

Fever Pitch

Extra Time

Penalty Shoot Out

How much do you remember? Divide into two teams. Take one question each alternately. Which team scores the most?

| Team 1 | √ or x? | Team 2 | √ or x? |
|--|---------|---|---------|
| »What is the name of the team that Nick Hornby supports? | | »What is the name of the stadium that Nick Hornby's favourite team use? | |
| »How old was Nick when he first went to a football match? | | »Who took Nick to his first football game? | |
| »What was the match that Nick first watched on television with his mother? (Name one team) | | »What most amazed Nick at his first match, the players or the crowd? | |
| »What did the supporters think of their home team at that first match? | | »What did Nick think when he was introduced to 'pain as entertainment'? | |
| »What was Nick given at his third match? | | »What were the packets of stickers for? | |
| »What helped Nick to transfer to secondary school? | | »How many supporters of the same team did Nick go to school with? | |
| »How many boys at the school wore shorts? | | »Name a 'downside' of being a football fan | |
| »After a few months, how did Nick feel each matchday? | | »What time did Nick like to get to the stadium on matchdays? | |
| »How did mum betray him? | | »How did dad betray him? | |
| »How did his team betray him? | | »How did the other supporters betray him? | |
| »What happened the day after the Cup match? | | »What happened when he went to school after the Cup match? | |

Sudden death question, in case of draw: What was the name of the opposing team for the FA Cup Match?

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After Reading

Further Reading

In 'Fever Pitch', Nick Hornby recalls that 'finding' football with his father didn't bring the rest of the family closer together.

It was a wonderful set-up, and changed our lives just when they needed changing most, but it was also exclusive: Dad and my sister never really found anywhere to live at all. Maybe now that wouldn't happen; maybe a nine-year-old girl in the nineties would feel that she had just as much right to go to a game as we did. But in 1969 in our town, this was not an idea that had much currency, and my sister had to stay at home with her mum and her dolls.

By the late nineties Hornby's suggestion that a girl would feel she belonged just as much at a football match as a boy had been borne out. In 1997, Anne Coddington published a book called 'One of the Lads', which examined the role of women in football. The 'blurb' describes what the book is about thus:

The beautiful game has undergone a revolution in recent years: the rise of 'soccerati', the fanzine explosion, players taking to the catwalks and fantasy football teams in the most unlikely of places. And in amongst this – often laddish – soccer renaissance is a quieter footballing phenomenon: the number of women who follow the game has now reached unprecedented heights.

Vocabulary Note: In the 'blurb', at least two words have been introduced which demonstrate the English language's ability to accept specially invented words where the occasion arises. Which words do you think are a product of the nineties?

Saturday afternoon passion from 'One the Lads' by Anne Coddington

Nick Hornby measured his life out through Arsenal fixtures. It gave not only a sense of continuity to a suburban adolescence teetering into middle age but also gave him an escape route, an emotional safety valve where all that pent-up angst could let itself go. And of course when Arsenal won it made up for some of life's other disappointments: 'I had the blues and when I watched my team I could unwrap them and let them breathe a little.' This is what makes football so special, there is simply no other sport that demands, and receives, such a high level of individual attachment. And notwithstanding the TV age we live in there is no obvious sign of this attachment abating.

'Football is completely cathartic. You're on this little island where you don't have to think about anything else. You can burn off a lot of energy. If you want to sing and chant you can and the very act of this is a release. You've got the unpredictability and the excitement. And you've got an oasis in the middle of the rest of your life,' says Debbie Horsfield. It's also an opportunity for Debbie to break out of the responsible convention: 'It's the reversal of my normal situation. I can leave behind my domestic ties, my busy life, my adult responsibilities.'

For Angela Fosdyke, football is a way of finding a side of her personality she never knew she had: she may have to be restrained and respectable at work but: 'I become completely different when I go to West Ham - I feel liberated,' she says. 'You become more aggressive, you get carried away. It's not like you have to prove yourself, you don't have to act in a feminine way in front of the people you're with. In fact you forget all about them. It's just you and eleven men and you want to tell them just what you think.' Or as Jan McKenley puts it: 'I don't go to football to be genteel, anything but. I'm an effer and blinder at games.' But she does see some
20 differences between her and other supporters.

'I was once at a game where most of the crowd jumped up and shouted "wanker" at exactly the same time. I wouldn't do that. There are some masculine signals that I don't give.'

Jan believes that the way women support their teams from the stands is different, too. 'I think women are more encouraging. I've never seen a woman walk out. A lot of blokes walk out if Arsenal aren't playing well - maybe they feel more keenly than women do - but most of the women I see clap, cheer, get behind the team even when we all know they're playing badly.' Angela Forsdyke agrees: 'Maybe it's the softer side of our nature coming out but I do think women are more forgiving. I do get angry and I do shout but I would always give the team the benefit of the doubt. If someone's getting on my nerves I let them know: "Move, you tart," but if he then plays better I will praise him. Maybe women are more
30 objective in that sense.'

Perhaps women do have more of a perspective on their fandom: 'I'm told that when I feel sorry for the players when they lose it's the mothering instinct coming out,' says Bolton fan Jean Thomasson. 'You feel for the players, whereas men don't. They only care about whether they win or lose and what the weekend's going to be like if they lose. I've heard men say: "We're going to need oxygen when we get home." Literally, it seems for some men that their whole life has been drained out of them by the failure to win.'

After *Fever Pitch*, almost every club in the country seemed to find its very own soccerati: from Stockport County to Cowdenbeath, Tranmere Rovers to Southampton's Saints. It was as if beneath all those layers of winter clothing donned for the difficult early January cup tie there was an aspiring author waiting to burst forth. In every case the author was a man. Hornby's collection of the new football writing *My Favourite Year*
40 didn't include even a token woman amongst its 13 contributors.

Simon Kuper spearheaded a second wave of writing, still exclusively male, with his 1994 best seller, *Football Against the Enemy*, and has this to say about his Hornbyesque peers: 'Too many books have been written about this sentimental attachment to football on the back of *Fever Pitch*, this idea that I've been following my team for 30 years and my dad did before me and my grandad did before him, that football is about blood and toil and belonging. This is very dangerous for two reasons. First football is about more than belonging and community, it's about art and great moments: George Best beating three defenders down the wing; a Platini free kick. Secondly, it makes Asian fans, black fans, women fans feel excluded. How can you come in if you didn't belong before?'

Kuper is right, women are used to being the object, never the subject, or in more colloquial terms, the
50 bridesmaid, never the bride. Our lives in football rarely make an appearance in these tales, even as objects, let alone as part of football's big happy family. It is not Nick Hornby's fault, the lad didn't do that bad, and in his darker moments he at least faces up to his own inadequacies. But until we are allowed to tell our own tales, until we find that space with the encouragement and support such a space would have to provide, it would be nice if all these enlightened blokes at least recognized that a woman can be just like a fan



Vocabulary Box

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| abating | - getting less; diminishing |
| angst | - anxiety; feeling of guilt |
| blokes | - men |
| carried away | - released |
| cathartic | - allowing an emotional expression/freedom |
| donned | - put on; wore |
| effery and blinder- | person who swears or uses bad words |
| fixtures | - arranged matches |
| notwithstanding | - in spite of |
| pent-up | - accumulated |
| spearheaded | - went first; pioneered |
| toil | - hard work |
| token woman | - symbolic or nominal woman (i.e. not really representative) |

Over to you

What, in your own words, is meant by:

1. “gave him an escape route, an emotional safety valve where all that pent-up angst could let itself go” (line 2)
2. “You're on this little island where you don't have to think about anything else” (line 8)
3. “I don't go to football to be genteel, anything but.” (line 19)
4. “I'm told that when I feel sorry for the players when they lose it's the mothering instinct coming out.” (line 31)
5. “women are used to being the object, never the subject, or in more colloquial terms, the bridesmaid, never the bride.” (line 49)

Discussion: “A football match is no place for a woman”

