

INTRODUCTION



GARY LINEKER

We spend a lot of time together making *Match of the Day*. Every Saturday during the season, the two guests and I will arrive in the studio a little before lunchtime. We gather, along with the producer, the director and the production staff, in a little office, lined with television screens, and begin a long day doing the really rather pleasant work of watching football.

We start with the early kick-off: we will all watch that one together. Then, when 3pm rolls around, each pundit will be assigned a specific game to monitor: it's not an exact science, but we try to focus on the ones which we think will produce the best stories. In the days before the pandemic, when there might be another four or five kicking off at that time, the director and I would do our best to stay across everything else, keeping a close eye on any game that looked like it might be developing into a real blockbuster. In the edit

suites, the team are hard at work, clipping up the most interesting moments from each and every one of the games. When they're over, we'll all gather again to watch the late kick-off.

It doesn't stop there. We still have to pull together the clips of all of the day's fixtures, pull out specific elements of each game for analysis, run through the script and do our best to look vaguely presentable before going on air, live, after the news. The few minutes we spend dissecting each game that you see are the product of an awful lot of work, from an awful lot of people.

Throughout the day, there is plenty of joking and laughing. We cheer when our teams score. We sink with our heads in our hands when they concede. And, in the case of Alan Shearer, whenever his beloved Newcastle are frustrating him, we shout. A lot. Alan has the loudest voice in the world, especially when he's seen his team give away a soft goal or miss an easy chance.

But what we do, most of all, is talk. We debate. We argue. And we tell stories. Every single footballer – or, more accurately, former footballer – has a well of stories from their career: strange incidents and happy memories and bitter regrets from the days when they were playing, all of which they are often happy to share, with their peers, at the drop of a hat. On those long, bustling Saturdays, we tell each other those stories. We compare notes. We contrast experiences. We try to outdo each other, to see who can get the biggest laugh.

It was those bottomless conversations that were the inspiration for what would, eventually, become the *Match of the Day Top 10* podcast, show and, now, this book. It was a chance to tell those stories to a broader audience, to offer a little insight into the way we played the game then and the way we see it now, and perhaps to settle a few of football's ongoing arguments, too. Who was the greatest defender of all time? Was it really harder in mine and Alan's day than it was

when Micah Richards was playing? Can you say for sure that Lionel Messi is better than Diego Maradona? And just how many teams did Micah support when he was growing up?

We have tried to cover as many subjects as possible, involving not just the Premier League but the FA Cup, the Champions League, the European Championships and the World Cup, too. We will, occasionally, disappear off down memory lane, just as we do as we sit and watch all of those games in the green room, preparing for *Match of the Day*, thinking about all the players we have faced, the games we have won and the cups – in Alan’s case – that we have lost.

As we say at the top of every podcast: these lists are not meant to be definitive. The glory of all of these conversations is that there are no objective answers to them, and we would not pretend to have found them. It is what makes sport – and especially football – special, that so many people can see it in so many different ways.

Please feel free to disagree with our conclusions; they are, after all, no more than personal opinions. I would ask you to let us know exactly where you think we’ve gone wrong, too, but I know that, when it comes to football, nobody ever needs an invitation to do that. That, after all, is the fun of it.

PART ONE

MOMENTS IN TIME

1

THE TOP 10 GAMES



GARY LINEKER

The final day of the season in 2012 was a stressful one in the *Match of the Day* office. How we handle that sort of situation is always a tricky editorial decision. Do we do one game first, and then the other? Or do we run the highlights of both simultaneously, cutting between them, to try to tell the story of the day?

We flipped between the two as the day unfolded. Manchester United were playing away, at Sunderland, and Manchester City were at home against QPR, knowing that a win would seal a first title in more than 40 years. Manchester United took the lead first, giving them the edge. By half-time, Pablo Zabaleta had scored for City, meaning the championship was heading for the Etihad.

The second half was chaos. QPR equalised, and then took the lead. The Etihad was silent, and the clock was ticking. The game in Sunderland finished: at that stage, Manchester United were champions. And then,

in injury time, Manchester City drew level. They had a few minutes to find another goal. At the last second, Sergio Agüero found it.

Lots of fans of lots of different clubs work on *Match of the Day*, but when Agüero scored, everyone went up: the whole office, delirious with the drama of it all. Well, almost the whole office: there was one United fan who did not quite feel up to joining in the celebrations. It was the same scene at Sunderland. United's players had been on the pitch, getting ready to party, waiting for the final whistle in Manchester, thinking that they'd won it. Then the news came through: the fans heard it in the stands, and someone passed it to Sir Alex Ferguson on the bench, and you could see their heads drop.

So much turned on that single moment. United would recover, of course, going on to win the league in Fergie's final season the next year, but you do wonder what would have happened to City if Agüero hadn't had that chance, if he hadn't scored. It would have been so devastating to choke like that. And though that sounds harsh, that is exactly what it would have been: a choke.

You can make the argument that Liverpool's (first) 4-3 win against Newcastle is the Premier League's greatest ever game, I think. But Manchester City winning the title as they did, the cliffhanger ending of the Agüero goal, is – without question – the defining Premier League moment.

THE CONTENDERS

Liverpool 4-3 Newcastle United (1996)

Newcastle 5-0 Manchester United (1996)

Arsenal 3-2 Manchester United (1997)

Tottenham 3-5 Manchester United (2001)

Liverpool 4-4 Arsenal (2009)

Manchester United 4-3 Manchester City (2009)

Newcastle 4-4 Arsenal (2011)

Manchester City 3-2 QPR (2012)

Crystal Palace 3-3 Liverpool (2014)

Chelsea 2-2 Tottenham (2016)



ALAN SHEARER

It tells you something that there are three Newcastle games on this list, you know. There are happy memories: the 5-0 against Manchester United, of course. That was almost the perfect performance, against the perfect opposition.

And the comeback against Arsenal, from 4-0 down at half-time, showed the power of St James's Park. The crowd had been moaning and groaning at the break. But then, as soon as Arsenal went down to ten men and Newcastle started pulling goals back, they started going mad. It pulls you along, that crowd, and there's not much you can do to resist it.

There was something strange in the air that day. Cheick Tioté was a great player for Newcastle: he spent seven years there, made 139 appearances. But he only scored one goal, and it was the one that completed the comeback that day. If you're going to score just once for a club in all that time, you may as well make sure it's a special game, and a special day.

But then there is, if not a sad memory, then certainly a bittersweet one. The game at Anfield against Liverpool, as Newcastle tried to chase down the title in 1996, had absolutely everything. They'd had

a 12-point lead quite late in the season, but Manchester United had been chipping away at it for months.

But what made Kevin Keegan special was that he never wanted to change how his teams played. He never considered altering his approach. It was always, always, all-out attack, whatever the circumstances and whoever the opposition. More than anything else, he wanted to entertain the fans.

That was what made that night so remarkable. Liverpool were still just about in the title race, but that didn't change what Newcastle did. They just kept going at Liverpool: they took the lead twice, but they never thought about sitting back and closing up shop. Instead, they went hammer and tongs for 90 minutes, more than that, until Stan Collymore swept home that winner, and Keegan could do nothing but slump on the advertising board in front of the dugout. That image was so powerful because it seemed to capture what had happened to Newcastle that night: with that one goal, the air had been drawn from its title race.

ALAN'S LIST

- 1** Manchester City 3-2 QPR (2012)
- 2** Liverpool 4-3 Newcastle United (1996)
- 3** Tottenham 3-5 Manchester United (2001)
- 4** Newcastle United 4-4 Arsenal (2011)
- 5** Manchester United 4-3 Manchester City (2009)
- 6** Newcastle United 5-0 Manchester United (1996)
- 7** Chelsea 2-2 Tottenham (2016)
- 8** Crystal Palace 3-3 Liverpool (2014)
- 9** Arsenal 3-2 Manchester United (1997)
- 10** Liverpool 4-4 Arsenal (2009)



MICAH RICHARDS

I was on the bench for the Agüero game. I wasn't happy that Roberto Mancini had picked Pablo Zabaleta ahead of me, but I was pretty confident I'd get to play. Most of the time, as soon as we went ahead, he'd bring a defender. He's an Italian manager, after all. His first instinct was always to protect the lead.

But when we did score, just before half-time, it was Zabaleta who scored. Zabaleta never scored, and now he'd got one in what was probably the biggest game in City's history. Worse than that was QPR equalising, and then getting a second. Now he couldn't bring a defender on. I knew, as soon as they scored, that I wouldn't play a minute.

I'm not especially proud to admit it but my first reaction was probably a selfish one: when Zabaleta scored, I felt sorry for myself, for what I'd miss out on. That changed with QPR's goals. Suddenly, my own situation didn't matter at all. That was when I realised how big it was. We were going to miss out on winning the Premier League.

You could feel the fans starting to turn. On the bench, you could hear all the comments from the fans sitting near us. 'Typical City.' 'Here we go again.' 'We're going to blow it.' As a substitute, especially as a defender, you feel powerless to help. The gloom that surrounds you starts to envelop you.

At one point, I was warming up with Mario Balotelli. He could see how down I was, how afraid I was, how much it meant to me. 'Don't worry,' he said. 'I'm going to come on, and I'm going to score or assist.' He had that sort of confidence, Mario, but he hadn't always backed it up. He hadn't created a single goal that season.

But he was as good as his word. I always think people forget how crucial Edin Džeko was: he got the goal that gave us the chance to go on and win it. It was Mario, though, who squeezed the ball through to Sergio for the winning goal. I don't really remember what happened next: the whole stadium went nuts. I ran down the touchline with everybody else to meet Sergio, and to celebrate. I was only there, in the end, as a spectator, but it was the most incredible moment of my career. I didn't ever really think I would be able to win the Premier League. I would never have imagined anyone could win it like that.

MICAH'S LIST

- 1** Manchester City 3-2 QPR (2012)
- 2** Liverpool 4-3 Newcastle United (1996)
- 3** Crystal Palace 3-3 Liverpool (2014)
- 4** Chelsea 2-2 Tottenham (2016)
- 5** Manchester United 4-3 Manchester City (2009)
- 6** Tottenham 3-5 Manchester United (2001)
- 7** Newcastle United 4-4 Arsenal (2011)
- 8** Newcastle United 5-0 Manchester United (1996)
- 9** Liverpool 4-4 Arsenal (2009)
- 10** Arsenal 3-2 Manchester United (1997)



THE TOP 10

- 1** Manchester City 3-2 QPR (2012)
- 2** Liverpool 4-3 Newcastle United (1996)
- 3** Tottenham 3-5 Manchester United (2001)

- 4 Manchester United 4-3 Manchester City (2009)
- 5 Newcastle United 4-4 Arsenal (2011)
- 6 Chelsea 2-2 Tottenham (2016)
- 7 Crystal Palace 3-3 Liverpool (2014)
- 8 Newcastle United 5-0 Manchester United (1996)
- 9 Liverpool 4-4 Arsenal (2009)
- 10 Arsenal 3-2 Manchester United (1997)

Gary's Verdict: I think we all agree on the top two: the game that maybe best defines the Premier League, and the most memorable conclusion to a season you could possibly hope for. In that situation, with everything on the line, it's hard to think of anyone better to be able to call on than Sergio Agüerooooooooo.

THE DEBATE

Alan: It has to be Manchester City beating QPR, just for the entertainment and excitement of it all: the contrast between the celebrations at the Etihad and the total devastation of the Manchester United players at Sunderland. It was the greatest game, and probably the greatest moment, in Premier League history.

Micah: That image of Keegan against the advertising boards summed up that whole season, didn't it? The excitement and the emotion and then, at the end, he just sort of deflated with the drama of it all. Those games can be really draining: in the derby that we lost 4-3, I remember not being able to press, not being able to get close to anyone, feeling as though I could barely run.

2

THE TOP 10 GOALS



GARY LINEKER

My bar for what qualifies as a beautiful goal is quite high. The best I ever saw on the pitch might well have been the best of all time: Diego Maradona's second against England in the 1986 World Cup.

That goal is, somehow, quite a lot better than people think it is, because that pitch was almost unplayable. They'd relaid it for the tournament, and it was a patchwork of different tufts of grass. Every time you moved, it shifted beneath your feet. It was difficult to stand up, let alone slalom between the whole England team and go round Peter Shilton. All you could do was stand back and admire it. 'My God,' I thought, when he scored it. I felt, deep down, like I ought to applaud. But he'd scored the first one, a few minutes before, with his hand, so we weren't in a particularly generous mood.

Whether any of these goals match that one, I'm not sure, but some of them come close. It was hard to narrow it down to just ten: the

Premier League has a knack for producing spectacular goals. There are plenty of iconic ones that have not made the list – David Beckham, Wayne Rooney and Maynor Figueroa scoring from the halfway line, for a start. There's no room for either of Tony Yeboah's iconic goals, against Liverpool and Wimbledon, or the brilliant efforts scored by Luis Suárez, Dalian Atkinson, Michael Essien and all the rest. Even Peter Crouch's volley against Manchester City can't squeeze on.

Other players have made the list, but not quite as often as they might have done. Matt Le Tissier scored some of the greatest goals I have ever seen, and he made it all look so sensible. Rooney, too, has quite a highlights reel: he's on the list for his thunderous volley against Newcastle, but his overhead kick, the one that settled a Manchester derby, is not there. Nor is his first Premier League goal, the swerving, long-range strike for Everton that announced his talent to the world.

That should illustrate just how good the goals from the Premier League era that have made it are. They are all a little different – from the wonderful, flowing passing move that brought Jack Wilshere's goal against Norwich to Trevor Sinclair's gravity-defying overhead kick; some of them stood out for their beauty, like Dennis Bergkamp's finish against Newcastle, and some for their significance, like Vincent Kompany's piledriver to win the title for City. They are all special, though: so special that it will be difficult to choose between them.

THE CONTENDERS

Dennis Bergkamp, Arsenal v Newcastle United

Paolo Di Canio, West Ham v Wimbledon

Thierry Henry, Arsenal v Manchester United

Vincent Kompany, Manchester City v Leicester City

Matt Le Tissier, Southampton v Newcastle United

Wayne Rooney, Manchester United v Newcastle United

Trevor Sinclair, Queens Park Rangers v Barnsley

Andros Townsend, Crystal Palace v Manchester City

Robin van Persie, Manchester United v Aston Villa

Jack Wilshere, Arsenal v Norwich City



ALAN SHEARER

Sometimes, the ball just falls in exactly the right spot. That was the case with the best goal I ever scored – it's a bit disappointing it's not on the list, if I'm honest – a volley against Everton. I knew, as it dropped to me, that I'd hit it; and I knew, as soon as I'd hit it, that I'd caught it just right. It just felt perfect. You could see it going and going, see the goalkeeper start to dive, and know that he wasn't going to get there. It was quite fun.

There's a few like that on this list. It's a very precise technique to get a volley just right; it changes, depending on where the ball is, how it's travelling, your body shape. The one from Andros Townsend against Manchester City is as sweet a connection as you will see. The pass, the run and the finish for Robin van Persie's goal against Aston Villa is all exceptional, a little piece of poetry in motion.

Wayne Rooney's against Newcastle – one of a few too many goals against Newcastle here, I have to say – is another. I was on the pitch for that one. Rooney wasn't having a great game that day. He was running alongside the referee, chuntering away at him, when the ball fell to him from a cleared header. I watched it happen. He was still quite far out. I didn't think he'd try it from there. But it fell

perfectly for him, and his finish was brilliant, the ball swerving from outside to in. Shay Given dived, but if I'm honest my first instinct was to wonder why he'd bothered. There was no way he was saving it.

The one that wins it, though, is the sort of goal that doesn't really have a category. It's a true one-off. Unfortunately, this one was against Newcastle, too, and I had a great view of it, again: Dennis Bergkamp's brilliant touch, swivel, control and finish at St James's Park. He'd scored an incredible one against Leicester a few years before, but this one was even better, a true masterpiece.

There is some debate over whether he meant it, but I think that misses the point. I'm sure he did, but even if he didn't, the improvisation was remarkable, to react that quickly and think that coolly. I'm not sure we'd seen a goal like that before. I'm not certain we'll ever see one like it again.

ALAN'S LIST

- 1** Dennis Bergkamp, Arsenal v Newcastle United
- 2** Trevor Sinclair, Queens Park Rangers v Barnsley
- 3** Matt Le Tissier, Southampton v Newcastle United
- 4** Thierry Henry, Arsenal v Manchester United
- 5** Paolo Di Canio, West Ham v Wimbledon
- 6** Jack Wilshere, Arsenal v Norwich City
- 7** Wayne Rooney, Manchester United v Newcastle United
- 8** Vincent Kompany, Manchester City v Leicester City
- 9** Andros Townsend, Crystal Palace v Manchester City
- 10** Robin van Persie, Manchester United v Aston Villa



MICAH RICHARDS

I'm at a slight disadvantage here when it comes to selecting the best goal I've ever scored: I don't have quite as many to choose from as Alan. I probably should have scored more, to be honest, particularly in the air: I had quite a leap on me. But in the end I only managed a dozen or so and, of those, the one that stands out was at Stoke: a bursting run forward, a little feint, and then slotting the ball into the far corner. I'll have to take what I can get, I suppose.

Thankfully, the best goal I saw on the pitch hasn't made it, either. If you watch the highlights of Wayne Rooney's overhead kick in the Manchester derby in 2011, you can just see my face appear, ready to head the ball away, as he makes contact with it. He just beat me to it. And you can tell from my reaction that I'm not entirely sure how he did it.

I always thought Trevor Sinclair's was better anyway, as it goes. That was an absolutely ridiculous goal. He came to City years after he scored that goal, and I always used to ask him if there was any chance of him doing something similar to that for us. He didn't particularly appreciate it, and I had to stop after a game at West Ham where I'd cost him a goal. He'd had a shot that had been curling into the top corner, but I'd got overexcited and followed it in. I headed it in, trying to claim the goal for myself, and run away to celebrate, only to discover that I was offside. He was raging, and I can sympathise with him.

All these goals are brilliant, obviously, and I've always had a soft spot for the sort of team goal, all intricate build-up and tiki-taka passing, that Jack Wilshere scored against Norwich, but there can

only be one winner, really. No matter how important any of them were – goals that won games, goals that won derbies and, in Vincent Kompany's case, goals that won leagues – nobody else could have scored the goal against Newcastle that Dennis Bergkamp scored. It was a true original, and that makes it particularly special.

MICAH'S LIST

- 1** Dennis Bergkamp, Arsenal v Newcastle United
- 2** Jack Wilshere, Arsenal v Norwich City
- 3** Wayne Rooney, Manchester United v Newcastle United
- 4** Thierry Henry, Arsenal v Manchester United
- 5** Trevor Sinclair, Queens Park Rangers v Barnsley
- 6** Paolo Di Canio, West Ham v Wimbledon
- 7** Robin van Persie, Manchester United v Aston Villa
- 8** Andros Townsend, Crystal Palace v Manchester City
- 9** Matt Le Tissier, Southampton v Newcastle United
- 10** Vincent Kompany, Manchester City v Leicester City



THE TOP 10

- 1** Dennis Bergkamp, Arsenal v Newcastle United
- 2** Trevor Sinclair, Queens Park Rangers v Barnsley
- 3** Jack Wilshere, Arsenal v Norwich City
- 4** Thierry Henry, Arsenal v Manchester United
- 5** Wayne Rooney, Manchester United v Newcastle United
- 6** Paolo Di Canio, West Ham v Wimbledon
- 7** Matt Le Tissier, Southampton v Newcastle United

8 Andros Townsend, Crystal Palace v Manchester City

9 Robin van Persie, Manchester United v Aston Villa

10 Vincent Kompany, Manchester City v Leicester City

Gary's Verdict: Dennis Bergkamp was not just a beautiful player to watch, he was a scorer of beautiful goals. There are three from his highlights reel that really stand out: one for Holland at the 1998 World Cup, against Argentina; his strike in 1997 against Leicester City; and, top of the tree, the touch, the turn and the finish against Nikos Dabizas and Newcastle at St James's Park. Nobody did it quite like him.

THE DEBATE

Alan: It's not included but there can't have been many more satisfying goals to score than Steven Gerrard's in the FA Cup final. Scoring from that distance to stop your team losing a final, with that sort of power and that sort of placement. It's as pure a strike as you could hope for.

Micah: There's something about the pure team goal that I've always loved, and there haven't been many better examples of it than Jack Wilshere's for Arsenal. All those one-twos, the little interchanges with the ball: that's how football is meant to be played.

3

THE TOP 10 FA CUP MOMENTS



GARY LINEKER

My first FA Cup final was in 1969. I went down to Wembley with my dad, to watch Leicester play Manchester City. It was Leicester's third final in seven years. They didn't win any of them: that day, we lost 1-0 to a goal from Neil Young, and I cried all the way home. That is how much the cup final meant.

That has changed over the last 20 or 30 years, of course, as the league – and Europe – has become the be-all and end-all for most teams. It does not have the same magic as it used to have, when it was the only game televised live and the whole country seemed to stop to watch the final.

But that does not mean it is not still special. Whether it's the tradition or the knockout format or the sense of the whole game coming together – a competition in which a non-league team can go

to Old Trafford, or a League Two side host Pep Guardiola and Manchester City – it retains its knack for producing memories.

We have had to be quite selective with which ones we chose for this list, so we decided to limit ourselves to those that we actually remember. No doubt, in an all-time list, things like Bert Trautmann playing in, and winning, a final with a broken neck would feature; so, too, would the Stanley Matthews final, the one in which Stan Mortensen scored a hat-trick.

There are still so many, though, from all stages of the competition. There's Steven Gerrard's inspirational performance in the final in 2006 and Paul Gascoigne's brilliant free-kick in the semi-final of 1991 – Spurs also scored two other goals that day, as it happens, but nobody ever seems to remember who scored them. But there is also Ronnie Radford's iconic strike to help Hereford beat Newcastle in 1972, the game that turned John Motson into a national institution and one of the archetypal shocks that have helped forge the FA Cup's reputation.

They're not pleasant to be involved in, those early games of the FA Cup. I played for Leicester when we lost to non-league Harlow Town. We'd drawn the first game at Filbert Street, and then travelled to Essex for the replay. Our manager was a man called Jock Wallace, and he was absolutely terrifying. I felt awful the day of the replay: I had tonsillitis, but I didn't have the nerve to tell him. As he read the team out, I was praying I wasn't in it. But there I was, and on the right wing. I still couldn't bring myself to admit it to him. So I played, feeling dreadful. We lost, and I was appalling. It's not a happy memory for me, but the fact it happened is what, deep down, makes the FA Cup what it is.

THE CONTENDERS

Ryan Giggs's goal (1999)
The Gerrard final (2006)
Wimbledon's Crazy Gang (1988)
Ricky Villa (1981)
Gazza's free kick (1992)
Crystal Palace 4-3 Liverpool (1990)
Wigan shock Manchester City (2013)
Wrexham defeat Arsenal (1992)
Ronnie Radford (1972)
Sunderland beat Leeds (1973)



ALAN SHEARER

Playing in an FA Cup final is great, but only if you win it. It is no fun at all if you don't, I can tell you that. I lost two finals in a row with Newcastle, in 1998 and 1999, and I don't remember them as great occasions in the slightest. I don't think I cried, but I had this sense of intense disappointment. We'd been playing two really good teams – an Arsenal team going for the double, and Manchester United on their way to the treble – but we hadn't performed, particularly in the latter, and that left a sour taste.

As a fan, though, the cup final used to take up the whole day. The build-up seemed to be on television from about 8am. There would be interviews with the managers as they ate their breakfast, footage of players getting their cup final haircuts, cameras on the coaches as

the teams left their hotels, aerial shots of the fans walking down Wembley Way.

I had plenty of experience of the magic of the cup – those difficult away games against lower league teams, the ones where you know you will be in for a real fight – but it is two finals that stand out for me. The first was Wimbledon beating Liverpool in 1988; the Crazy Gang against the Culture Club, as they called it. Wimbledon were horrible to play against. They set out to upset the opposition. They would wreck the dressing room, they would verbally abuse you, and they would smash into you at the slightest opportunity. That was their way, and it was what took them all the way from non-league to the biggest game in the country.

And within 30 seconds or something of it starting, Vinnie Jones had gone into Steve McMahon, kicking him six foot up in the air. McMahon was a tough player himself, but you knew then what Wimbledon were going to try to do. It would have been a straight red card now, obviously, and it wasn't to everyone's tastes, but it worked. They shocked the best team in England that day, one that in terms of talent they didn't get close to.

But the Gerrard final in 2006 just edges it out. That game epitomised everything that made Steven Gerrard great. The game was gone; Liverpool were beaten. It needed something ridiculous to claw it back and, just when his team needed him, he produced it. He was knackered when he took that shot; he's said that if he hadn't been so tired, if he'd had the legs to run, he would have tried to take the ball on, rather than hit it first time. To get the sort of power and accuracy he did, with 90 minutes or so in your legs, and drag your team back from the brink: that's special. And to top it all off, he scored a penalty in the shootout. That was Steven Gerrard.

ALAN'S LIST

- 1 The Gerrard final (2006)
- 2 Wimbledon's Crazy Gang (1988)
- 3 Ryan Giggs's goal (1999)
- 4 Wigan shock Manchester City (2013)
- 5 Ricky Villa (1981)
- 6 Sunderland beat Leeds (1973)
- 7 Crystal Palace 4-3 Liverpool (1990)
- 8 Gazza's free kick (1992)
- 9 Ronnie Radford (1972)
- 10 Wrexham defeat Arsenal (1992)



MICAH RICHARDS

Winning the Premier League was not something I dreamed about as a kid. Even when I was at Manchester City's academy, it was too distant to be worth thinking about. Maybe it would have been different had I been at Manchester United, or Arsenal, or Liverpool, clubs that seemed to have a realistic chance of winning the title. Before the arrival of Abu Dhabi and the transformation in the club, maybe it wasn't the sort of dream a Manchester City player had.

The FA Cup was different. That felt attainable, somehow, like everyone had a chance. I don't know why that was. Maybe it's because you grow up knowing that giant-killings happen, or because a knockout sort of levels the playing field a bit: we couldn't beat the big boys over the league season, but we could beat them in a one-off game.

At youth level, the big thing was always winning the FA Youth Cup. I played in the final of that for City – our team, which included me, Michael Johnson and Daniel Sturridge, lost to Liverpool in 2006 – so maybe that helped, too: it showed us that we stood a chance. Whatever it was, winning the FA Cup was the first ambition I had in football. People talk about it not being as special as it used to be, but it was special to me.

It is a double-edged sword, though. We won it in 2011, but two years later we were on the other side of the magic of the cup. Wigan were on their way to being relegated from the Premier League, and we'd won the title the year before, so it should have been a huge mismatch: it wasn't quite the same vibe as the 1988 final, when Wimbledon beat Liverpool, because Wigan played good football, but the gulf in quality was probably just as wide.

Looking back, maybe we did not quite have the same urgency as we'd had two years before. We didn't need to win it: we'd already won the cup, and we'd picked up the league, too. In a way, we were the overwhelming favourites but maybe we were not under quite as much pressure as it seemed. They had always been a bit of a bogey team for us, so we would not have been complacent, but we didn't seem to be able to take our chances. And then, late on, Ben Watson scored a header from a corner – a really well-taken goal – and we were done. Well, I say we. I wasn't in the team. I'd probably been bombed or something. So it definitely wasn't my fault.

A couple of days later, Roberto Mancini was sacked, a year to the day after winning the league, and about 48 hours after losing the cup final. It goes to show that maybe the FA Cup does still matter, in certain circumstances, after all.

MICAH'S LIST

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- 4** Wigan shock Manchester City (2013)
- 5** Crystal Palace 4-3 Liverpool (1990)
- 6** Ronnie Radford (1972)
- 7** Ricky Villa (1981)
- 8** Gazza's free kick (1992)
- 9** Sunderland beat Leeds (1973)
- 10** Wrexham defeat Arsenal (1992)

Gary's Verdict: I didn't like Wimbledon. I don't think I've ever made any secret of that. I didn't like the way they played, I didn't like their

manner, and I didn't like the verbal abuse. I don't like them to this day. Anyone who watched the documentary series *The Last Dance* will know what I mean when I say they remind me of the Detroit Pistons, the basketball team that became known as the Bad Boys. But I do recognise that what they achieved, their story, was incredible. Maybe out of revenge for all those nasty tackles, though, I'm glad that Steven Gerrard's inspirational performance in 2006 edged them out.

THE DEBATE

Alan: If there is one player you would not want to gift the ball with a weak pass, it was Ryan Giggs. He glided past one of the most iconic defences in English history in that semi-final at Villa Park, and then beat one of the greatest goalkeepers we've ever seen, too. Then the shirt came off, that hairy chest came out, and a truly great FA Cup moment was born.

Micah: It is long before my time, but the Ronnie Radford goal for Hereford against Newcastle is the perfect FA Cup goal. Look at the pitch – it's a complete mud-bath – and the fans running onto the pitch afterwards. Those are the games and the moments that always made the FA Cup so special.

4

THE TOP 10 BONKERS MOMENTS



GARY LINEKER

There are certain things that happen on a football pitch that you are not meant to want to see. The arguments between teammates. The confrontations between opponents. The occasional beach ball scoring a goal. But while we all know these aren't why we watch the game, they do stick in the memory. Not so secretly, deep down, everyone loves them.

They happen far more often than you would think, too. They certainly did during my career. I remember travelling to Yugoslavia with England for a qualifying game, and standing in the tunnel at the Marakana – Red Star Belgrade's stadium – separated from the Yugoslav team by just a wire mesh fence.

Suddenly, Terry Butcher, was shouting to all of us that we were caged tigers, ready to roar. He just kept shouting 'caged tigers, caged tigers', grabbing hold of the fence. Quite what the Yugoslavs thought

he was doing, or talking about, I have no idea. They must have wondered who these strange people were. It worked, though. We were four up inside the first 20 minutes.

I'm not sure how much stuff like that goes on nowadays. It certainly all seems to be very friendly in the tunnel now: players chatting among themselves, holding hands with the mascots. Maybe things are a little more professional. Maybe it's just that everyone knows there are cameras there.

That said, every so often, you do still get a glimpse behind the curtain. Seeing Patrick Vieira and Roy Keane have that simmering exchange before an Arsenal-Manchester United game proved that some of that old enmity is still there. Keane muttering that he would see Vieira on the field was as threatening as anything I'd have heard.

And then, much more occasionally, you get the moments that you just cannot explain. Paolo Di Canio pushing Paul Alcock, the referee, for example, or Eric Cantona's kung-fu kick into the crowd at Crystal Palace. That was in my early days of doing punditry, and I was doing *Match of the Day* that night. I had absolutely no idea what to say. You do get a lot of abuse from fans, but what Cantona did is football's greatest taboo. All I could do was say that it was completely unacceptable: not the most damning indictment, but it was hard to know how else to describe it. I don't know if any of us had ever seen anything quite like it. I know I haven't since.

THE CONTENDERS

Kevin Keegan's 'I would love it' rant

Lee Bowyer and Kieron Dyer fight on the pitch

Luis Suárez bites Branislav Ivanović

Alan Pardew head-butts David Meyler

Sunderland-Liverpool and the beach ball goal
Roy Keane and Patrick Vieira in the tunnel
Martin Keown celebrates at Ruud van Nistelrooy
Eric Cantona's kung-fu kick
Paolo Di Canio shoves Paul Alcock
Temuri Ketsbaia versus the advertising hoardings



ALAN SHEARER

Strangely, I was on the pitch for quite a few of these. I wonder if that's the connection: maybe it was something I was doing?

I remember Temuri Ketsbaia's celebration – if that's the right word – quite well. We were both on the bench that night, and the manager, Kenny Dalglish, had put me on before Temuri. He wasn't happy about that. He came on with a point to prove, and ended up scoring the winner. And then he just went berserk. Off came his shirt. He started taking his boots off. He couldn't quite do it, so he just started booting the advertising boards behind the goal. He was trying to make a point. I'm not sure it worked, though: it took him ages to get his shirt back.

Temuri was a lovely guy, but hard as nails. We went paintballing on one team-bonding trip. He was on the other side to me. At one point, he crept up behind Aaron Hughes, pushed him to the floor, and just emptied his barrel at him. He kept shouting, 'Stay down, stay down!' He was a little bit different, Temuri.

I was there for the night Kieron Dyer and Lee Bowyer got into a scrap, too. It wasn't the first time I'd seen teammates fight: it happened

all the time in the tunnel when I was starting out, and there'd been an incident at Blackburn, too, during a Champions League game in Moscow, when David Batty and Graeme Le Saux had a go at each other.

Dyer against Bowyer was something else, though. There had been bits of aggression between the pair of them in training; exchanging choice words at the end of finishing sessions, that sort of thing. They were fighting for the same place in the team, and I guess eventually it just boiled over.

We were being battered by Aston Villa, we were already down to ten men, and there had been a couple of times when Kieron hadn't passed to Bowyer. You could see Bowyer getting more and more angry. The final straw was when he told Kieron to pass the ball, they said something to each other, and it kicked off. I saw it all happening, but there was nothing I could do. They both got sent off. We finished the game with eight men.

When we got back in, I let them both have it. But that was nothing compared to the manager. Graeme Souness was not a man you wanted to cross. He stormed in, looked at them both, and told them in no uncertain terms that if they fancied a fight, he'd take the both of them on, together.

ALAN'S LIST

- 1** Eric Cantona's kung-fu kick
- 2** Paolo Di Canio shoves Paul Alcock
- 3** Luis Suárez bites Branislav Ivanović
- 4** Alan Pardew head-butts David Meyler
- 5** Lee Bowyer and Kieron Dyer fight on the pitch
- 6** Martin Keown celebrates at Ruud van Nistelrooy
- 7** Kevin Keegan's 'I would love it' rant