

A chat with Darren Fletcher...

By Kai Bexon

YCA 2020 Creative Writing winner (16 – 18 age group)

Probably no other football manager in the history of the game has struck as much fear into the hearts of journalists as Brian Clough. So imagine being an 18-year-old about to conduct your first ever interview with this famously difficult man. That was Darren Fletcher's baptism of fire into the world of journalism.

"I didn't think I would be able to do it," The BT Sport and 5Live broadcaster, Nottingham born and bred, tells me. Interviewing Clough as his first gig was "a pretty surreal experience. I spent the first couple of years pinching myself, expecting to be told it's not worked out and off you go but I'm still here now so I must've done something right!"

'They don't make managers like him anymore'

From a young age Darren wasn't exactly academically focused and didn't have his sights set on a definite career path, "I left school with not too many qualifications - I lost interest". It wouldn't be until he'd been out of school for a couple of years that he took the path to sports commentary stardom.

He'd long had a passion for the beautiful game, "I grew up in Nottingham so I grew up following Forest" This was the era of the aforementioned Clough, very much the main man in the dugout.

Most people around the world know about the glory days of Nottingham Forest and their staggering back-to-back European Cups in the 1978-1979 & 1979-1980 seasons. "Forest were a big story at the time because Cloughie was there." Little

could Darren imagine that he'd be going from directionless teenager to interviewing the Trentside hero. Yet his path to that place was not exactly conventional.

Everybody has to start somewhere and Darren's break came in the unlikely setting of putting up suspended ceilings at a building called The Lyceum in Sheffield. "I was totally wasting my life". Darren admits. Yet a chance meeting with a Radio Trent sports editor, and a subsequent offer to try his hand at sports journalism, suddenly set him on his way, and en route to meeting Ol' Big Head.

It wasn't always easy; the broadcasting industry is a hard place to ply your trade as there are certain qualifications you generally need to have in order to be a success in the profession. This wasn't the case for Darren Fletcher, "You needed a degree to get into the industry and I didn't have one, so I was up against it to start with. If I was as good as them, they would get the edge, because they had a qualification and I didn't." A passion for sport gave him a much-needed edge. To be able to come from doing a job you don't like, to doing something that you never want to stop doing is incredibly inspiring.

His job has taken him around the world, reporting on football matches, so it is inevitable that he would have met some famous faces along the way. "The best sports person I've ever met was Mohammad Ali". This was when 'The Greatest' visited Nottingham in the early '90's. Darren was there, another legend to add to his collection.

With old footage of legendary matches finding a new home on platforms such as YouTube, Darren's live commentaries of special moments will be continuously

performed for years to come. "It's nice to get a lot of satisfaction knowing whenever that goal is played again in years to come it'll be what you've said".

Darren has been to lots of stadiums over his time being a commentator and some people would only dream of being able to visit different grounds all over the globe.

"The best stadium in the world is Tottenham's stadium, by a mile. But the one that always takes my breath away is the Bernabeu in Madrid." There is a strong sense of nostalgia here: most stadiums come with history and the fact that Nottingham Forest clinched their second European Title in 1980 at that very stadium just makes the Santiago Bernabeu even more stunning.

As well as broadcasting, Darren has also taken part in presenting a few shows, such as "*Fletch and Sav*" in 2014 alongside former footballer, Robbie Savage. Currently, Darren presents a podcast called "*The Friday Football Social*" on BBC Radio 5 Live alongside fellow Nottingham star Jermaine Jenas. He prefers commentating to presenting, "I think when you're a commentator, you're actually there, you're in the middle of the game." After speaking about life after sport, Darren mentioned the fact that within presenting "You don't really get the chance to leave as much of a legacy behind I don't think, for years to come."

Darren Fletcher's story is one that should inspire "you have to really want to do it. You've got to be prepared to do jobs you don't want to do, interview people you don't want to interview, work longer hours than you want to work, and you've got to be prepared that it's going to take you 10/15 years to get where you actually want to go." He plans on doing his job for a "long time" and bringing to life matches for those who can't be there themselves. Although Darren might work in lots of different

countries, he has certainly left his legacy on the future generations of sports
broadcasters here in Nottingham.