

Winning Post

with Nick Smith



Keep calm, wait for the window to open...and then go into a blind panic!

FOOTBALL managers should try being in the newspaper business – deadline day every day instead of just twice a year. See how they cope with that stress.

But the thing with deadlines is, no matter who you are, you're glad when they're out of the way so you can get on with your real life. And you can understand why bosses up and down the country are a bunch of relieved men this week.

When the transfer window opens, they must feel they've been transported back to sitting the school exams (although if you're destined for a career in football, why would you turn up for them?)

You look at the other pupils frantically scribbling down their answers and you're sat there, mind going blank and watching the clock, eventually thinking 'well, putting anything has to be better than nothing' before crossing your fingers you've managed to blag your way through it (...just me then?)

In a nutshell, panic. If other clubs are throwing money away like TOWIE stars on 'The Million Pound Drop' and you're struggling to persuade Jay Bothroyd to sign on a pay-as-you-play, then the anxiety soon sets in.

And the fans don't help. They're concerned, and social media allows them to let the clubs know it.

"Why haven't we signed anyone yet?", "Where's the money?", "We need to strengthen NOW!"

All the while Roberto Martinez is sat in his office, feet up on desk, head resting on hands,

knowing full well that those five deals in the final 10 minutes on September 2 will all go through with no hassle.

But of course, there was hassle. And this will only be exacerbated by the mid-season rush in January.

Just one month to strengthen for the title run-in/relegation battle/push for Europe.

No wonder bad decisions get made. But the thing is, some weren't made.

Summer 2013 might actually go down as the window when there was a bit of a relaxing on the desperation to do a deal just because everyone else seems to be demanding it – even the player involved.

Suarez stayed, Rooney remained, Baines is still a Blue... so what next?

The soap opera will of course go on. The contrived drama of the transfer window will see to that and Paddy Power is one bookmaker encouraging us to get in on the fun early.

The 'next permanent club' market is an early chance to score a fortune with some razor-sharp powers of foresight.

The bookmaker has Liverpool as 3/1 favourite to be the next port of call for Arjen Robben with Juan Mata 7/2 to go to Anfield next, with only PSG ahead of them on that list.

Baines is still destined for Old Trafford it seems (3/10) but there's an interesting array of curveballs that will whet the appetite for the next time the circus comes to town.

Only five months to wait...

No jolly Roger



ONCE the deadline day madness was done, a chance to take in something more serene and smooth – Roger Federer playing tennis.

Except not any more. Tommy Robredo's straight sets US Open demolition only hastens the great man's demise and he is 6/4 with Ladbrokes to retire from the game next year, when he will turn 33.

The unique story of The Ramblers is finally brought to book as **David Prentice** discovers

THEY are 'probably' the oldest existing amateur football club who still refuse to play league football.

They boast a European Cup winner, an England international, several war heroes and the man who infamously fled the Titanic amongst their ranks of former players.

And they were the first football team in the world to play a match with goal nets.

Welcome to Liverpool Ramblers, the 131-year-old football institution who still play weekly matches – always competitive, but strictly friendlies – on two well groomed pitches off Moor Lane in Crosby.

The Ramblers story has been put together in book form for the first time in a lovingly crafted, beautifully designed and exhaustively researched labour of love by former player Jonathan Russell.

But you won't find 'Liverpool Ramblers The Complete History' in any book shops.

Like the football team whose fortunes Jonathan's impressive volume chronicles, the book will belong to a very exclusive club.

"Only 500 copies have been printed," explained the author: "The book was funded by members, for members, with a view to breaking even."

"But I have loved writing it. It took two-and-a-half years to produce and was like piecing together a very large jigsaw. I received a lot of support from Tony Onslow, who has already written books about Bootle FC and Everton; I spent a lot of time in the British Library and I spoke to many, many members."

Nowadays, any enthusiastic footballer willing to follow the club principles of fair play, respect and friendship can represent the Ramblers – but original criteria were more stringent.

A wealthy Liverpool cotton broker named Percy Bateson called a meeting in February 1882 for all "public school players living in the Liverpool area to start a first class Association Football club in Liverpool."

A framed copy of his letter, dated February 1 1882, hangs in the present clubhouse – and the key paragraph details the desire to form a club with the "intention of keeping it as select as possible."

Bateson had played football for Bootle, alongside players from disparate social and economic backgrounds, but as a former public schoolboy he craved regular football with a club made up solely of team-mates from similar social and economic backgrounds.

His letter was circulated around relatives and members of the city's Athenaeum Club and Liverpool Cricket Club – and he received replies from 50 former Etonians and Harrovians.

The Ramblers clearly was a well-heeled club from the start.

Jonathan calculates that six of the founding members had wills whose combined worth was more than £100million in today's money, amongst them William Pilkington, the son of the glassworks founder, James Moss who owned the Moss Shipping Line and Henry Hornby, the renowned cotton broker.

Jonathan muses exactly what The Ramblers status in modern football might have been had the founder members decided to eschew their strictly amateur status and plough money into the club – like some kind of Victorian Roman Abramovich.

Such an approach, of course, would have come into direct contradiction with the Ramblers' cherished amateur approach – a club for gentlemen, with gentlemanly values.

Not that every Rambler has always portrayed such virtues.

Early players included Bruce Ismay,

This is not a football club – it's a club that plays football



Author Jonathan Russell with the book and (left) with members (left to right) Tim Crutchley, John Collier, Willie Hall, Charles Shepherd, Peter Collinson, Ian Short, and president Nicholas Kennedy

the White Star Line chairman who infamously fled the Titanic disaster.

While his chivalry and his gallantry were questioned in the wake of the tragedy, his footballing skills were not.

Described as: "an excellent full-back standing six feet four inches tall" he appeared for Ramblers in the Liverpool Cup Final against Bootle in 1883.

Liverpool city council engineer John Brodie famously invented goal nets in 1890 – and the Ramblers were the club chosen to trial them for the first time. An initial experiment saw the ball rebound into play from a sub-frame, which was then replaced by a stanchion.

And in a very early forerunner of goaline technology, a bell hanging from the net failed to ring when the ball entered the net, so was removed.

A final design was used in a Ramblers match against a team made up of Old Etonians and Harrovians – the trial was a success, and the rest is football history.

The rest of Ramblers history is contained in Jonathan's wonderful work – as much a social and economic history of Liverpool as it is an account of an amateur football club, together with more than 750 stunning photographs, images and etchings.

But what of those Ramblers mentioned in the first few paragraphs?

The European Cup winner was Trevor Birch, who sat on the bench for Liverpool in Rome in 1977 and later became a chief executive of Chelsea and Everton.

The England international was Gerard Dewhurst, capped by England in 1895 – his club dutifully recorded in The Times as Liverpool Ramblers.

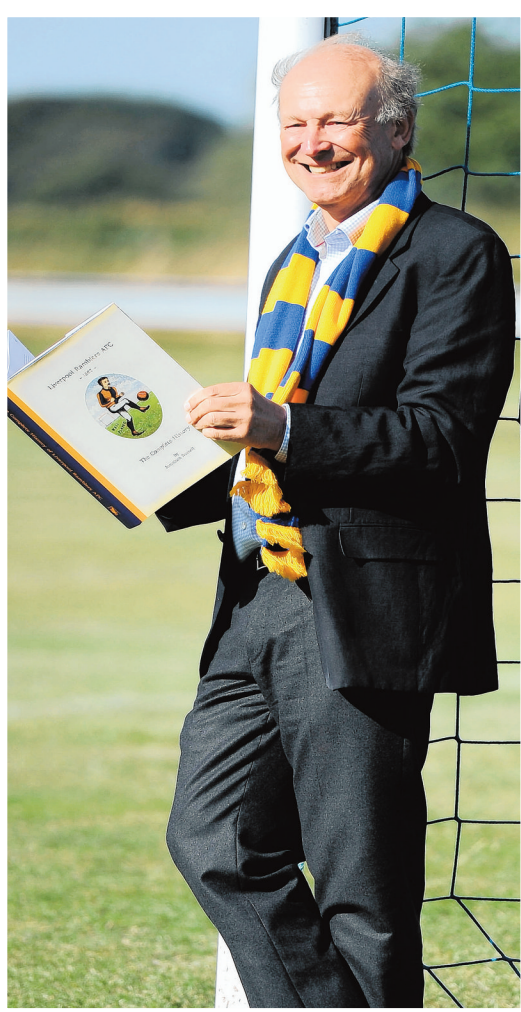
Ismay was the man who chaired the White Star Line – and ignored the women and children first principle on board the Titanic.

While war heroes included 13 men who gave their lives in the Second World War – including half of the team which played the final matches of the 1938/39 campaign against Litherland, Orrell and Lussac – and 15 who died for King and Country in the Great War.

Perhaps the postscript, however, should lie with past President JJ Thwaites, who declared: "Liverpool Ramblers is not a football club; it is a club that plays football."

Now that club has been committed to paper for posterity.

"Well Played," Jonathan Russell and Liverpool Ramblers!



Ex-president Willie Hall watching the interclub games with his pet Labrador Daisy, with secretary Nigel Power in goal



Photographer Ray Farley taking a snap of one of the teams during the interclub games
Pictures: ANDREW TEEBAY

Wirral have Upper hand in cup derby

WIRRAL achieved a historic win at Birkenhead Park, coming out 19-10 winners at Upper Park in their Cheshire Cup quarter-final.

They achieved the win over their local rivals by playing a defensive game plan devised by their new coaching team.

Wirral scored the first try when Chris Speed intercepted and fed Matt Loon, who ran unopposed to score in the corner, and they led 14-3 at half-time.

Park had the wind advantage in the second half but it was the younger Wirral team who kept them penned in their half for long periods.

The game was decided by a great individual try by Julian



Julian Haigh gets behind the Birkenhead Park defence to score Wirral's second try

Haigh, who started at scrum-half but at this stage was playing on the wing. Park exerted some late pressure but errors denied them until the last play of the game when Shaun Woof crossed for a try, converted by Dave Hall.

Wirral now look forward to the Cheshire Cup semi-final.

LSH instant replay

by Steve Clark and John Williams
WIDNES/LSH

LIVERPOOL St Helens won a thrilling first round Lancashire Trophy encounter at Moss Lane against Widnes.

The good news for the Wids, though, is that thanks to the vagaries of the fixture list they get an instant chance for revenge – these two teams are due to meet again this coming Saturday in the first North One West league game of the season.

And Widnes will be confident after fighting back from 29-15 down to eventually go down by just two points. While Lee McDermott returned to the coach's



Phil Kearns

urday."

Hooker Mario Bonati picked up a knock in the cup tie but hopes to be fit following treatment and Dave Cunliffe is expected to be in this Saturday's line-up.

The game kicks off at 3pm.

Loo upbeat in defeat

by Geoff Lightfoot
WATERLOO

DESPITE the 52-0 defeat at Chester, Waterloo – with five first team regulars missing – did enough to suggest in this game that they will be more than competitive in National Three North when their campaign opens at Percy Park this coming Saturday.

Last season's N3N champions Chester have certainly strengthened their squad for N2N rugby – but despite the quality of the opposition Waterloo made a fair fist of it.

They held their own at scrum time, even on one occasion forcing

the opposition front row up to get the penalty, and for the most part the line out functioned well.

As with the previous week, they were quick and aggressive at the breakdown with the defence muscling up well before a constant barrage of attacks from the Chester backline.

Waterloo did have opportunities, the best in the final minute of the first half when they were unlucky not to get over in the corner.

Chester upped the intensity after the break and although Waterloo continued to defend manfully up to the hour mark, the effort began to tell.