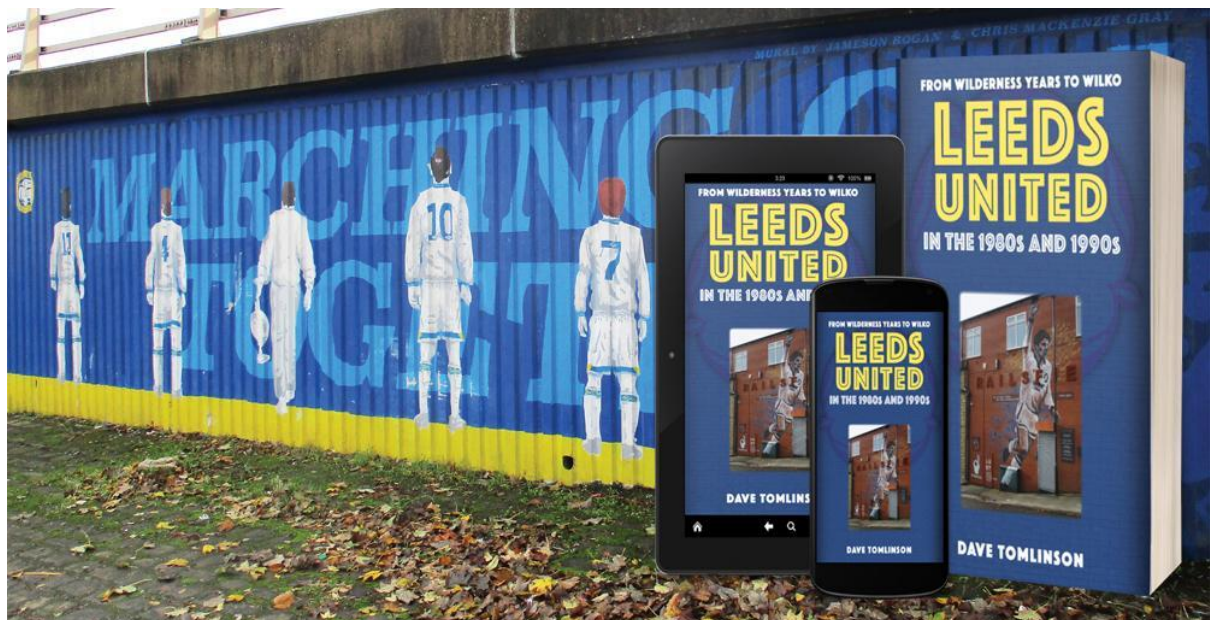


Memories of Cantona, Speed and many more Leeds United heroes shared in new book

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Dave Tomlinson's 'Leeds United in the 1980s and 1990s: From Wilderness Years to Wilko' charts the eventful end to the Yorkshire club's exploits in the 20th century, writes Eric Brown...



By *ERIC BROWN*

He retired from football in his native country after racking up a series of misdemeanours longer than an EastEnders cast list's rap sheet.

These included throwing boots at a team-mate, aiming various items of kit at team-mates, abusing match officials, rows with club managers and screaming “idiot” in each of the faces of disciplinary committee officials who had just banned him.

Eric Cantona’s indiscretions were not forgotten in France even after he emerged from retirement to help win the title. A marked man in France, he eventually decided to try his luck in England and the rest, as they say, is history.

First Sheffield Wednesday offered an escape route by giving the France international a trial. Manager Trevor Francis wanted him to sign but Wednesday balked at the £1million fee, allowing Howard Wilkinson to pounce for one of Leeds’ most significant signings.

Within months, Cantona had another title medal after several match-winning displays helped bring the last Football League crown to Elland Road.

Cantona’s important role in reviving Leeds is central to a new book **‘Leeds United in the 1980s and 1990s’** by fan Dave Tomlinson.

It’s a rollicking tale featuring a host of half-forgotten players and some of the greatest performers ever seen in English football as the Yorkshire club hurtled from relegation fights to qualifying for the European Cup.

It starts with Don Revie’s paradise lost and the club in despair. As Tomlinson puts it: “Leeds United was a club going nowhere but down. The stench of urine from neglected toilets at Elland Road was a symbol of a club that offered little but a depressing and dangerous place to waste away a bleak Saturday afternoon.

“It was not a club in crisis. No one cared enough any more for it to be a crisis.”

As the 80s arrived, Leeds was a place to avoid, with the Yorkshire Ripper on his killing spree, unemployment rife, and buildings blackened by years of emissions from vehicles and factories.

At Elland Road, a similar sense of decay persisted. Manager Jimmy Adamson faced terrace rebellion with “Adamson out” chants heard far more often than roars of team support.

How this sad state of affairs was transformed into glory by Cantona, Gordon Strachan, David Batty, Gary McAllister, Gary Speed and others under Wilkinson makes absorbing reading, even for non-Leeds fans.

Tomlinson has produced a worthy successor to his earlier histories ‘Leeds United’ and ‘Leeds United in the 20th century’. Strangely though, there’s not a single illustration of Cantona in the picture section, while the author features four times.

From Adamson to O'Leary, from Kevin Hird, Wayne Entwhistle and Aidan Butterworth to Jonathan Woodgate, Harry Kewell and Alan Smith, this is an absorbing tale of Leeds' helter-skelter existence over a couple of eventful decades.

'Leeds United in the 1980s and 1990s' by Dave Tomlinson is published by Amberley Publishing, price £16.99.