



HAMMERED

MARK WARD

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MAN CITY AND EVERTON... THEN THE POLICE
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JOHN BLAKE

I am dedicating this book to the memory of my late father, William Joseph Ward.

To my mother, Irene Ward, and my daughter, Melissa.

Also, my Uncle Tommy and Auntie Helen and my brothers and sisters, Susan,
Billy, Tony, Irene, Ann and Andrew.

My four grandchildren, Deri, Zach, Isabella and Frankie. I love you all.

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And to the one screw who helped me out when I needed it, he is a true fan of the 'People's Club'.

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FOREWORD

By Howard Kendall

BY pure coincidence, I had just finished watching an episode of the TV police series *The Bill* when Mark's publisher phoned me at home and asked if I would contribute this foreword. How timely!

I was obviously shocked when I heard that Mark had been arrested and then subsequently sentenced. I don't want to go into what he was guilty of and why he ended up in prison for the past four years but when it happens to someone you know well and have become close to over the years it's obviously very disappointing.

But once I knew how long he would have to spend inside, I had no doubts whatsoever that Mark would be able to handle it. His outstanding qualities of resilience and determination that characterised his performances for me, firstly at Manchester City and then Everton, have again stood him in good stead.

Mark first came to my attention some eight years or so before I actually signed him. He was playing for Everton in a testimonial at Halifax one night in May 1981, just after he had been given a free transfer by manager Gordon Lee, who was in fact sacked later that day. I'd just been appointed as Lee's successor when I was sat next to my assistant, Colin Harvey, at the game.

Despite being shown the door by the club he'd supported as a kid, Mark gave a typically honest performance that caught my eye at The Shay that night. I asked Colin if he thought the club was doing the right thing by letting 'Wardy' go and he mentioned that Lee had based his decision on Mark's size and stature and doubted whether he had the strength to fully make the grade.

Although I accepted Lee's verdict at the time and didn't intervene, I made a mental note of Mark's ability and the decision to let him go ultimately proved an expensive one for the club – I brought him back to Everton 10 years later at a cost of £1million.

After being released by Everton in the early 80s, Mark went on to show what he was all about. Instead of feeling sorry for himself and giving up on his dream, he worked hard to improve his game, kept plugging away and got his reward via a non-league spell with Northwich Victoria that took him back into pro football at Oldham Athletic and then West Ham United. For this achievement I always use him as the perfect example of a youngster who showed the hunger and determination required to bounce back from a big setback early on in his career.

For me, Mark's best qualities were his consistency and the 100 per cent commitment he guaranteed with every game he played. Some players don't attain that level of consistency but he always did. Add that attitude to the lad's other abilities – his strength and willingness to get up and down the wing and a good crosser of the ball – and here was a player you wanted on your team-sheet every week.

It was those fighting qualities that made me sign him when I returned to England after managing Athletic Bilbao to take over at Man City towards the end of 1989. The team was struggling in a relegation battle and not only did I need to bring in players of quality, but ones who would fight to drag us out of that hole to ensure survival in the top flight.

One of the first games I saw on my return from Spain was Blackburn Rovers against West Ham and I knew then that Wardy was ideally suited to help us get out of the situation we were in. I swapped him for two players, Ian Bishop and Trevor Morley – plus money – to form a central midfield

partnership alongside another reliable Scouser called Peter Reid, and City eventually pulled clear trouble.

I found myself in a similar predicament when I went back to Everton to manage there for the second time, in the summer of 1991 – and I again turned to Mark because I knew he would do the job we needed from him. This time, he was asked to play on the left of midfield, but it didn't matter where I put him in midfield because I knew I'd always get the same consistent level of performance and a wholehearted endeavour.

I never really liked to play with out-and-out wingers anyway. I preferred wide players who would attack and then also get back to defend when needed – and Wardy could perform both roles very well.

After he had recovered from a badly broken leg during my second spell as Everton manager, I didn't hesitate to put him straight back in the side as soon as he was fit enough to play again. He had a winning mentality, on and off the field.

I saw more evidence of this soon after he'd joined City, when I took the lads on a mid-season break to Tenerife. I challenged Wardy to a game of tennis after we'd all spent the previous night enjoying drinks in the hotel bar. There was a £100 side-stake on the match and I managed to beat him two sets to one.

He could never stand to be beaten, though, so he insisted on a double-or-quits re-match the next day. This time he got his revenge – he must have caught me at a weak moment!

I got him back a few years later, though, on Everton's summer trip to Mauritius. Wardy had got up to something – I can't remember what – so I punished him by making him stand up on stage at the hotel and sing *Summertime* to the whole squad. It probably proved to be more a punishment for the other lads who had to listen to him perform!

These bonding tours did much to boost morale among the players. There were no cliques and they always had a positive effect. We'd invariably win our next game after a mini-break, although the players had to pay for their own fun. If any of them stepped out of line during the season I'd fine them for it and put the money into a kitty that went towards our next trip.

I'd keep a log of all the miscreants and what they had paid into the fund. Before going away I'd read out the list of contributors and the sums they had raised. The lads would all clap and cheer as I went down the list but, inevitably, Wardy's name would be at or somewhere near the top and I'd be informing him that it was his turn to get the champagne in again!

Not that he has had any champagne to enjoy in the past four years. I visited Mark in prison, along with Duncan Ferguson and my pal Tommy Griffiths, and I didn't know what to expect when we arrived there. But I was very pleased to see that he looked well and as fit as he did during his playing career.

It wasn't for me to probe him about what had happened or ask how or why he got himself into such a mess. The main thing is that he has paid the price for his mistakes and done his time like a man.

I understand that Mark would now like to rebuild his life and career by getting back into football in a coaching or management capacity. My advice to him would be to apply himself fully and gain the necessary coaching qualifications, so that any prospective chairman can see that he means business and has a clear intent to progress in coaching and management. If he can show desire and commitment, the same qualities that made him an integral part of my teams at both Manchester City and Everton, then people will sit up and take notice of him.

I wish Mark good luck in the future and look forward to seeing him back at Goodison Park again soon, where he will always be made welcome by me.

Howard Kendall
Formby, Merseyside
November 2010

INTRODUCTION

THE radio in the van taking me from court to prison was tuned to the local station and it blasted out the bad news I never wanted to hear: 'Former Everton player Mark Ward has been remanded in custody on a drugs-related charge.'

I'd obviously heard my name mentioned countless times before on radio and TV during my years in top flight football, but this was a surreal moment.

I could just manage to see out of the prison van window and recognised what was a familiar route. We had to pass Everton's famous ground on the way to the jail and I reminisced to myself about those many carefree days when I'd driven to Goodison, eagerly looking forward to the really big game, playing for my hometown team. I remembered the day I was acclaimed a hero by nearly 40,000 fellow Blues for scoring twice on my debut against the mighty Arsenal. And also my goal against our big city rivals Liverpool.

Now I was on my way past Everton's famous football ground in Walton, to HMP Liverpool in Walton. To me, they were a world apart.

The dreadful enormity of what I'd got myself into hit me hard and fast. Being refused bail in the magistrates' court that morning came as a shock and bitter disappointment. It was looking bad for me.

I was worried for my family. I'd let them down terribly. How would they cope with all this bad publicity? I knew my daughter Melissa would be devastated. I'd looked across at her and the rest of the family in court that morning and the sight of Melissa's tears rolling down her face will haunt me forever.

Her dad, her hero, was going to prison.

As I stepped down from the dock, I heard her say, 'I love you, Dad.' I couldn't look back, I was too emotional, trying as hard as I could to fight back tears. I didn't want her to see me losing it.

So much was going on in my head. I was living out my very own nightmare.

That short journey to Walton in the confined space of the meat wagon was very uncomfortable. How on earth larger prisoners could travel any great distance in such cramped conditions was beyond me.

There were four other prisoners on my journey and the awful stench of p**s was overwhelming. There are no toilets on board where prisoners can relieve themselves, so they just p**s on the floor of their own tiny individual cubicle.

When the van came to a halt, a screw came aboard and handcuffed himself to me before escorting me in to Liverpool's notorious prison. I was led to the main reception desk, where I was confronted by three screws. I could already sense some resentment towards me. The youngest of the screws said, 'We've been waiting for you. You're gonna be here for a long time.'

I didn't react – I was still in a state of shock at being refused bail, although I knew I had to try and retain my dignity as best I could and not take any bait from prison staff trying to further humiliate me.

After confirming my name and date of birth, I was led away to an area set aside for stop-searches. I had to take off all my clothes and put them in the box set in front of me. A screw told me to turn around, spread my legs and open the cheeks of my a***. I did as I was instructed before being given back my clothes.

Undressing in front of anybody has never been a problem. As a footballer, taking off your kit in the

dressings room is an everyday occurrence. But to be told to bend over, spread the cheeks of your a** and lift up your b*****s so that prison officers could check to see if I was hiding anything, was a degrading experience.

They then asked if I had any valuables on me. The only thing I had to disclose was a Gucci watch, present from my former West Ham teammate Alan Devonshire for playing in his testimonial match in 1987. They logged it down on my property card and gave it back to me.

I was then escorted to a larger room where other prisoners were waiting to be told which wing and cell they would be allocated to. I sat down and looked around at the others – all of them looked dooped, tired, restless and in need of a good feed. Some of the lads knew each other and were talking about prison and other establishments where they had stayed. Time dragged on and, having not slept properly since my arrest two days earlier and the hours of police interrogation that followed at Helens nick, I felt shattered.

The door opened and a screw asked if we wanted a welcome pack of tobacco or sweets. Everybody asked for tobacco except me.

The screw left us and soon returned with 11 packets of Golden Virginia and a small bag of 'goodies' for me. A young lad asked the screw why it was taking so long sort out our cell allocation. He explained that the prison was full to the rafters.

The same kid approached me and asked if I was Mark Ward, the former Everton player, and I answered 'Yes'. He told me he also came from Huyton and knew some of my cousins. He was quick to tell me that I'd be looking at eight-to-ten years inside. 'Get yourself a good QC and watch yourself when you get on to the remand wing – that's B-wing,' he added.

As he offered me this advice the skinniest prisoner came up to me and asked for a bar of chocolate. I gave him a small Milky Way and watched him scoff it down as if he'd not seen food for weeks.

The door opened yet again and this time we were asked by a nurse if any of us wanted to see the prison doctor for medication. Everyone except me joined the queue to see the prison doctor. When the rest had all been given their medication I soon sussed that most of the lads – drug addicts – had been given methadone to calm them down.

The room stank of tobacco smoke and, being a non-smoker, I began to realise that I could soon be banged-up with one of these lads.

Then the youngster from Huyton started to tell everybody that we would be put on K-wing. 'That's the case,' he said, 'tell them to f*** off.'

I asked him what was wrong with K-wing and he just laughed out loud. 'Wardy, lad, that's where all the nonces are. The scum all get put there.'

Another prisoner approached me for a bar of chocolate. I gave him a Snickers before the Huyton kid told me to stop giving away my bag of treats. 'You're gonna have to learn fast,' he warned. 'Some prisoners will take the eyes out of your head for a deal of smack.'

We'd been waiting around for four hours and I was feeling overwhelmed with absolute mental and physical exhaustion. Finally, a screw opened the door and my name was called out. I followed him into another room where he told me to sit down. He took my photograph and put the passport-size picture in a plastic cover with my prison number underneath it.

I used to be proud to wear No.7 on my back in my playing days. Now I was NM6982 – a number I'll never forget until the day I die. 'Don't lose that Ward and always wear it around your neck,' he told me.

I was then shuffled along to see a more senior screw, who informed me that I was to be put on the 'lifers' wing – A-wing. He pushed a bundle of clothing and bedding into my arms but I nearly dropped

my belongings at the thought of what he'd just told me. Lifers' wing! F*****g hell – I hadn't killed anybody!

I knew that although the drugs and paraphernalia were not mine, and nor were they put there by me, I'd be held responsible because the property they had been discovered in was rented in my name.

What a dickhead I'd been.

1. BORN IN THE ATTIC

REACHING the top in football became my goal very early in life, so it was perhaps appropriate that I was born in the attic of 25, Belton Road, Huyton, Liverpool on October 10, 1962.

My sister Susan had arrived a year before me. As the eldest of seven children, we became very close as kids. Like all families in the large Ward clan, Mum and Dad kept very busy and seemed to produce a baby almost once a year. Billy turned up just nine months after me, then Tony, followed by Irene, Ann and Andrew. Mum lost a child somewhere in between, so there should really have been eight of us.

In later years I asked Dad why, as his eldest son, I was named Mark William Ward and not Billy after him. He explained that it was deemed unlucky in our family to name the eldest boy after the father. Apparently, there had been a series of tragic deaths in previous generations of our family, so Dad chose to name his second son Billy instead.

Billy Ward senior came from a large Catholic family of 13 children, with him and Tommy the two youngest. Tommy – who has been a father-figure to me and my brothers since Dad died – tells me that my grandfather had been a stoker in the merchant navy, travelling to Russia in the first world war. My mother, Irene, was one of six kids in a family of Protestants. I've got so many cousins and relatives I've never even met half of them.

Dad's family originated from County Cork in the Republic of Ireland. He used to tell me about his grandmother, Mary McConnell, who came to Liverpool on the boat from Cork. She was blind and lame and the other children would have to carry her to the toilet or bathroom.

Ward is a very common name in Ireland. I found out from my Uncle Paddy that they were tinkers or 'knackers' as they were also sometimes called. Many a time on my visits to Ireland as a footballer I'd be asked if I was a knacker. They were not well thought of and were widely regarded as troublemakers who loved a scrap. That doesn't sound like me!

Ireland has always been one of my favourite destinations. I love the place and the people who make it so special. I've made so many friends in the Emerald Isle and I could happily live there. Dublin or Liverpool without the violence.

I can't remember much about living in Huyton as a kid, although I do recall my first visit to hospital. I was three or four years old and Mum would allow me to go to the shop at the top of our road – Keyos – that sold just about everything.

I always had a football to dribble to and from the shop. I remember being nearly home, as happy as Larry with my pockets stuffed with sweets, when, all of a sudden, I was hit from behind. It felt like one of the worst tackles I've ever experienced. A large Alsatian dog attacked me and caused me to hit the pavement so hard that my head split wide open, with blood gushing everywhere. Luckily, Dad was at home and he picked me up before carrying me all the way to Alder Hey Hospital, where I had the first of many stitches I'd need throughout my life.

I was told the next day that the dog wouldn't be attacking any more children. Dad had taken his revenge on the beast with a metal pipe.

However, this painful childhood experience did not dampen my desire for sweets. In fact, the mishap effectively became my first-ever coaching lesson. From then on, whenever I went to the shop I'd dribble the ball but with my head up, so that I could see and be aware of everything around me.

Instead of looking for my next pass, I was alert to the opposition – the dogs. I'd learned the hard way and didn't want to go back into hospital again. I wasn't going to be caught out by any more vicious dogs and there were plenty of them around. Huyton, in the L36 postcode district of Liverpool, was such a tough area, the locals used to reckon that even the dogs would hang around in pairs! In fact Huyton was also known as 'Two Dogs Fighting'.

Before he met and married Mum, Dad was a PT instructor in the army and always kept himself extremely fit. Dad was only a small man – 5ft 4ins – but incredibly strong and athletic. At 5ft 6ins I'm hardly much taller than he was but, more importantly, I inherited his strength and athleticism too. Without those two assets, I could never have made it as a footballer. He would say to me: 'Strength and speed equals power.' Although I had to work on my fitness as much as everyone else, I had the capability to reach the levels needed to play at the top level.

As a small child, I remember gazing in admiration at Dad's trophies on display in the cabinet in our living room. He won medals for football, running, cricket and weightlifting. Signed by Don Welsh, he was a promising left-winger for Liverpool in 1953-54, playing a number of games for the reserve team. Uncle Tommy tells me that he once saw a photograph of the entire Liverpool squad lined up on the pitch at Anfield, with his brother stood proudly next to a young lad called Roger Hunt.

But compulsory National Service spoilt Dad's hopes of becoming a pro. He was shipped out to Hong Kong, where he played for the battalion along with quite a few pro footballers. After completing two years in the army he was demobbed in 1956.

Over the years he'd tell me all about this magical place called Hong Kong. He really enjoyed his time out there and would say: 'If you ever get the chance, son, visit Hong Kong.' I would eventually play in Hong Kong for a short period at the end of my career.

* * * *

My parents married at St Columbus Church in Huyton on Grand National Day in April 1960. Dad's sister, Chrissie, was Mum's best friend and it was through her that they met.

One special talent I didn't inherit from Dad was his wonderful left foot. He was actually a two-footed player. If I'd inherited his left peg, I'd have been a far better player – my left foot was hopeless.

As well as making around 10 appearances for Liverpool's reserve team, Dad also played for South Liverpool, Skelmersdale United and some of the top Sunday League teams in our area, notably the Eagle and Child and the Farmers Arms in Huyton. Comedian Stan Boardman played at centre-forward in the same Farmers Arms team. I'd have a famous fall-out with Stan years later.

Uncle Tommy would take me to watch my father play. Apparently, I was a real handful and would try and run onto the pitch to join in. Although eight years separated them, Tommy was very close to Dad and he, too, was a very good player – as he's still fond of reminding me to this day! He held the local league scoring record and once netted nine goals in one game, including six with his head.

I'm very close to Tommy and his wife, Helen, who have both always been there for my brother and I since Dad died in 1988.

Dad taught Tommy how to tie his shoe laces, basic arithmetic and the art of kicking a ball with both feet. He also showed him how to look after himself with his fists, which was a handy skill to have around our way.

Huyton, in the borough of Knowsley, is not only known for being a rough area, though. A number of famous names are also associated with my birthplace. Harold Wilson was the MP for Huyton and

the week after my birthday he became Prime Minister. Being a staunch socialist himself, Dad voted for him.

In the second world war, Huyton was home to an internment camp for German and Austrian prisoners of war. Goalkeeper Bert Trautmann was held there before going on to become a Manchester City legend.

Football and Huyton go hand in hand. Over the years there have been many debates among locals as to who would be included in a best-ever Huyton XI. Four definite starters would be Peter Reid, Steven Gerrard, Joey Barton and, of course, myself! What a formidable midfield quartet that would have been.

Reidy played for the Huyton Schoolboys team that won the English Schools Trophy, which was no mean feat. In my fictional Huyton all-time team I can just imagine Reidy commanding the centre of the midfield and pulling the strings with Gerrard powering forward to destroy the opposition, ably supported by the combative Barton and Ward.

Despite my true blue allegiance, I rate Steven Gerrard as the best midfielder I've seen in my time. A truly amazing player who has served Liverpool and England with distinction.

* * * *

As the size of our family increased, Mum and Dad decided to move on – to nearby Whiston, which is just a stone's throw to the east of Huyton, on the other side of the A57. In the summer of 1967 we moved to a bigger, four-bedroom council house at 23 Walpole Avenue. I remember a happy and loving childhood and feeling secure in a very close-knit family. Not that we had much money. Dad was a labourer who found himself in and out of employment, although he always worked hard to provide for us as best he could.

I realised from an early age how relatively poor we were compared to most other kids in our area and that we weren't going to get a new bike at Christmas or go on holidays in the summer. We knew better than to ask for things our parents clearly couldn't afford. I wore the cheapest football boots money could buy and never had a replica Everton kit as a kid. We just didn't have the money for such luxuries. It didn't used to bother me much, although it hurt my feelings a bit when I'd go to play for the under-nines and I'd turn up in football boots with holes in them while other kids, who couldn't even kick a ball properly, were wearing the flashiest boots going.

But I honestly wouldn't have swapped what we had as a family unit for anything. It was character building. The most important thing was that there was always food on the table. Although how my parents managed at times I'll never know.

You had to be smart and fight for everything in our house. If you were last out of bed to get your breakfast, there was a very good chance that there would be no Weetabix or Shredded Wheat left after six hungry kids had devoured it. Even if there were still a few cereal crumbs left at the bottom of the box, the chances were that there would be no milk left to pour on them.

Despite the harsh economics of home life, Mum tried her best to provide a special birthday present for her kids. The only way she could purchase these surprises was by means of the catalogue, paying for items in weekly instalments. On my 10th birthday I received a brand new 12-gear racing bike which became my pride and joy. I knew that the weekly amount Mum had to re-pay the catalogue company was more than she could really afford but she still made sure I had this special bike as a treasure.

I was oblivious to most of the everyday goings-on at home, though, as I fully immersed myself

football. You see few kids doing it today, but playing out in the street was my life. Our house was on the corner and instead of a fence or wall, there were hedges surrounding the garden. They reminded me of the Grand National fences – and they were ideal for smashing a football into. Over the years they got some hammer and the constant daily bombardment from my ball took its toll. While other neighbours' hedges were all lush and green, ours were bare.

One day I was asked to run an errand for a man called Billy Wilson, who lived opposite. He and his wife May treated me like their own son – I was the spitting image of their grandson Karl who had emigrated to Australia years before I arrived in the street and whom they missed terribly. I had wavy blond hair just like him, too.

A miner who loved his garden, Billy became a great friend to me and I'd happily run to the shop nearly every day for him to get the *Liverpool Echo*. He was so generous, he'd give me a threepenny bit almost every time I went to the shops for his Woodbines and papers, which made me well off compared to the other kids in the street.

My first real mate was a lad called Colin Port, who lived in our street and was a couple of years older than me. He became my sparring partner and we competed against each other at everything. Once a week there was always a fall-out between us and it would inevitably end up in a scrap. The truth is that I hated losing at anything – still do – and my attitude to defeat usually sparked a fist-fight.

The first school I attended was Whiston Willis Infants, next door to the junior school. The two playgrounds were adjacent and I'd constantly be caught on the junior school premises playing football with the older lads. Looking back, competing against more senior boys played a massive part in my development as a young player.

After moving up into the juniors, I was picked for the football team two years above my age group which was unheard of. My first cup final was in 1969 – Whiston Willis Juniors v Bleak Hill at the neutral St Lukes venue. It's a game that will always remain with me – not for the fact that we won and I scored the equaliser in our 2-1 victory, but because it earned me a pound note. Alan Moss – a lad I still know well – had watched me play from an early age and, before kick-off, he promised to give me a quid if I managed to score.

It seemed like a fortune and when the final whistle blew, as everybody ran on to the pitch and started hugging all the players, I was too busy looking around for 'Mossy'. He sneaked up behind me, picked me up and placed my first football-related payment in my little hand. My best mate Colin scored the winner to cap a great day.

Alan Moss always had faith that I'd go on to become a pro. Whenever we meet up now, we still talk about the day he paid me a pound for my goal and made the smallest kid on the park feel 10ft tall.

* * * *

My father had his own way of toughening up his eldest son. He would take me with him to visit his brother – my Uncle Joey – two or three times a month. Joey and Aunt Ivy also lived in Huyton but I think Dad took me along more as 'insurance'. When he left me there to go out drinking with Uncle Joey, he knew he'd have to pick me up at his brother's place later on and take me back home, which meant he couldn't stay out all night.

He'd leave me to play with my cousin Kevin Ward, who became the elder brother I never had. Of all my countless cousins, he was the closest to me, even though he was four years older. Kevin had a fearsome reputation around Huyton. No sooner had our fathers sloped off to The Quiet Man or the Eagle and Child for a pint or six then Kevin was lining me up for a fight with one of the local kids

even though these hand-picked opponents were usually older and bigger than me. If they were getting the better of me, as they often did at first, Kevin would come to my aid by giving my rival a slap before sending him on his way.

This went on for years. At first I'd try and hide from Dad when I knew he was planning to visit Uncle Joey's. He'd always find me, though, and while he never said as much, I'm sure he told Kevin to harden me up a bit. It worked, because I'd gained in confidence when I returned to my hometown of Whiston. I never backed down to any of the local kids and was always in trouble for fighting.

Mr Boardman, the disciplinarian headmaster at Whiston Willis Juniors, had enough of my ongoing battles with a lad called David Maskell, the youngest of six brothers in a family of boxers. One day the Head organised a boxing match between David and myself in the school hall, in front of all the other kids. David knew how to box but I'd never even pulled on a pair of boxing gloves before. I knew I could beat David in a straightforward street fight but the boxing ring was a different matter.

My fears that our bout was going to be one-way traffic proved correct – he boxed my head off. I managed to butt him in the nose and there was blood all over his face but it was so one-sided. When the Head raised David Maskell's hand to signal his victory at the end of the fight, he barked: 'I hope this is the end of your fighting.'

Who was he trying to kid? I was so absolutely gutted to have lost to David in the ring that I waited for him after school to exact my revenge – in the street. I just couldn't let him think that he was better than me at anything. I was never a bully but having this inner drive and sheer will to win became a key part of my make-up from an early age.

My class-mates would ply me with Mars bars, sweets, apples and cans of Coke, just so I'd pick them in my team at play-time. I quickly realised that being good at football made me popular with other kids – including the girls. This continued when I left the Juniors and moved on to Whiston Higher Side Comprehensive school.

* * * *

Life in the Ward household was chaotic at times. Being the eldest lad, it was my job to ensure that the younger ones behaved themselves properly when our parents were not around. Our Billy and Irene argued like cat and dog, constantly at each other's throats over anything and everything.

One day Billy and I were playing darts in our bedroom. The dartboard was hanging from the back of the door but there was a constant distraction in the form of Irene, who was the cheekiest and naughtiest sister you could imagine. She kept running in front of the dartboard to put us off until Billy told her: 'I'll throw this dart at you if you don't go away.' But Irene being what she was, continued to wind him up all the more.

Before I could say anything, Billy let fly with the dart – and it entered Irene's head. She had a mass of curly hair and to my horror, the red dart was sticking out of the top of her head. I panicked knowing I'd get a good hiding if Dad found out. I rushed over to Irene to try and extract the dart but she already had her claws out and was chasing Billy around the bedroom like a raging bull.

As she was about to pounce on my brother, I pulled the dart from her head and got in between them. It was only then that the tears and screams started – not because of the pain caused by the dart, but the fact that she couldn't get her revenge on Billy!

My brothers and sisters get together occasionally and we reminisce about how violent we were towards each other as kids. Although we'd argue and fight with each other, if any outsiders ever tried to harm any of us, we'd stick together like glue.

I was probably about six years old when Dad called me in off the street and told me to run to the bookies for him. If ever he told you to do something, you daren't refuse or even make him wait.

The nearest betting shop to our house was about half a mile away. Kicking a football in the street had obviously improved my fitness and speed, but running as fast as I could to the betting shop to place Dad's bet definitely enhanced my aerobic capacity. Many a time I'd been in the middle of a game in the street and be summoned by Dad to go to the bookies as fast as I could because he had a runner at Haydock Park or some other racecourse. Sometimes I'd only have 10 minutes to get there before the 'off' and then hope that I wouldn't have to wait long for a punter to agree to my urgent request to put the bet on.

Regulars in the bookies got to know me as Billy Ward's lad, so it was never a problem sneaking inside the door. As soon as the bet was placed and I had the receipt slip in my hand, I'd run like the wind to get back and resume playing football in the street. Looking back, I think I ran faster than Dad's bloody horses – he never gave me a winning ticket to take back to the shop! On the rare occasions that he did back a winner, I think he must have collected his own winnings and then headed straight off to the pub.

The positive from my regular sprints to the bookies was the fact that, from a young age, I learned to run very fast over a fair distance. The downside was that my early introduction to the betting shop and horseracing probably led to my own gambling habit in later years.

I admit, I did develop a big gambling problem in adult life – I'd say after I joined West Ham in 1985. It's well documented that gambling was, and still is, a footballer's disease and I'd agree with that because it goes with the territory. Then again, maybe I would still have gambled even if I hadn't been asked to place Dad's bets at the bookies.

* * * *

Junior football clubs started to develop around the area where we lived and I was soon signed up to play for a Sunday side called Whiston Cross – later re-named Whiston Juniors – who had, and still have, a big stronghold on all the best young players in the area. Steven Gerrard is their most famous graduate but I also came through the Whiston Juniors system, along with a dozen or so others who went on to make the professional grade, including Karl Connolly (Queens Park Rangers), Ryan McDowell (Manchester City) and John Murphy (Blackpool).

We all owe so much to the managers who looked after the Whiston teams. In my time, without pioneers like Steve Hughes and Brian Lee giving up their spare time to run the clubs, a lot of us wouldn't have developed into the players we became.

I made more friends from other parts of Whiston and the surrounding areas because football brought us together. Even though we didn't attend the same schools, we'd hang out together. One of my best mates – and he still is – was a goalkeeper called Kevin Hayes. We nicknamed him 'The Egg' because he was brilliant at finding birds' nests and had a great egg collection. I still call him The Egg to this day.

Peter McGuinness was our left-back with a great left foot. We became close friends and remain so to this day.

Our Whiston Cross team was so successful that we were invited to play at Everton's Bellefield training ground against the best kids on their books. It proved to be a big turning point in my life. Da

came along to watch but he wasn't like all the other fathers. He wouldn't go religiously every week see me play, whereas some fathers would kick every ball for their boys from the sidelines.

I reckon that Dad knew I had qualities, although he never, ever told me I was good. I'd score four or five goals in a game and dominate the opposition but he'd never tell me afterwards that I'd played well. It was only quite a bit later in my career, when I was at West Ham, that he ever lavished any praise on me. I'll never forget it. We were sat together in a pub, on one of my home visits, when he suddenly commented I was a far better player than he ever was. I nearly fell off my chair in shock.

Dad didn't coach me and never told me to do this or that. He just let me develop in my own way. He knew my size would be an obstacle I had to overcome but he also knew I had the qualities of strength and speed that I'd inherited from him.

That game against Everton's kids was a real lesson. They murdered us 6-0 but – and don't ask me how – some of our players still came out of the game with credit. Afterwards Everton youth coach Graham Smith approached my father and asked if it would be okay for me to go to Bellefield after school every Tuesday and Thursday night for proper coaching.

Dad agreed and going home that night he told me to just go along and enjoy it. Kevin Hayes – 'The Egg' – was also invited back by Everton even though he'd conceded six. It still amazes me how they saw any positive play from me that day, because I hardly kicked the ball – Everton's kids were that good. But Graham Smith said that it was my never-say-die attitude, even when we were being hopelessly outclassed, and the fact that I kept trying to do the right thing and never hid, that caught his eye.

Dad presumably felt chuffed to see his lad attracting the attention of Everton – the club he supported all his life – but if he was, he never showed it.

Training twice a week at Bellefield improved my technique and it was the first time I'd had the benefit of proper coaching. Playing for my school, then Whiston Cross on Sundays and the St Helier Schoolboys district side meant that hardly a day went by without me playing a game. I couldn't get enough of it.

My mate Colin Port and I would go to Goodison to watch Everton play one week and then see Liverpool at Anfield the next. I was brought up as an Evertonian while Colin was a Rednose.

It was around this time that I was called in to see Ray Minshull, Everton's youth development officer. I was concerned that I might have done something wrong but he counted out my expenses for travelling to training and they gave me a pair of brand new Adidas boots. They were size six, and a little big for me, but it was a wonderful gesture and made me feel good.

Ray then asked if I'd like to become a ball-boy at Goodison for first team games. Wow! In those days it was every schoolboy's dream to play for his hometown club and being a ball-boy provided a great opportunity to at least get onto the hallowed turf. The feeling I had while running out with the other nine ball-boys before the opening game of the 1974-75 season was magical. I remember the deafening noise from the crowd, the *Z-Cars* music and every hair on my body standing up as players such as Bob Latchford, Andy King, Mick Lyons, George Wood and Martin Dobson ran out of the tunnel. It wasn't the greatest side in Everton's history but it felt fantastic to be so close to the action and able to take it all in at the age of 11. I realised then, more than ever, that there was nothing I wanted more than to run out with the blue shirt on my back.

Other clubs who showed interest in me included Blackburn Rovers, Manchester United and Liverpool. Jimmy Dewsnip, the local Liverpool scout, invited Dad and I to be Liverpool's guests at Anfield, where I was dying to meet my idol Kevin Keegan. Even though I was an Evertonian, I loved to watch him play. I can't remember much about the game itself but I was introduced to Kevin outside

the changing rooms afterwards. I was a star-struck 15-year-old as the England star, wearing a vivid red polar neck jumper, shook my hand. The first Cup final I recall watching on telly as a kid was Liverpool's 3-0 win over Newcastle in 1974, with Keegan scoring twice.

Liverpool were definitely pushing the boat out in an effort to impress. Soon after our visit to Anfield they arranged for me to travel down to Wembley, with a number of other schoolboy players they had their sights on, to watch the 1977 FA Cup final. Liverpool lost 2-1 to Manchester United and the mood on the journey back to Merseyside was very glum, but Bob Paisley's Reds were destined to lift the European Cup for the first time in Rome just four days later.

Everton got word of my trip to Wembley with their Merseyside rivals and quickly offered me schoolboy forms, much to the annoyance of Jimmy Dewsnip who arrived at our house hoping he had done enough to convince me to sign for the Reds. The truth is, I was never going to sign for any club other than Everton. I was determined to live my dream and playing for my club would mean everything to me.

Although football dominated my every waking hour, it was around this time that I started to become more aware of my parents' badly deteriorating relationship. Dad was a proud man and he found it difficult to come to terms with being out of work and unable to provide properly for his family.

He also had a terrible jealous streak where Mum was concerned. It's so sad, but this was the main cause of their marriage problems.

I couldn't stop them from breaking up. All I could do was focus all my efforts on becoming a footballer. I lived and breathed the game and my burning desire was to play well enough to earn myself an apprenticeship at the club when I left school at 16. Bill Shankly famously said that football was more important than life or death. That's how I felt too.

2. JOY AND SORROW

HOW ironic that my first-ever appearance as a player at Goodison Park, on September 12, 1978, was largely thanks to ... Merseyside Police!

The same constabulary whose officers arrested me in May 2005 were responsible for giving me and my team-mates at Whiston Cross (Juniors) the experience of a lifetime. Our local police force organised a five-a-side competition throughout Merseyside in the summer of '78 – and the reward for reaching the finals was the opportunity to play at Goodison. It was a huge competition and winning was no mean feat.

Our team comprised goalkeeper Kevin Hayes ('The Egg'), skipper Peter McGuinness, hatchet man Carl Thomas and the two playmakers, Andy Elliot and myself. Andy was the best player at our rival school St Edmund Arrowsmith and we became good pals. The early rounds of the competition were played locally and we comfortably swept through the games and advanced to the semi-finals at the police training grounds in Mather Avenue.

Our journey by minibus to the semi-finals was one full of excitement and nervous expectation for our team of 15-year-olds. We'd all known each other from having played in school matches over the years and we were very confident of going all the way.

I travelled to the game in a pair of bright red Kickers boots that Mum had bought me. Nobody else around our way had them at the time and I thought of myself as a bit of a trend-setter. Dad was not too pleased to see his son strutting around in red boots but I was very much my own man even in those days. Just because my family are all Bluenoses, it didn't deter me from wearing what I wanted – even if they were in the colours of our big Mersey rivals. In fact, I wore those boots until they fell off my feet and was forever gluing the soles back on them. This was the era of baggy jeans and I must have looked ridiculous.

My choice of music was different to that of my mates. I was influenced by my eldest sister Susan's boyfriend at the time, Les Jones. He was into Earth Wind & Fire and I'd borrow his records and listen to this magnificent American R&B band. In later years I was lucky enough to see them perform live on two occasions.

I also loved listening to Elvis Presley. Not too many lads my age would admit to admiring Elvis but he really was the king in my eyes. One Christmas Mum bought me the Elvis Greatest Hits double album and I wish I had a pound for every time I played it. I'll never forget the day Elvis died – August 16, 1977 – because I was at the FA's coaching headquarters at Lilleshall having trials for England Schoolboys. I was there for a few days and I recall coming down for breakfast that morning, picking up a newspaper and reading the shock front-page headline 'Elvis is Dead'.

Peter McGuinness and The Egg started to listen to Northern Soul and visited Wigan Casino, which was voted 'Best Disco in the World' by American music magazine *Billboard* in 1978 and was definitely the place to be seen. You had to be 16 to get in and, being five-feet nothing and baby-faced, I'd not plucked up the courage to try and sample the unbelievable atmosphere at this famous dance venue. I'd always thought it would be a wasted journey until my curiosity got the better of me one night and I jumped on the train for the short journey to Wigan.

I'd borrowed a blue velvet jacket from an older lad called Brian McNamara. As I stood in front of him and tried it on, he said: 'It's a bit big for you but you'll get in – no problem.' But looking back on

it, I must have looked pathetic. Brian was a lot bigger than me and his jacket probably looked like an overcoat.

Stepping down from the train and walking to the dance venue, I started to have second thoughts. There was no way I looked 16. As we arrived I was amazed by the size of the queue – there seemed to be young girls and lads from all parts of England talking in different accents. I was in a gang of about 10 lads and as I neared the front of the queue, I was trying to remember my adopted false date of birth that would hopefully convince them that I really was old enough to be allowed in.

Just as I approached the entrance, a big bouncer tugged at my arm and pulled me to one side. ‘Sorry, son, you have to be 16 to get in here – not 12.’ I turned red with embarrassment, as everybody heard his humiliating put-down.

All the other lads entered the Casino okay, leaving me feeling gutted and alone outside. I was angry with myself for having believed that I might get in. I took off the oversized blue velvet jacket, tucked it under my arm and started the solitary journey back to Liverpool.

These knock-backs were very common at the time. My diminutive size and youthfulness made it very difficult for me to socialise with my mates of the same age. Another similar example occurred one night at Prescott Cables FC, where they held very popular Saturday dance nights in the bar area known as Cromwells. The disco was organised by the Orr brothers – Robbie and John – who also ran the football team. The venue was just up the road from where I lived and all the lads of my age were flocking there every weekend.

Peter McGuinness, who played for Prescott Cables, and The Egg were regulars and the stories they told of the girls they had pulled on their nights out there gave me the urge to join them. As I queued to get in, I was amazed by the quality of the local talent – the lads were bang on with their assessments. Standing between Peter and The Egg, I watched anxiously as Peter paid his 50p entry fee and as I went to give my coin to the bouncer, he said: ‘Sorry, no midgets tonight.’

With a lot of sniggering from way back in the queue, once again I felt totally humiliated at the rejection. Only this felt even worse than being turned away from Wigan Casino, because Cromwells was in my own back yard.

That night, Peter mentioned my problem to Robbie Orr, who said that if I approached him at the door the following week, he’d let me in. I didn’t really believe what Peter told me but there I was again the very next week, just hoping that Robbie would be on the door to let me in as promised. True to his word, after Peter introduced me to Robbie at the entrance, he just shook my hand and said ‘come in’. He never even charged me admission.

It turned out the Orr brothers were both Evertonians. This was the first instance of me being given special treatment simply due to my association with Everton. Ironically, although I never had to pay whenever I went back there again, Peter and The Egg both continued to have to fork out 50p every week!

At this time I’d been courting a girl from Whiston Higher Side school called Jane Spruce. She was two years younger than me and I was very keen on her. She wasn’t like the other girls her age – she was very confident and had an arrogance that attracted me to her.

Jane and her friends would also go to Cromwells on Saturdays. Although she wasn’t from a wealthy family, Jane’s parents, Barbara and George, worked hard for a living and ensured their daughter had the best in clothes. Always immaculately dressed, Jane was despised by some of the other local girls, which I put down to jealousy. She was always the girl I fancied more than any other but she was a push-over and I soon realised that we were both strong characters. I was eventually to fall madly in love with her.

The five-a-side tournament semi-finals at the police training grounds reached a dramatic finale. The whistle blew at full-time and then the cruel reality hit both teams – the golden chance to progress to the final at Goodison all came down to a penalty shoot-out.

Our manager Steve Hughes brought the lads together and told us not to worry about missing a penalty. In his eyes, we had already achieved great success just by getting this far.

I took our first penalty and slotted it comfortably home. Every penalty hit the back of the net, so it was left to the keepers to decide it. The Egg stepped up to take his and blasted it past their keeper. Our last save from The Egg and we'd be in the final. Their keeper struck his spot kick very hard and straight but The Egg had his measure and turned the ball around the post. We all ran to Kevin, lifted him off the ground and the feeling was one of unbelievable elation.

On the way home in the minibus, Steve Hughes asked if any of us wanted a biscuit. But as he reached into his coat pocket, he suddenly laughed out loud. The digestives were no more. Steve had been so engrossed and stressed during the penalty shoot-out, he had crushed the whole packet of biscuits into tiny crumbs. The dream of stepping out onto the pitch at Everton meant as much to our manager as it did to his players.

Tuesday, September 12, 1978 was my swansong playing with my mates in the final of the Merseyside Police five-a-side competition at Goodison. That night was special and I remember scoring a couple of goals in a 4-1 victory. Everyone in our team played brilliantly and it was the last trophy I won with the lads I'd grown up with. Soon after, I was offered a contract by Everton and signed as an apprentice professional in 1979.

* * * *

Billy Ward was a very proud Dad when he left our house in Whiston to accompany me on the bus to sign the paperwork at Goodison. Dad had been a massive Evertonian all his life. He'd tell me about greats like the 'Golden Vision' Alex Young, Alan Ball and the other stars of the 1970 championship winning side.

One of his big mates was Eddie Kavanagh, a legendary Evertonian who famously ran on to the Wembley pitch during the 1966 FA Cup final against Sheffield Wednesday and had to be wrestled to the ground by a number of coppers. They used to call Eddie 'Tit Head' because he took so many beatings in his time that one of the scars on his head looked like a nipple. Eddie ended up being a steward at Goodison.

I remember the look of pride and joy on Dad's face as I signed my first Everton contract in front of Jim Greenwood, the club secretary. He was beaming – little did he know that, just an hour later, our whole world would be turned upside down.

I'd been full of excitement on the return bus journey and couldn't wait to get home and tell Mum what it was like behind the scenes at Goodison, to be part of the inner sanctum. But, strangely, when we arrived back at the house, she wasn't there to greet us.

As Dad walked straight into the kitchen to put the kettle on, I noticed an envelope on top of the mantelpiece with 'Billy' written on it. I picked it up and gave it to Dad without even thinking – I assumed it was probably just a note from Mum to say that she had gone shopping.

As I sat in front of the telly, dreaming about the future ... playing in front of massive crowds and scoring in the Merseyside derby ... I felt a tap on the shoulder. With tears running down his face, Dad

passed me the letter. And as I read Mum's words, I realised the enormity of what she had written.

~~She was apologising for leaving him and their children. Dad and I looked at each other and we~~ started to cry, not wanting to believe the terrible truth that the most important woman in both our lives had left us.

Dad adored Mum but, looking back on their time together, I don't think she could cope with him anymore. The relationship between my parents was volatile at times, due mainly to Dad's insatiable jealousy. It was a terrible disease of his mind and he couldn't control it. He was never violent towards Mum but he constantly accused her of being disloyal when, in truth, she hardly went anywhere without him. I loved the pair of them dearly.

He was devastated by the break-up and, because of the hurt it caused him, I took Dad's side. In fact I never spoke to Mum again for 16 years.

But there was never any doubt that she loved her seven kids. Just six months after moving to Wolverhampton, she decided to return to Liverpool – with another man. Dad went crazy. I remember him screaming all sorts of threats one night after he'd found out she was living back in Liverpool with a new partner. He was making verbal threats to kill Mum's boyfriend – and he meant it.

Even though I was just 16, Billy 15 and Tony 13, the next day we made a point of warning Mum's boyfriend – I never did find out his name – to get out of town or else he'd definitely come to some serious harm. When we barged past Mum at her front door, her new partner sat there on the sofa. I just blurted it out: 'Do yourself the biggest favour, mate. Get out of Liverpool before my father gets you.'

Mum was shouting and screaming but the three of us just walked straight past her and out through the front of the house, hoping we'd done enough to convince her new man to see sense. And thankfully he did. He moved out the next day and Mum followed him to start a new life together in the Wolverhampton area, where she still lives today.

Dad passed away in 1988, aged 52. It was a heart attack that killed him but I've always maintained that he really died of a broken heart, because he never got over losing Mum. I don't blame her at all though. That's life, many couples divorce – I've been there myself – and if it hadn't been for certain flaws in their relationship, who knows, they might still have been together today.

I'll never forget, though, the stark contrast of emotions Dad felt on the day his eldest son signed for his beloved Everton. How, one minute, he was the proudest man in the whole of Liverpool and, just an hour later, he found out he'd lost the only woman he ever loved. Why she chose *that* day of all days to leave, I'll never know. Mum told me years later that, with Dad out of the house and on his way to Goodison with me, she had an unexpected opportunity to leave. Feeling as desperate as she did at the time, she said it was a chance she simply had to take.

Her leaving the family home affected us all. My sisters, Susan, Irene and Ann, eventually set up home in Wolverhampton with Mum, while Billy, Tony, Andrew and myself stayed with Dad in Liverpool. From being a very close-knit family, the break-up of our parents also split us right down the middle. It knocked me for six at first.

Dad was a broken man but he cared about my future and gave me one bit of sensible advice: 'Just concentrate on being a winner and give it your best shot at becoming a footballer,' he told me. An old saying of his was: 'Quitters never win and winners never quit.' How right he was.

It was unbearable, at times, to hear him crying at night after coming home drunk from the pub again. I felt helpless, as most kids do when their parents split up. I think it did affect my football for a while but I was so determined to succeed in the game, I had to think of myself and try and forget about the troubles at home.

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