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PREMIER LEAGUE | ALYSON RUDD

Baby Jürgen, champagne and tears — how Liverpool fans will celebrate end to long title wait

Alyson Rudd meets the fans who have to greet their first league win since 1990 in the era of social distancing



Liverpool fans will not be able to watch from inside Anfield when their team win the Premier League but their joy at watching Klopp's side will fill houses and gardens instead.
PETER BYRNE/PA

Alyson Rudd | Thursday June 25 2020, 12.00pm, The Times

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“I’d paint the house red if my landlord would let me,” Daniel Cook says, “and put a Liverpool crest on the front of it.”

Cook, like all Liverpool fans, is considering how to celebrate the club's first Premier League title given that supporters have been asked to stay away from Anfield and maintain social distancing.



Cook believes most Liverpool fans will obey rules not to gather in public places

"You'll get the few odd idiots who'll go to the ground, but most won't," Cook, 28, who is on the American pool pro circuit, says. "We're going to Norris Green, near the stadium, to my granddad's — he's got portraits of Bob Paisley and Kenny Dalglish tattooed on his back — and we'll bring the TV into the garden.

"The bubbly will be coming out. I've got a feeling the whole neighbourhood will be out celebrating, cheering from their gardens. It will feel like a bank holiday.

"I've never seen Liverpool win the Premier League so it's really exciting for me. I'll cry for sure. For my generation, all of us would have sacrificed the European Cup to win the league. It's nice to be able to say to Manchester City, take a step back, we're in charge now."

An advertisement for Tom Howley Bespoke Kitchens. On the left is a photograph of a modern kitchen with dark green cabinets, a white countertop, and a central island. On the right is a white background with the text "TOM HOWLEY EXQUISITE BESPOKE KITCHENS" at the top. Below this is a red circular badge with the text "SALE NOW ON". Further down, it says "BRITISH CRAFTSMANSHIP SHOWROOMS NATIONWIDE" and a green button with the text "REQUEST A FREE BROCHURE >".

Cook's player of the season is Jordan Henderson. "I've watched him grow and this season, he's shown snippets of how Steven Gerrard used to be," he says, "Grabbing the game by the scruff of the neck."

"The first thing I'm going to do is cry," Louise Darwin says, "and I'm not someone who cries a lot. I was consumed by Liverpool as a child while my three sisters played with their dolls."

Eighteen months ago Darwin, 40, was diagnosed with breast cancer and although she travelled to Madrid for the Champions League Final against Tottenham Hotspur during her chemotherapy, "there were moments over the past 18 months when I thought; 'Am I going to see them win the title?'"



Darwin says she doubted whether she would see Liverpool win the league

"Because of Covid-19 I have to shield, so the celebration will be a family affair. We've bought masks of Jürgen Klopp, Bobby Firmino

and Virgil Van Dijk but they're not allowed in the house until we have sealed it. One of my aunties married a Blue [Everton fan] but we make him sing *You'll Never Walk Alone* at every family event."

The modern-day team has rekindled the intensity of passion that she felt as a child.

"Jürgen, he makes your heart smile," Darwin, who attends the cancer centre set up by Marina Dalglish, the wife of Kenny, says. "He understands us, he makes you remember why you fell in love with football."

Darwin's player of the season is also Henderson. "I was just looking at his photo from when he signed for us nine years ago, and he's a completely different person," she says.

Siobhan Beattie was hoping she would not be able to pop open the champagne because she had conceived — but her IVF treatment was cancelled due to the pandemic.

"I've had a lot of Champions League games to celebrate in my life but never the title," the 31-year-old solicitor says, although she is not sure she wants to commit to naming her baby in honour of the team.

"We'll end up having a girl and calling her Bobby and if she's called Bobby Beattie she might sound like a stripper. Jürgen Beattie has a better ring to it."

Beattie's player of the season is Trent Alexander-Arnold. "He's so quick, so brilliant and a Scouser which always helps."

Older supporters do know what a title win feels like but few can remember much about how they celebrated in 1990, mainly because winning the league was no big deal.

John Bennett, 71, a retired IT director from Aughton, north of Liverpool, cannot recall how he celebrated the previous time his team won the league, but he has strong memories of the year before.



Bennett with his grandson at Anfield

"The last time I saw a title presented at Anfield was in 1989 and I stayed behind and watched Arsenal get the trophy," he says. "The Arsenal team seemed to appreciate us staying. We were all pretty cut up about missing out on the title but I made my son stay with me.

"So, I was disappointed when we played Wolves on the last day of the season last year with how the Wolves fans behaved. If I had been a Wolves fan, I'd have preferred to have been there to see Liverpool win the title but all they did was cheer every City goal that they heard had gone in against Brighton and taunt the Liverpool fans. I just thought it was pretty ordinary of them."

Bennett has two season tickets that he shares with his nephew and two friends, so they will gather in his garden with his two sons to celebrate. He will rerun all the *Match of the Day* programmes from the season, barring their sole league defeat by Watford in February, and then set off fireworks.

“We’ve been celebrating, really, for the last year and half, we’ve hardly had a bad day in the league,” he says. “Rather than mass congregations, which we want to avoid, we could have a ‘Cheer for the Champions’ at a specific time. It could be synchronized by the club perhaps for when they would have held the open-top bus parade.”

Bennett’s player of the season is Virgil Van Dijk. “He’s more influential than anyone else,” he says, “he has an aura.”

Ken Gibb, 75, suffered a stroke 21 years ago, so stopped going to Anfield. He watches all the games he can at his local, the 22 Club in Ormskirk, Lancashire.

“If I can’t go to the 22, where I’d be dancing around with my mates, then I’ll be in my house with my wife and a magnum bottle of Spanish red wine I’ve just bought,” he says. “In 1965, when we first won the FA Cup, I was in town doing stupid things I wouldn’t be doing now I’m 75.

“This team is the best of the lot and I’ve seen them all. I knew we would win the title when we annihilated Man City [in November] in the first half at Anfield.”

Gibb’s player of the season is Alisson, the goalkeeper. “He has given the defence the confidence to go forward, so we all go and attack.”



Gilchrist, centre, says he will only stock up on memorabilia after the title and Hagan, left, has had to cancel his wedding

Dave Gilchrist, 65, lives in Orpington, Kent and travels the world to watch Liverpool. “We’ve had so much flak from United and City,” he says, “that we’ve never won the big one, and now we can only watch it in the comfort of our own homes, it feels like a final dig at us.”

He is not, though, assuming the title is in the bag. “Never tempt fate,” he says. “Once we’ve won it, then I’ll buy all the memorabilia. We’ve had the title ripped away from us too many times. Anything could happen although we’ve played the best football in years with the right manager so it shouldn’t go wrong.

“The one bonus is that by playing the season out we won’t have that asterisk next to us. That’s the last thing we want but most sensible football fans know that we deserve to win it.”

Gilchrist’s player of the season is Andy Robertson, “a great left back, the fitness of the man is unbelievable”.

Jay Hagan, a university finance officer, 41, from Maghull, and Gilchrist's cousin, has had to postpone his wedding, which he had hoped would mark a double celebration. Hagan graduated from the Paddock to the Kop to the main stand and has had a season ticket since 1992 "so I've always thought I was part of the curse".

"Liverpool fans get a lot of bad press," he says, "but in the main we will adhere to the distancing rules. And that means I can't sit in my parents' house to watch the matches with my dad and I can't hug him or my mum because they are over 70. We'll just have to have a drink in the garden."

Hagan's player of the season is Sadio Mané. "When other players were not firing earlier in the season he was unbelievable," he adds.



Hall, 25, at the Champions League final in Madrid last year

"Will I cry? A hundred per cent," Josh Hall, 25, a chef from Burscough, west Lancashire, says. "As soon the final whistle went in Madrid to win the Champions League last year the first thing I did was Facetime my girlfriend and I was bawling my eyes out, so I don't know why I called her. I couldn't speak. I've no clue what it feels like to win a title. I'm getting emotional now just thinking about it."

Hall's player of the season is Henderson. "I was his biggest critic, I used to hate him, but he turned a corner. I wouldn't swap him right now for anybody."

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30 years waiting, thinking at least once every week about what they would have to do to win a title, always thinking they were a year or two, or three at worst, away from getting over the line. If you'd told me it would be this long in 1994, 2001, 2005, 2014, I could never have believed it. I was a kid when they last won the title, now my own kid is the same age I was then. I think I might just shed a tear when the trophy is lifted.

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