

Football fanzines are extremely unique to British culture and our island as whole. They were born out of the 1970's punk scene and then flourished in a somewhat gloomy 1980's football period. The 90's were colourful and fanzines definitely followed the heady rise of the "Cool Britannia" wave. However, the noughties saw a real technology shift and in recent years we have seen the demise of CD's, DVD's and printed magazines.

In my hometown, for the first time in history, there is no longer a journalist that covers Huddersfield Town football club in the local newspaper! This means that there is a huge gap for me to fill. It appears that fanzines are outliving the rest and there is still a target fanbase that thankfully support such publications.

I have got to be honest and share that fanzine writers in the modern era, need to be more creative and resourceful than ever before. The football aesthetic in our country is as commercial as it has ever been. We have Amazon Prime and Netflix football club documentaries flooding our TV screens, daily club-based "access all areas" footage, ifollow is available for fans to watch games from the comfort of their sofa and with the recent birth of podcasts, we are seeing many fanzine writers decide to bow out and opt for the more cost-effective way of sharing stories.

I describe Smile A While to have a traditional heart and a modern head. My fanzine is moving with the times and tends to reflect a polished look but has within it a narrative that people will recognise from days of old. For fanzines creators in 2025, we seek the appreciation and support from that beautiful pocket of football fans who yearn for the traditions that brought them to football in the first place. There are plenty of us up and down the country that still choose to stand in the rain and find ourselves late for kick off on a Saturday!

Sean O'Toole, editor - Smile Awhile (Huddersfield Town Fanzine)

BACKGROUND

Happy Days was set up in 2005 by two Leeds-based Northern Ireland football fans: Nial Coulter from Bangor and Niall Rudd from Moira. We met through the North of England branch of the Northern Ireland Supporters Club, which pretty much is exactly what it says on the tin - a supports club for Northern Ireland fans living in the North of England.

At one of our meetings, we proposed setting up a fanzine as at the time, all previous Northern Ireland fanzines had stopped printing and gone down the online forum route. Niall Rudd had known Martyn McFadden - Editor of Sunderland fanzine A Love Supreme - for years and we basically bamboozled him with hundreds of questions on how they managed to write, design, produce and sell their fanzine on a regular basis.

Martyn and his team at ALS were very helpful and loaned us one of their designers to help set up our debut issue. We learnt skills such as page setting, text to photo ratio, long reads, short reads, ethics and of course the balance between having a pop and something and slander!

PRODUCTION AND SELLING

Northern Ireland had been drawn in the same 2006 FIFA World Cup Qualifying group as England and Wales so our target launch date for Issue 1 was for the away game v England at Old Trafford. Whilst we may have lost the game 4-0, the fanzine was a success and sold out. This gave us the confidence and drive to produce Issue 2 for the return fixture in Belfast in September.

Beating England at home (yes, it really happened) meant another sell-out and requests for a third issue in time for the home game with Wales six weeks later. Since then, we have scaled it back to one issue a year, released in September and adapting the features to make them less time critical so they remain relevant for the October and November internationals.

Personally, I'm not a keen salesperson and it was a move out of my comfort zone to stand with a bag of fanzines and sell. Thankfully we had a few regular fans whose gift of the gab shifted a lot of copies and they earned their commission - especially in the wind and rain of Belfast and the heat of Nice at Euro 2016. We also sold the fanzine in shops and our first few issues were also on sale on ALS' website as a bit of a favour.

MERCHANDISE

Another piece of advice A Love Supreme gave us was to produce T-shirts. Our aim was always to put the sales money back into the fanzine in case we had an issue that didn't do too well and one avenue we got excited about was T-shirts. ALS like to go down the parody line, such as a play on famous logos or phrases. So the likes of the Healy Honda T-shirt was born.

As official merchandise has become extremely bland over the years, limiting itself to replica shirts, basic tees, retro and training gear, we feel the need for independent merchandise with a bit of character is what's needed.

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE IFA

Whilst it's traditional for fanzines to be anti-FA or anti-board, we didn't want to fill that cliché unless it was justified. The fanzine had almost the opposite effect of those experienced by club; the IFA embraced us and offered us press passes for the senior international games which included attending press conferences, match tickets in the media sector and access to players at training. This really helped improve the content we could deliver as well as developing a fantastic photo library. We also felt like we were able to hold our own in a professional environment and some of the 'real' journalists even admitted being jealous of our freedom to write without answering to newspaper or TV editors.

EXPANSION

It's easy to get carried away when producing a fanzine; you have a list of players you want to go and interview, bags of ideas for features and articles and a load of social media posts you could create and deliver. Then you remember you have a job, a family and there's only 24 hours in a day. Both Niall and myself realised we needed more help editorially, so one of our



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regular writers - Blake Welton - had graduated as a journalist and was now working freelance, so it seemed right to give him more of a role. In 2020 we expanded further and brought in Jacob Graham as a fourth co-editor.

DECLINE IN PRINT MEDIA

It's no secret that print media has been in decline over the past 15 years and fanzines are not excused from this. Some football clubs like Bradford City don't even produce a matchday programme any longer. We've seen our circulation drop from a peak of 5,000 to 750 but we have offset that by making our fanzine available to purchase online as a downloadable PDF. We no longer sell in shops, as their retail cut increased to 40% making breaking even a tougher task. It takes the fun out of producing the fanzine and makes it seem more of a job, which is not the intention!

LEGACY AND FUTURE PLANS

We have thoroughly enjoyed producing Happy Days over the past 20 years. It's added a dimension to attending Northern Ireland games and brought us closer to the players (past and present) than we could ever have imagined. We've had pints with Grant McCann's and the Evans brothers' dads, interviewed Steve Jones in his back garden, played table tennis with David Healy and felt serious imposter syndrome when interviewing Shane Ferguson at Newcastle United's training ground. We've been in press conferences with Michael O'Neill and Ronald Koeman and met Northern Ireland legends such as Billy Hamilton, Jim Platt and Willie Irvine.

Our co-editor Blake occasionally freelances for the Sky Sports website and has set up London Football Scene, reporting on the capital's EFL clubs. During lockdown, with no Northern Ireland games to attend, I assisted Blake in covering EFL games and as a result we are now both EFL and Premier League accredited journalists. So in a way, we are now almost 'real' journalists!

We don't want to stop but are fully aware of how times change. We're developing our online presence more and have plans to launch a Podcast later this year. And remember, We're Not Brazil, We're Northern Ireland.

Nial Coulter, co-editor - Happy Days

Express Yourself

The fanzine gives the fanbase a chance to celebrate those who are fighting their own battles. A hobby photographer, a budding journalist building up their portfolio, A 3rd generation fan celebrating the life and commemorating the death of a grandparent. These are the features that make me the most proud to be providing a platform

We The Many

As Man Utd fans we have plenty to complain about. The money men at our club have never been for the fans and they need to be held to account. The 2 men's fanzines and this one that follows the women have a combined voice. It might not be the loudest voice in the modern world of social media and big business infiltrating football but we know they read it. Barmy Article only prints 100 each run, but the variety of voices on display are powerful and we know they make it into the upper echelons of the club.

DIY by Design

The beauty of a fanzine in my eyes is that it isn't reserved for the professionals. You don't have to have a degree to get your point across. It doesn't have to be a career aspiration, you just need to have something to say. Even if you don't consider yourself particularly literate, there are pages for you in the fanzine and help to get it into words and put it out there.

Andy Slater, editor – Barmy Article



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