

## WHITE LINE FEVER: Fowler Blows Run-In By A Nose?

Goodbye Robbie, you must leave us, at least until next season. The FA's cumulative six game ban, alternatively adjudged excessive, or a fine example of moral rectitude by the rulers of our game, sees Fowler consigned to Professor Houllier's remedy: character building 'hard labour' on the training field, but not a competitive sniff of goal.

Controversy over Fowler's conduct as a Liverpool player has never been far away. Tabloid tattle-tales abounded in 1997 over three-in-a-bed romps with a local MP's daughter and (girl) friend. Fowler's grannie chimed back: "You can't blame Robbie if they serve it to him on a plate!" Liverpool's Atlantic Tower Hotel is said to have rocked like a boat in a storm during the Anfield goal-getter's orgiastic liaisons, co-hosted by onetime Toffee Duncan Ferguson, with sundry well-paid ladies of nether repute. Then the



Bluenose 'Junkie' taunts, with Fowler doubtless having been seen once too often at Paul Walsh's old favourite, the Coconut Grove, Tuebrook, known to Scallies as the 'cokie'. Then the other side, an FA and UEFA sportsmanship citation in 1997, after turning down a penalty (given anyway) against Arsenal, in order to avoid having the hapless David Seaman sent off for a professional foul. The tearing asunder of his shirt at Anfield, having scored, to reveal to a delighted Kop the slogan "Support the 500 sacked dockers!". Moreover, for sheer guts and professionalism, the fightback from cruciate ligament surgery, through sustained criticism, some of it mine, to recapture not only the mercurial striking form of early years, but mature development into a subtle, lightning-fast infield passer and determined offensive tackler. Where the teenage Fowler's use of the ball was about 7% effective, his performances this season against Villa and Chelsea away, and Southampton at home, to name but a few I saw, showed unlimited promise, needing only a central midfield worthy of the name to consolidate into consistent brilliance. But what about character?

Wiggling his arse at Le Saux, whose persistent unpunished petty fouling in the 2-1 loss at Stamford Bridge was greeted not with a career-threatening crunch when the Ref wasn't looking, nor with a rabbit-punch nor an elbow to the jaw, but with a playful mocking taunt, winding up the petulant Chelsea gallery-hopper with the public jibe that if he got any closer, more often, then perhaps persistent rumours had a foundation. OK, childish stuff, but a wind-up intended to put Le Saux off his game, which it did to the extent that a minute later Fowler was felled with a blow to the head. Sticks and stones will break my bones .....? What, I ask you, would Norman Hunter, Tommy Smith, Ron Harris, Claudio Gentile, Marco Tardelli and the other immortally evil greats of yesteryear think?

The sanctimony of the football establishment posturing that followed would be laughable were it not also empowered with the prerogatives of official retribution, showing political correctness tinged with astonishing humbug. Interestingly, none of the powers that be were on hand to counsel and protect poor Justin Fashanu, the gay footballer whose loneliness and despair when facing a potential scandal led him to take his own life in 1998. Yet, when protecting one of their favored clubs and an undertalented England international, whose shortcomings have him lash out when exposed to ridicule, it seems that anything is possible.

Now for snorting up a storm in the Derby: first of all, Liverpool-Everton is an affair with its own ethos and traditions, where two sides of the City - the best of enemies, run amok in a festival of anarchic misrule. I can remember goal celebrations by Adrian Heath that nearly incited riots - but what FUN! FA fatcats haven't a hope of understanding, nor I suspect does the Cockney, Janner, Woollyback, Nordic daytripper element whose songless voyeurism is an increasingly depressing feature of Kop life. Yet, the Derby is without doubt a game that is still ours, and having been taunted by Evertonians for years, there is only one way to stick it to them - Fowler, GOaaalllll! Upmearssyerblueshite!!! (Ooops, sorry, Graeme, not you.). And just to rub it in, here's what the junkie thinks of your taunts, whose the junkie now, eh? What wit, style, spontaneous seizure of the moment, articulate sheer Liverpoolian brilliance. Yiss!



No: Angry of Harlow writes "I had to explain to my little lad what Fowler's obscene sniffing meant". Oh oh - who's the audience that enriches the FA satellite dish bean feast? So, even the Derby is not our own anymore. Couch potato morality, no spirit, no wit, not even enough imagination not to turn on the highlights after these much-publicized Scally high-jinks, if the moral sequestering of junior shell-suit wearers the land over is so vital.

Moreover, the same weekend, as revealed in the London Sunday Telegraph, 310,000 pounds was mysteriously paid without contractual authorization in 1993 to the FA officials who brokered the Premiership-SKY contract, and who were subsequently to move on for undisclosed but strongly implied business and administrative irregularities. Furthermore, no contractual parameters for the distribution of the 750 million pounds given the FA by Rupert Murdoch's SKY were ever drawn up. Monies have proven strangely unaccounted for during a time when senior FA executives were forced to resign for corrupt practices, for example involving cash for FIFA votes to the Welsh FA during deliberations on the venue for the next World Cup. What better time to demonstrate how high and moral the FA is indeed, by stamping hard on an unruly Scouse 24 year-old, who in addition to having the temerity to earn his massive lucre by talent rather than embezzlement, jeopardizes with a joke the fabrication of football as high-priced family front-room entertainment.

A word from Our Lord is appropriate I feel: "Ye hypocrites that sit in judgement! First, pluck out the beam in thine own eye, so that ye might see better to pluck the speck from thy brother's". Robbie Fowler may not be God, but he is a great footballer, a genuine player with character, energy, talent and a Liverpoolian heart. At a time when spongers, whingers and fops like Ince, Le Saux, Beckham respectively, suck the heart out of our game, which is in turn presided over by crooks and bunglers, like Kelly and Davies, I say Fuck You All: Ladies and Gentlemen will you please raise your glasses and drink to the good health and speedy return of Saint Robbie Fowler!

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