence rather than sudden breakthrough, gradual adaptation rather than a single transformative moment.

As a whole, Dúbravka's career illustrates how consistency, professionalism, and awareness can elevate a player to high levels even without flashy self-promotion.

His contributions have earned respect from teammates, coaches, and supporters across multiple countries. For Slovakia, he has been a long-term anchor in a position where stability is invaluable.

For Newcastle United fans, he is remembered not only for his saves but also for his reliability during difficult periods in the league. For those who follow European football more broadly, he represents a goalkeeper who earned every opportunity through steady, thoughtful progression in his craft.

Martin Dúbravka's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Being on the bench when Newcastle United won the EFL Cup in the 2024/25 season.

Anthony Gordon

Gordon joined Everton's youth academy at a young age and found himself surrounded by a system that demanded both technical quality and sharp football intelligence.

Everton have produced many talented footballers over the years, and Gordon joined the academy at a time when the club was making a deliberate effort to rely more on homegrown players.

He matured alongside teammates who were all competing for very few chances to be noticed by the first team staff.

This environment can be intense for young players, but it also builds resilience. Gordon had the advantage of being a winger with strong dribbling ability, quick acceleration, and a willingness to run directly at defenders.

Even before his professional debut, those who watched him regularly knew he possessed a boldness and competitive spark that set him apart.

His senior debut came in December 2017, in a Europa League match against Apollon Limassol.

He was still just a teenager, but it was an important moment for him and for the academy staff who had worked to bring him along.

Everton used the match as an opportunity to test younger players, and while a single game does not guarantee anything, moments like that change a player's mindset.

After getting even a brief exposure to the senior level, Gordon understood the standard he needed to reach. Though that debut did not immediately lead to a permanent place in the first-team squad, it confirmed that the path forward was clear.

Over the next couple of seasons, he built up experience through training sessions, domestic cup appearances, and occasional league opportunities. Everton were not a club without difficulties during this period.

Managerial changes, inconsistent performances, and recruitment decisions that did not always pay off led to frequent turnover in the squad. For a young player like Gordon, this sometimes provided opportunities and at other times complicated the situation.

Young players often benefit from stability, and Everton rarely had that at the time. Even so, Gordon's persistence paid off.

He earned more playing time and eventually became a regular in the squad.

His speed, work rate, and competitiveness endeared him to fans who appreciated his pressing and chasing every ball. Gordon is not a player who plays passively or waits for the game to come to him. He forces himself into the flow of matches, and supporters tend to respond strongly to players who show visible commitment on the pitch.

As Everton faced increasing pressure in the league, fighting relegation battles rather than pushing for higher finishes in the table, Gordon became one of the young players whose performances were highlighted for both their potential and their responsibility.

There were games in which he was a key attacking outlet, driving forward and winning free kicks in dangerous areas.

There were also games where the weight of the situation was heavy, and the team struggled as a whole.

It was clear by this stage that Gordon had the ability, but his development needed consistency and an environment that would support and build his confidence.

The following central turning point came when Newcastle United became interested in signing him.

They were under new ownership and, with a clear long-term plan to strengthen the squad, saw Gordon not only as a young player with talent but also as someone who fit their tactical identity. Eddie Howe values intensity, work ethic, and physical commitment across all positions, especially in attackers. Gordon's energy and willingness to press were traits that matched his vision for the wings.

After negotiations that drew considerable public attention, Gordon moved to Newcastle United in January 2023.

The transfer sparked strong reactions, especially among Everton supporters, as he had been a homegrown player and one of their most promising talents. But for Gordon, the move represented a chance to develop in a more stable and improving football environment.

At Newcastle United, Gordon faced the challenge of integrating into a squad that was already functioning well.

He was not being signed to be the immediate star; he had to earn his place again.

The coaching staff helped him refine aspects of his game, particularly his decision-making in the final third, the timing of his pressing, and the balance between dribbling past defenders and releasing the ball at the right moment. Newcastle United encouraged him to play without fear and to contribute effectively to the team's structure.

During his time with Newcastle United so far, Gordon has shown noticeable improvement in composure and end product. He has contributed goals and assists in both league and European competitions, and his performances have demonstrated maturity and confidence.

His ability to run at defenders remains one of his defining strengths. Still, he has developed greater subtlety in his movement, often drifting into half-spaces, combining tightly with midfielders, or making diagonal runs that create passing lanes for his teammates.

Beyond attacking output, Gordon's pressing has become one of his standout attributes.

He tracks back with urgency, helps regain possession, and forces mistakes from opposing defenders. In a Newcastle United side known for its aggressive off-ball work, these qualities are essential.

This growth in performance at club level also brought him closer to the England national team setup. Gordon has represented England at youth levels, including the under-21 side, where he played an essential role in their success.

As a footballer, Gordon is not defined solely by speed and directness.

He reads the game with awareness that continues to sharpen as he gains more experience. The winger understands how to position himself to receive the ball in dangerous areas. He has a strong sense of when to take on a defender and when to recycle possession.

While there is still room for growth in aspects such as finishing consistency and decision-making in crowded penalty areas, these are areas that frequently improve with time, confidence, and coaching.

What stands out most consistently in his style is the intensity of his competitive spirit. He does not shy away from physical challenges, and he carries himself with a confidence that suggests he believes he belongs at the highest level.

Off the pitch, Gordon has learned to manage the pressure of being a high-profile player.

Transfers involving strong emotional reactions from supporters can affect a player, especially one who grew up in the same city as the club he left. However, he appears to have handled this transition with composure.

He speaks openly about wanting to keep improving and contributing to his current team, while acknowledging the past without allowing it to overshadow his present.

This balance is not always easy, particularly for young players navigating the intensity of Premier League football.

The direction of his career now feels positive. Newcastle United are a team with ambition, structure, and an identity that suits the way Gordon plays. He finds himself surrounded by teammates who

welcome his energy and movement, and by coaching staff who work closely with him to refine the details of his game.

When a young player moves to a club that fits their development needs, the results can be substantial. Gordon's progression since joining Newcastle United shows exactly that.

Looking forward, Gordon's career depends on several factors, including his ability to maintain consistency, adapt his game as opponents learn more about him, and stay physically prepared for the demands of top-level football.

Yet the foundation he has built over years of steady effort, patience, and self-belief suggests he is well-positioned for continued success.

The qualities that carried him from Everton's academy to his debut to becoming a key Premier League player are still present: drive, competitiveness, willingness to take on defenders, and a mentality that refuses to fade under challenging matches.

In many ways, Gordon's story is ongoing. He has already achieved notable milestones, but still has much room to grow. He remains at an age where development can accelerate rapidly, and his current environment supports that.

For supporters of Newcastle United and Premier League followers, Gordon represents the type of player who can shape the course of matches through energy, intelligence, and directness. His path to this point shows that early opportunities must be matched with perseverance, adaptability, and a willingness to embrace change when it leads to growth.

His story so far shows a player stepping into his abilities with confidence and determination, ready to shape the next chapters through continued effort and belief in what he can become.

Gordon has also become an England International, making his debut against Brazil in March 2024.

Anthony Gordon's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring his first Newcastle United goal at Chelsea in a 1-1 draw in the 2022/23 season.

Lewis Hall

Hall joined Chelsea's academy at the under-8 level, having previously played for Binfield.

There, he progressed steadily through the youth ranks and soon became recognised as one of the standout players in a robust academy contingent.

His technical ability, tidy passing, intelligence in defensive phases, and composure in crowded midfield areas drew praise from coaches. One of his developmental strengths was his ability to adapt to new tactical roles with minimal instruction.

Initially a midfielder, he was frequently deployed at left-back or wing-back due to his understanding of space, decision-making in build-up play, and comfort receiving and distributing the ball under pressure.

He made his senior debut for Chelsea at the age of 17. Supporters first saw him widely during domestic cup competitions, where his composure and energetic work rate stood out. Even when playing against seasoned Premier League opposition, Hall demonstrated maturity uncommon for a teenager.

His league debut and subsequent appearances often featured the same traits: neat footwork, careful positional discipline, and a willingness to receive the ball in tight spaces to help maintain control in possession. These traits became defining elements of his style.

In the summer of 2023, Hall joined Newcastle United initially on a season-long loan with an obligation to buy, a move shaped both by Chelsea's evolving squad priorities and Newcastle United's interest in developing young, technically assured players who could be integrated into a long-term project.

At St James' Park, Hall has had to balance competition for positions with adaptation to a system that demands precise defensive contribution and high physical output.

He has continued to show his natural strengths: calm distribution, intelligent support play, and an ability to contribute to controlled possession sequences.

While left-back is his primary role in the current squad, there remains ongoing discussion among coaches and observers about whether he may eventually settle into a midfield position, particularly as he matures physically and accumulates more match experience.

His ability to play in two positions is generally considered an asset.

However, there is also recognition that young players benefit from stability, and Newcastle United's long-term plans may include clarifying his role more distinctly.

Hall's involvement with England's youth teams reflects his standing among his age group.

He has participated in youth international tournaments and qualifying campaigns, regularly demonstrating the same traits seen at club level: balance, composure, and reliability.

Off the pitch, Hall is regarded as grounded and attentive to his development.

Coaches past and present have spoken about his work ethic, listening skills, and seriousness toward training.

He does not present as a player preoccupied with personal hype or external attention; instead, he appears focused on steady improvement.

Hall has also earned respect for his calmness. Even when moving from youth football into Premier League environments, he has rarely shown signs of nerves or impulsiveness. This mental steadiness is considered one of his most promising long-term qualities.

As Newcastle United continues to develop under new ownership and coaching leadership, Hall is expected to be part of a core of young players alongside others who represent a future-oriented direction.

With more match minutes, tactical stability, and continued refinement of his physical attributes, he has the potential to become a regular Premier League starter, whether his future position settles as a modern possession-oriented left-back or as a deep-lying midfielder remains to be seen.

However, both pathways highlight his technical foundation and decision-making ability.

His career is still in the early stages, but the foundations of a thoughtful, versatile, and composed footballer are already well established.

Hall has also become an England International, making his debut against Greece in November 2024.

Lewis Hall's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Making his Newcastle United debut in the 8-0 victory at Sheffield United in the 2023/24 season.

Joelinton

Joining Sport Recife's youth academy provided Joelinton with his first opportunity to work within a professional structure.

He steadily rose through the youth ranks, showing a combination of technical ability and physical presence.

Although not yet fully developed physically, he demonstrated intelligence in his movement and a willingness to press and work hard. Sport Recife saw enough promise to promote him to their senior team, and he made his professional debut in 2014.

During his time in the first team, Joelinton contributed goals and energetic performances, helping establish him as one of the club's most promising young talents.

His early displays suggested a player capable of playing in a range of attacking roles, sometimes as a central striker and at other times drifting into wide positions.

His performances in Brazil began attracting the attention of European scouts, who saw both his potential and the rawness that could be refined through structured development.

In 2015, Joelinton took a significant step by moving to Europe, joining TSG 1899 Hoffenheim in Germany.

This move marked an important turning point in his career, not only because of the shift in culture and playing style, but also because Hoffenheim was a club known for emphasising tactical intelligence and physical intensity—the initial period required adjustment.

The Bundesliga demanded a faster pace, greater discipline, and more advanced positional awareness. TSG 1899 Hoffenheim believed Joelinton had the potential to adapt, but he needed regular game time to find his rhythm.

To support his growth, the club arranged a two-year loan to Rapid Wien in Austria in 2016.

The loan to Rapid Wien became an essential stage in Joelinton's development. Austria's Bundesliga was competitive but not as demanding as Germany's, which gave him more freedom to play consistently and develop his strengths.

There, he became a key figure, known for his ability to hold the ball under pressure, link play, and contribute goals. His physical development accelerated, and he gained confidence in his role as a forward capable of blending strength with technical skill.

He made over 60 appearances for the Austrian side, scoring important goals in domestic competitions and European matches. His performances drew increasing attention, and he returned to TSG 1899 Hoffenheim in 2018 as a more developed, more assertive player.

Upon his return to TSG 1899 Hoffenheim, Joelinton earned a regular place in the first team under manager Julian Nagelsmann, who recognised his versatility.

Rather than seeing him solely as a traditional striker, his club used him in roles that required him to drop deeper, link midfield to attack, and press.

His time in Germany shaped him into a more complete footballer, without doubt.

In 2019, Joelinton transferred to Newcastle United for a club-record fee of around £40,000,000.

He arrived in the Premier League with the expectations that accompany such a move, particularly the assumption that he would be the club's primary goalscoring forward.

However, adapting to English football was challenging. The pace, physical intensity, and tactical rigidity of Premier League defences required rapid adjustment.

In addition, Newcastle United's playing style at the time offered limited attacking support, leaving Joelinton isolated in matches, often battling defenders without the service or structure needed to excel as a central striker.

Public scrutiny intensified as goals did not arrive in the numbers many had expected, and he faced criticism from supporters and commentators.

Despite these challenges, Joelinton did not fade. Instead, he continued working, demonstrating resilience and professionalism.

His fortunes began to change dramatically when Eddie Howe arrived as Newcastle United's manager in late 2021.

Howe and his coaching staff looked beyond goalscoring stats and recognised the attributes Joelinton possessed: strength in duels, defensive awareness, ball retention under pressure, and a willingness to work tirelessly. Howe made the bold decision to move Joelinton from a forward role to a midfield role.

This change proved to be one of the most successful positional reinventions in recent Premier League history.

In midfield, Joelinton discovered a role that allowed him to influence the game more broadly.

His physical presence made him effective at recovering possession, while his close ball control and composure enabled him to carry the ball forward and relieve much of the pressure on his team.

He became a key figure in Newcastle United's pressing system, frequently winning tackles, covering ground, and disrupting opposition build-up play.

At the same time, he retained the attacking instincts developed earlier in his career, making late runs into the box and contributing to both phases of play.

The midfielder's performances helped drive Newcastle United's resurgence, transforming him from a target of criticism into a fan favourite and symbol of the team's growing identity.

His success at Newcastle United eventually led to recognition on the international stage.

Although he had previously represented Brazil at the under-17 level, he did not make his senior national team debut until 2023.

This achievement reflected both his growth and the broader acknowledgement of the unique qualities he brought to the pitch.

Representing Brazil is often seen as one of the most difficult honours to earn, given the depth of talent available.

Joelinton's story is not simply one of positional change but one of resilience, self-trust, and a willingness to evolve.

His journey has included cultural adaptation, tactical reinvention, and determination under public scrutiny.

At Newcastle United, he became a symbol of grit and redemption, demonstrating that simple statistics cannot always measure a player's value.

His transformation into a midfielder not only improved his career but also reshaped Newcastle United's identity, helping them develop into a more competitive and dynamic side.

Across his career, Joelinton has shown that football development is not always linear. Success comes not only from natural ability but also from adaptability, openness to coaching, hard work, and resilience in the face of setbacks.

Whether contributing goals as a forward in Austria, linking play in Germany, or dominating midfield battles in the Premier League, Joelinton has proven himself to be a footballer whose value lies in the breadth of his abilities and the strength of his character.

His rise from the streets of Pernambuco to the international stage stands as a testament to the unpredictable, transformative journey of professional football.

Joelinton's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Transforming from a forward to a world-class midfielder under Eddie Howe.

Valentino Livramento

As a child, Livramento joined the local grassroots club Roundshaw, where he first played as a striker.

His earliest coaches recall his strong athletic ability and desire to run at defenders, showing a natural comfort level with the ball and a willingness to take the initiative.

Even though he did not become a striker permanently, the sharp attacking instincts he developed during these years would follow him throughout his career, shaping the dynamic full-back he eventually became.

From Roundshaw, he joined Chelsea at the under-9 level. Entering their academy placed him in one of the most competitive and respected youth systems in Europe.

This particular academy, especially during the period Livramento developed, was known for producing technically refined and tactically intelligent players.

The environment was intense and full of high-level prospects, meaning any player who rose through it had to be consistently driven.

At Chelsea, coaches gradually shifted Livramento into wide defensive and wing-back roles.

He possessed pace, close control, and a willingness to get forward, which made him well-suited to the modern interpretation of the full-back position.

Rather than being a purely defensive player, he learned to provide width, overlapping runs, and involvement in the final third.

Over time, he built a reputation at the academy level for being one of the most exciting young full-backs Chelsea had developed.

As Livramento progressed through Chelsea's youth ranks, he regularly featured in under-18 and under-23 competitions.

During the 2020/21 season, he particularly stood out, playing key roles in youth league campaigns and cup competitions.

His performances earned him the Chelsea Academy Player of the Year award for the 2020/21 season, a significant achievement given the sheer number of talented academy players competing for that recognition.

The award signalled not only his technical skill but also his commitment, consistency, and growth.

At this stage, he was seen as a high-potential prospect, capable of stepping into senior football in the near future.

However, competition for first-team minutes at Chelsea was extremely high, especially at full-back, where the club had internationally established players already entrenched in starting roles.

Livramento, eager to play regular first-team football, made the difficult but ambitious decision to leave Chelsea for an opportunity where he could be trusted as a first-team regular rather than a developmental option.

In August 2021, he signed for Southampton, a club with a strong reputation for developing young talent and providing meaningful first-team opportunities.

He adapted quickly and impressed in the early stages of the season. His confidence with the ball, willingness to overlap, and ability to recover defensively made him stand out.

Many supporters and pundits noted how composed he looked for such a young defender and how naturally he seemed to belong at the Premier League level.

His performances attracted widespread attention and reinforced the idea that he could become one of the league's best young full-backs.

Unfortunately, Livramento experienced a significant setback in April 2022 when he suffered a serious knee injury, specifically an anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injury.

This required surgery and a long period of rehabilitation, often one of the most challenging experiences a young footballer can face.

Recovering from an ACL injury involves not just rebuilding physical strength and stability, but also regaining the confidence to move at full speed, change direction sharply, and trust the knee under competitive pressure.

Throughout his rehabilitation, he was supported closely by medical staff, coaches, family, and teammates.

His determination and patience became defining elements of his character.

The recovery process lasted several months, and while he was away from the pitch, the football world recognised him as a talented player whose future depended on how well he could return from such a difficult injury.

When Livramento eventually returned to play, he demonstrated resilience and maturity that many found encouraging.

Although he initially needed time to rebuild his rhythm and sharpness, his technical qualities and athletic instincts remained.

In 2023, he joined Newcastle United, one of the most rapidly developing clubs in English football.

With the Mags, he entered a competitive squad environment that valued tactical versatility.

His ability to play on either side of the defensive line, to advance high into attacking zones, and to adapt to different match situations made him a valuable and forward-thinking addition to the team.

His background continues to influence him off the pitch.

Growing up in a family with Portuguese and Scottish heritage adds to his sense of identity. It also shapes questions about his international career, as he has represented England at the youth level but remains eligible for Scotland and Portugal. He chose to play for England and made his debut against Eire in November 2024.

Tino Livramento's story is one of talent, dedication, and resilience.

From playing as a striker at a local youth club to developing in Chelsea's elite academy to emerging as a Premier League full-back and overcoming a serious injury, his journey reflects both natural ability and disciplined growth.

His career remains in an active stage of evolution, and many supporters and observers are eager to see how he continues to progress.

His combination of technical skill, speed, tactical awareness, and mental strength suggests he has the potential to become a standout player in the years ahead.

Valentino Livramento's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring his only Newcastle United goal in a 3-0 home win against Wolves in the season 2023/24.

Alan Saint-Maximin

Saint-Maximin's football career began in France's youth academies, where his natural talent became apparent early.

As a young player, he already had dribbling skills far above average.

He could manipulate the ball with both feet, accelerate past defenders, and perform feints that seemed instinctive rather than rehearsed.

This natural flair made him a player whom coaches either tried to discipline tactically or simply allowed to create freely.

From the beginning, he played with a sense of freedom, the kind of expression one might associate more with street football. That sense of improvisation became a core part of his football identity.

He made his professional debut with Saint-Étienne, one of France's traditional clubs.

While his opportunities there were somewhat limited, he showed flashes of potential that drew attention from larger teams.

His next significant move was to AS Monaco, a club known for developing young talent and selling players to top European sides.

However, at his new club, competition for attacking roles was fierce, and he did not immediately break through as a regular starter.

Loans would follow, including a notable one at Bastia, where he gained more playing time and began showing greater maturity in his play.

The player's real rise in prominence came when he joined Nice. Under the management of coaches who encouraged attacking play, Saint-Maximin found a place where his dribbling and unpredictability were embraced.

At his latest club, he became an important figure, often carrying the ball forward and breaking defensive structures with individual runs.

His performances there attracted the attention of clubs outside France, eventually leading to his move to Newcastle United in the Premier League.

At St James' Park, Saint-Maximin became a firm favourite almost immediately.

His runs forward provided excitement during times when his team lacked stability or attacking strength.

Even when his end product — goals or assists — did not consistently match the level of his dribbling ability, his importance to the team's offence was undeniable.

He frequently carried the ball out of pressure, relieved defensive strain, and forced opposing defenders to commit multiple players to stop him.

Supporters admired not just his technical brilliance but also the joy he brought to his play.

However, his time in the Premier League also came with challenges.

Injuries sometimes limited his consistency, and tactical demands changed as Newcastle United's ownership and coaching staff evolved.

When the club began pursuing a more structured and balanced style under new management, the question of how Saint-Maximin fit into that approach became a topic of discussion.

His value was clear, but fitting him into a tightly coordinated tactical system required adjustments.

Nonetheless, his years at Newcastle United are fondly remembered by many, and his impact on the club's culture during that era remains part of his legacy.

A new chapter in his career came when he moved to Al-Ahli in Saudi Arabia.

This move was part of a broader trend in global football, with several well-known European players transferring to the Saudi league

for both financial reasons and the opportunity to play in a developing football environment.

At Al-Ahli, Saint-Maximin continued to display his trademark flair, though the shift in league style required him to adapt to new defensive structures and a different pace of play.

His time there added another dimension to his career, demonstrating his willingness to embrace challenges beyond Europe's traditional leagues.

From Saudi Arabia, he eventually transferred to Club América in Liga MX, one of the most storied and widely supported teams in Mexico and the Americas.

Playing in Liga MX introduced him to a football culture marked by intense passion and a strong regional identity. América is a club with high expectations and a demanding fan base.

For a player like Saint-Maximin, who thrives in environments where supporters respond emotionally to performance and personality, the move provided an opportunity not just to play but to perform theatrically. His flair aligns well with the atmosphere and intensity that surrounds football in Mexico.

On the field, Saint-Maximin remains a player defined by his explosiveness, quick changes of direction, and ability to beat defenders in one-on-one situations.

Many players at the professional level can dribble, but very few can do so in a way that instantly changes the momentum of a match.

His ability to carry the ball from deep areas or along the wing and draw defensive attention continues to make him valuable.

Opponents often find that even when they contain him once, the threat returns on the next possession.

Off the field, his personality is expressive and full of individuality.

He interacts with fans, presents himself with confidence, and does not shy away from being seen. That combination has made him not just a footballer but a public figure.

Some people appreciate his charisma, some criticised his flashiness, but there is no denying that he stands out, and standing out is a significant part of his identity in global football.

As his career at Club América continues, the story of Allan Saint-Maximin is still unfolding.

He remains a player capable of capturing attention, changing the rhythm of games, and surprising audiences.

His journey across multiple leagues and cultures shows adaptability and ambition.

Whether he is remembered most for his dribbling, his personality, or his impact on supporters, he has made a mark as a footballer who brings excitement every time he steps onto the pitch.

Alan Saint-Maximin's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring the winning goal at Burnley in a 2-1 win for Newcastle United in the 2020/21 season.

Fabian Schär

Schär's earliest footballing experiences came at FC Wil, a local club that provided a stable environment for young players to learn without excessive expectations.

From the outset, his coaches saw a player who could scan situations and act decisively.

He was not necessarily the biggest or strongest youth player, but he understood positioning and had a natural ability to time tackles.

As he transitioned from youth football to senior football with Wil, he adapted to the physicality of the professional game. He learned to manage duels against experienced forwards who had spent years refining their tricks and movement patterns.

It was at Wil where he first started developing the passing range that would later become a defining part of his game.

The Swiss second division is not always known for elegance. Still, it served as a useful training ground for a defender who sees the game not merely as a series of collisions but as a problem-solving exercise in space and timing.

In 2012, his transfer to Basel represented a significant shift in both his role and the expectations placed upon him.

Basel were the dominant force in Swiss football, a club accustomed to winning domestic titles and competing regularly in European competitions.

Here, Schär found himself surrounded by international players and a coaching environment that demanded precision.

During his three seasons with Basel, he won the Swiss Super League title each year, but those achievements were not effortless.

He had to learn to operate in a team that was often expected to keep possession and break down defensive opponents, meaning he needed to be as comfortable building attacks from deep as he was defending counter-attacks.

At the same time, Basel's European runs meant facing high-level attackers and tactical systems from across the continent. These matches accelerated his growth considerably.

He learned to anticipate the movements of quicker forwards, when to commit and when to hold his position, and to gain confidence in stepping forward to initiate play rather than limiting himself to clearances and simple passes.

In addition to his development as a defender, Schär began to show surprising goal-scoring ability, particularly from distance and on set pieces.

While defenders scoring from corners is common, he demonstrated the ability to strike the ball cleanly from outside the box, often hitting shots with both precision and power.

This made him not just a defensive cornerstone but a genuine offensive threat in key moments.

His goals at Basel were often memorable: powerful free kicks, curled strikes from range, or perfectly timed headers.

They contributed to a growing reputation in Switzerland, and beyond that, this was not an ordinary centre-back but a player with a level of technique generally associated with midfielders.

His performances at Basel attracted attention abroad, and in 2015, he moved to TSG 1899 Hoffenheim in the German Bundesliga.

The change of club required adaptation. The Bundesliga is faster, more physical, and tactically varied, and Hoffenheim, at the time, were a club trying to stabilise itself amid the pressures of the league.

Schär had to earn his place in the side, sometimes dealing with rotation and competition for starting spots.

Although his time in Germany was not always smooth, it provided essential learning experiences.

The intensity of the league improved his decision-making under pressure, and he learned to adjust his game when the margin for error was small.

Even if his TSG 1899 Hoffenheim chapter did not define his career, it strengthened the foundation on which later successes would rest.

His next move took him to Spain, where he joined Deportivo La Coruña in 2017.

This environment brought a different set of challenges. Deportivo struggled in La Liga, and the season proved difficult for the club, ultimately culminating in relegation.

Yet he was one of the players who consistently performed at a high level, showing leadership, tactical awareness, and resilience even under challenging circumstances.

It was during this time that he demonstrated the mental strength that would serve him later in his career.

Being part of a relegation battle is emotionally draining, yet Schär continued to show composure and professionalism.

Even when the club's future looked increasingly bleak, he did not allow his performances to decline.

His time in Spain also helped refine his reading of technique-heavy forwards and of teams that rely on tight passing patterns, improving his anticipation and interception skills.

In 2018, he made a transfer that would become one of the most important steps of his career: signing for Newcastle United.

For a modest transfer fee, the St James' Park-based club acquired a defender who could bring not only stability at the back but also ball progression and intelligence.

The Premier League's high tempo suited his style. It allowed him to defend actively, step into midfield when needed, and use his passing range to switch play or launch quick counter-attacks.

His performances quickly made him a central figure in Newcastle United's defence. Supporters appreciated how he combined old-fashioned defensive instincts with the poise of a modern ball-playing centre-back.

Newcastle United's rise under new management and investment further highlighted Schär's importance, as the team evolved into one that presses aggressively and builds from the back.

He has become one of the most trusted figures in the squad, admired for his consistency, calmness, and ability to deliver under pressure.

On the international stage, Schär has been a key figure for Switzerland for over a decade.

After representing his country at the 2012 Olympics, he made his senior debut in 2013 and quickly became a regular.

His international career includes appearances at three World Cups (2014, 2018, and 2022) and three European Championships (2016, 2020, and 2024).

Switzerland have been one of the most stable and competitive national teams in Europe during this period, frequently advancing from the group stage and often eliminating more heavily favoured opponents.

Schär has played in many of these high-pressure matches, contributing not only defensively but also occasionally scoring key goals.

His ability to stay composed in tournament environments, where a single mistake can be decisive, has made him one of Switzerland's most trusted pillars of defence.

One of the striking characteristics of Schär's game is his calmness. He does not rush challenges or dive into tackles unnecessarily.

Instead, he prefers to read the play, position himself correctly, and intercept the ball cleanly. His passing ability allows him to start attacks from deep positions, helping his team to keep control rather than immediately giving possession away. When opponents press heavily, he remains calm, showing a level of comfort with the ball.

At the same time, his shooting technique remains a threat. On rare but memorable occasions, he has scored goals that capture attention far beyond his club's fan base, typically struck from outside the area with precision and force.

Off the pitch, Schär is known for a quiet and composed personality.

These qualities translate into leadership, though not the loud or theatrical kind. Instead, he leads through reliability, example, and a consistent professional approach.

He has dealt with injuries and setbacks over the course of his career, but has always worked patiently to return stronger. This measured resilience has become part of his identity as a player.

The story of Fabian Schär is not one defined by sensational headlines or dramatic transfers.

Instead, it is the story of a player who steadily refined his craft, who respected the technical and tactical importance of his position, and who demonstrated that intelligence and composure can be as resolute in football as speed or brute strength.

Fabian Schär's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring his first Champions League goal in a 4-1 home win against Paris Saint-Germain in the 2023/24 season.

Callum Wilson

Wilson began his footballing journey with his hometown club, Coventry City, progressing through their youth ranks before eventually establishing himself in the senior team.

His path to the Premier League was not easy; it was shaped by hard work, overcoming injuries, and proving his worth at every level of competition.

Wilson's early years at Coventry City were marked by promise and persistence.

As a young forward coming through the academy, he was known for his pace, strength, and eye for goal.

However, like many young players, he faced challenges breaking into the first team.

In search of experience, Wilson went out on loan to two clubs in the Conference Premier, Kettering Town and Tamworth.

These spells were invaluable in helping him adapt to the physical demands of senior football.

Playing in the lower leagues tested his resilience, but it also provided him with regular game time and the opportunity to refine his skills against seasoned professionals.

It was during these loan periods that he began to develop the attributes that would later define his career: sharp movement, tireless work rate, and clinical finishing.

After returning to Coventry City, Wilson gradually established himself as a key figure in the first team.

His breakthrough came during the 2013/14 season, when he became one of the most exciting young forwards in the Football League.

His pace on the counterattack and ability to finish under pressure earned him recognition, and he quickly became a fan's favourite.

That season, he scored regularly despite Coventry City's challenges off the pitch, which included financial issues and points deductions.

His performances did not go unnoticed, and several Championship clubs began to show interest in signing him.

By the end of that campaign, Wilson's reputation as a rising talent was firmly established, and a move to a higher division became inevitable.

In the summer of 2014, Wilson signed for AFC Bournemouth, a club that was itself on the way up under the management of Eddie Howe.

The move proved transformative for both the player and the club. AFC Bournemouth had ambitions of reaching the Premier League for the first time in their history, and Wilson was brought in to spearhead their attack.

His first season at the club was a remarkable success. Wilson's pace and finishing were instrumental as AFC Bournemouth won the

Championship title and secured promotion to the top tier of English football.

He finished the season as one of the division's top scorers, and his performances earned widespread praise. It was a dream campaign for a player who, just a few years earlier, had been playing in non-league football.

Wilson's first season in the Premier League began brightly. He adapted quickly to the top level, scoring a memorable hat-trick against West Ham United early in the 2015/16 season.

His combination of speed, strength, and intelligent movement made him a constant threat to opposition defences.

However, his momentum was cruelly interrupted by a serious knee injury.

The anterior cruciate ligament injury sidelined him for several months, forcing him to watch from the sidelines as AFC Bournemouth fought to establish themselves in the Premier League.

It was a devastating setback for a player whose career had been built on perseverance, but Wilson's attitude during recovery reflected his character. He worked tirelessly to return to full fitness and eventually made his comeback, delighting AFC Bournemouth supporters.

In the following seasons, Wilson continued to play a vital role for AFC Bournemouth.

Despite suffering further injury setbacks, he remained the club's leading striker and one of their most consistent performers.

His ability to link up play, hold off defenders, and score in crucial moments helped AFC Bournemouth maintain their Premier League status.

He developed a strong partnership with teammates such as Joshua King and Ryan Fraser, with their attacking chemistry becoming one of the team's biggest strengths. Wilson's composure in front of goal and selfless work for the team earned him respect across the league.

By the time AFC Bournemouth's Premier League run ended in 2020, Wilson had firmly established himself as one of the most reliable English forwards in the competition.

In September 2020, Wilson signed for Newcastle United, joining a club with a rich history and passionate fanbase. His new club had been searching for a proven Premier League goal scorer, and Wilson fit that profile perfectly.

His arrival immediately injected energy into the team's attack. He scored on his debut against West Ham United and quickly became a favourite at St James' Park.

His professionalism and leadership qualities were evident from the start, as was his knack for scoring important goals.

In a team that at times struggled for consistency, Wilson's reliability in front of goal provided a crucial source of stability. He became a key player for Newcastle United, both as a finisher and as an experienced figure guiding younger teammates.

Wilson's tenure at Newcastle United has coincided with a period of significant change for the club.

The takeover by new ownership in 2021 brought renewed ambition and investment, with Newcastle United aiming to re-establish themselves among England's elite.

Under manager Eddie Howe, who, as mentioned above, had previously coached Wilson at AFC Bournemouth, the striker continued to play an important role.

His familiarity with Howe's tactical approach allowed him to thrive in Newcastle United's new system.

He contributed not just through goals but also through his work rate, pressing, and hold-up play. His experience and maturity were vital in helping Newcastle United progress, notably in securing qualification for European competitions for the first time in many years.

On the international stage, Wilson's performances in the Premier League earned him recognition from the England national team. He made his senior debut in November 2018 in a friendly against the United States, scoring on his first appearance.

It was a proud moment for a player whose career had begun far from the glamour of international football. Wilson went on to make a total of nine appearances for England between 2018 and 2023, contributing goals and assists when called upon.

Although he was not always a regular starter, his inclusion in Gareth Southgate's squads reflected the national team's faith in his ability and professionalism.

Wilson was also selected as part of the England squad for the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar.

Competing on football's biggest stage was a testament to his perseverance and consistency.

During the tournament, he served as a valuable option off the bench, offering pace and directness when England needed to change the tempo of their attack.

His unselfishness was particularly evident when he provided an assist for Jack Grealish in England's opening match against Iran.

While he did not score during the tournament, his attitude and contribution to the squad were widely praised. For Wilson, representing his country at a World Cup marked the pinnacle of a career built on resilience and hard work.

Callum joined West Ham United in time for the 2025/26 season.

Callum Wilson's Memorable Newcastle United Moment

Scoring on his debut in a 2-0 win at West Ham United in the 2020/21 season.