

Retro football shirts – A rose-tinted look back on our youth, or a commendable generation of designers?

Football.

It can unite and divide opinion in equal measure. Whichever team you support, you will have thoughts about their chances of winning, of silverware, of securing a prize-money rich position in the table, or of survival in the current league. But what of the kits? Or, more specifically, the shirts the players of your team wear.

As a lifelong fan of football, I try not to get too misty-eyed and nostalgic about the replica shirts I owned whilst growing up, mainly due to the fact my mother discarded them as soon as I experienced a growth spurt (love you mum!). Standard fare you may think, but not for someone who is obsessed with the history of the game and their team.

Don't get me wrong, I'm all for donating to charity and do so on a regular basis, but having been spared of such tangible reminiscence, I thought it an idea to get the conversation going with fellow lovers of the beautiful game for a trip down memory lane and to share my experience of those treasured, badged pieces of material we call replica shirts.

The generation game

What constitutes a memorable shirt is, of course, subjective.

Take, for example, my father. He was a Leeds United fan in his younger days and was always keen to tell me about the 1970s team. Recalling such stories now, the vision of images I have since seen of the crisp white shirt with the 'LUFC' insignia on the chest come to mind. Leeds have had some iconic shirts. Living in the city, I quite often see tops from bygone years.

The team of choice for me, though, is Tottenham Hotspur. Just writing their full name conjures up passion. My grandad lived in Enfield when he was younger and upon coming to Leeds he won the club another fan with his tales of the halcyon days of the 1960-61 double-winning side. Ever since his accomplishment, I have been the proud owner of Spurs shirts from years gone by. One of my most prominent memories is when I visited White Hart Lane for the first time aged 10. Stadium tour complete, I then became the proud owner of the 1991 white Umbro/Holsten FA Cup-winning shirt (I actually bought the full kit at this time, but I'll stop there, as some people have a name for that!). In recent years, with the increased popularity and subsequent re-emergence of retro shirts, I purchased the Hummel/Holsten yellow away top (pictured below).

Inevitably, living in Leeds and supporting Tottenham evokes memories of their iconic shirts, but as an enthusiastic fan of the game I can't help but be caught up in the romance of Liverpool's Crown Paints and Candy-sponsored shirts of the 1980s and 1990s, the Celtic jerseys sponsored by CR Smith (my initials and name) in the same period, or Arsenal's predominantly yellow JVC-emblazoned away top of the same era.

I'd love to hear who or what introduced you to football and the shirts you consider to be iconic.

On the world stage

Beyond the shores of the UK, memories of AC Milan's Lotto shirts, Barcelona's offering minus sponsorship and Ajax's popular yet simple red-striped number (pictured below) remind me of previous times.

From the launch of replica shirts aimed at uniting a nation ahead of an international tournament, to players who make famous the jerseys we love, football apparel will continue to be a significant contributor to our lives.

For me, the clamour for an England shirt was centred around the traditional white shirt of 1989. As an eight-year-old boy, the coloured bands on the sleeves were what first enticed me. To this day I consider this to be one of the nicest shirts England have ever had, certainly in my lifetime anyway.

My favourite shirt of all time though has to be the then West Germany home top of 1990 from Adidas. The designer of this work of art had one of their finest days at work when developing this shirt. An iconic product that has and will continue to stand the test of time, in my opinion.

Name that player

Players synonymous with wearing the aforementioned kits for me are:

- Leeds – Billy Bremner
- Tottenham – Dave Mackay (1960s)
- Tottenham – Gary Lineker (1991)
- Liverpool – John Barnes
- Celtic – Charlie Nicholas
- Arsenal – David Rocastle
- AC Milan – Ruud Gullit
- Barcelona – Romario
- Ajax – Johan Cruyff
- England – Gary Lineker
- West Germany – Jurgen Klinsmann

Who do you recall when thinking of your favourite shirts?

Tell me about (or even better, show me) your tops from yesteryear and the memories they evoke.

What's next?

The retro look of football shirts is clearly still given the consideration it deserves in design departments across the globe. Manufacturers know what is popular and what sells. You only need to think back to the amazing Nigeria shirt of the 2018 World Cup when Nike reported three million people had pre-ordered it; a top which sold out on its website soon after release.

With much hope for many more shirts like the ones mentioned here, let's hope the designers and manufacturers continue to go back to the future, or at the very least, generations can

regale stories of years gone by with their favourite shirts continuing to be reproduced by clubs and made available to us, the fans.

Reflection

Am I being too nostalgic? Perhaps. Though with seemingly constant calls nowadays of the game becoming too far removed from fans with astronomical ticket prices and the highly debatable VAR, maybe looking back on what has been and the amazing shirts of yesteryear isn't necessarily a bad thing.

By Craig Smith of CRS Editorial

