



CARDIFF CITY
REBRANDED
BLUEBIRDS AND RED DRAGONS

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It Started With A Leak

‘I N the March prior to the rebrand, somebody contacted me and told me there would be a big overhaul at the club in the summer.’

Carl Curtis is a production manager, who runs a travel group for away games, a popular Cardiff City message board and was writing a weekly column for the *South Wales Echo* at the time. ‘That person I know now must have known at the time that it included the rebrand. Not once was it suggested or insinuated that there would be a colour change. Coming back from West Ham, the phones had started going mental and a message board post was the catalyst.’

The message, posted on the rival website Cardiff City Mad, was from a new user going by

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the moniker 'BlueSince1908' and the message read as follows:

'Apologies for the anonymous nature of this message, which will be my one and only post on this subject. Please be assured that the information contained herein is genuine and now this is out in the open, direct questions need to be asked of our club.

'Now that the curtain has come down on Cardiff's season, there is some very important news that everyone needs to be made aware of. In recent weeks, deals have been agreed with Cardiff's largest creditors, which pave the way for the Malaysians to take full control of the club during the summer. Bankrolled by Vincent Tan, manager Malky Mackay will be provided with a war chest to take Cardiff to the Premier League, stadium expansion plans will go ahead and a multi-million pound training facility will be built. All this may sound like everything we have been waiting for, but there is one bitter pill to swallow. Cardiff City is about to be completely re-branded in a manner which goes against a century of our history.

'Cardiff City will play in red next season. The dragon will become the major emblem on the club badge and the stadium will literally turn red. This change has been ordered by Vincent Tan and a red

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home kit and blue away kit have already been agreed for next season. The club intend to announce these changes over the next few days.

‘The investment into Cardiff City by the Malaysians over the last two years has been very welcome and almost certainly saved us from going into administration.

‘It now seems that they are ready to take the next step and assume full control, but intend riding roughshod over our identity and changing our football club into something none of us will recognise or be able to identify with.

‘Cardiff City have played in blue since 1908. We won the FA Cup and competed in the top flight in those colours, we are the Bluebirds. A huge part of our identity, history and tradition are bound up in the colours, badge and nickname of the club.

‘The Malaysians **MUST NOT** be allowed to proceed with these plans and destroy decades of history and tradition. There may be some fans that say so what, it doesn’t matter what colour we play in as long as the club is progressing. Well if that is the case, just why do they want to change our identity? It smacks of a lack of knowledge of what a football club consists of and begs the question of what other changes are planned?

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‘What’s next? A change of name? Will we become the Cardiff Dragons? Hasn’t the example of the local rugby club changing its colours, badge, nickname and ground yet losing its identity and much of its fan base taught us anything?’

‘These plans have pressed ahead without any consultation. Mr Tan, we are glad to have you involved with our football club, but not at the expense of our history. Sam Hammam aired similar ideas but ultimately listened when the club’s support objected en masse.

‘Steve Borley, as a man we can trust on the current board of directors, we need you to publicly condemn these plans. Malky Mackay, you have united the fans behind you this season and as a man who knows of the importance of tradition at football clubs, we need you to speak out and impress upon our investors that these plans need to be nipped in the bud before it’s too late. To the local press, the new Labour-led Cardiff Council and our local MPs and AMs, we need you to use whatever influence you can wield to ensure that the traditions of the city’s football club are upheld.

‘Now is the time for the various supporters’ groups, rival message boards and Cardiff fans from all walks of life to unite and ask the football club to come clean about their plans. They need to

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understand in no uncertain terms that we will not support a re-branded Cardiff City, no matter what the consequences may be. I would rather support my team playing in League 2 rather than a team I no longer recognise as my own. Cardiff City play in blue, we are the Bluebirds.'

If true, these proposed radical changes were set to send shockwaves through Cardiff's fan base. Change may be inevitable in football, as in life, but change for the sake of it rarely goes down well. As much as the threat of the new may rankle, a lack of consultation with supporters has time and again proved to be an even greater irritant. In 2013, Everton decided to upgrade their crest, without seeking the feedback of their fans, removing the club's motto 'Nil Satis Nisi Optimum', which translates as 'Nothing But The Best'. Such was the negativity that greeted the proposed changes, that Everton conceded defeat within days and issued the following statement:

'It has been a full-on weekend for many Evertonians and undeniably you have spoken to us loudly and clearly. We have listened. We are sorry. It is clear that you wanted to be involved in the selection of our new club crest. We regret we didn't ask every Evertonian about something that matters so much to every one of you. We remain firm in the belief

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that our crest should be modernised – not a unique or unprecedented situation and one we know our fans would accept and embrace. Our chairman [Bill Kenwright] had demanded widespread consultation and we stopped short of that. We talked to our fans' forum, our commercial partners and our experienced staff around the club. That was not enough. We want to put this right. While the time-constraints of kit suppliers in particular present challenges, which inevitably means the version released on Saturday will be in operation for the 2013/14 season, we are determined to give our fans a greater say in how we represent the club on our jerseys, at Goodison Park and across media around the world. In advance of the 2014/15 campaign Evertonians from all sections of the fan base will be pulled together in a fully transparent way. This group will conduct an in-depth review of all aspects of past and present club crests. The panel will then develop ideas and put forward suggestions to you. Evertonians will make the final decision.'

The reality is that badges often change and there is rarely as much opposition as there was in this particular instance on Merseyside. Changing a kit colour is an entirely different matter though. As a fan, your colours are synonymous with your very identity. Supporters consider themselves as a blue or a red, it

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is sacrosanct. There have been kit changes littered throughout the history of football, but nothing as radical as this in the modern era.

Going back almost 100 years, Chelsea would play in a turquoise shirt, white shorts and black socks to reflect the kit of Old Etonians and the racing colours of their president Henry Cadogan, Viscount Chelsea. In 1920, they changed to a royal blue strip, despite an outcry for red in honour of the Chelsea Pensioners. Watford only became yellow in 1959, while Leeds manager Don Revie decided to change the colours of Leeds from blue and yellow to all white in 1961, an attempt to emulate Real Madrid, who were the dominant force at the time. Coventry reintroduced their pre-First World War sky blue kit in 1962 and Bournemouth added a black stripe to their red kit in 1970.

As Cardiff were rebranding, Southampton launched a not quite as radical all-red strip with a white pinstripe, replacing their traditional red and white stripes. The marketing campaign that accompanied the launch stated that the new look 'sets itself apart from recent designs to embrace the new era of Premier League football'. The reception was more of frustration rather than outrage and the stripes returned a couple of years later.

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Among the Cardiff fans returning from Upton Park, denial was the buzzword. 'Calls started coming in from fans and the media, it snowballed within about half an hour,' adds Curtis. 'I was trying to make phone calls to the club because my first reaction was that it was bullshit. That evening, I couldn't get hold of people within the club that would normally answer the phone to me.' Annis Abraham, a close friend of Curtis who owns the Cardiff City Forum they both maintain and has been a season ticket holder for 44 years, echoed this sentiment. 'I 100 per cent didn't believe it, I thought it was totally made up. I knew there were big changes happening, but never did I dream of that happening. I actually put out that it was all lies and rubbish, I didn't believe it. I was then contacted the following morning by the club and asked to meet with them.'

Mike Roderick, who attended his first Cardiff game in 1965, read about the proposed rebrand the same way as everyone else, but quickly learned that there was some substance to the claims. 'The news was broken by a poster who I subsequently found out was a mate of mine. He posted it on the way back from the West Ham game. It seemed incredible and most people took it as a wind-up, but when I had spoken to a couple of trusted friends and heard who

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the anonymous poster was, it sickened me. I can honestly say from that moment, I knew I could not actively support a rebranded Cardiff City. In fact, my first question to my mate Dave Sugarman was, “Right Dave, how do we go about getting a refund on our season tickets?”

Like Curtis, Dave Sugarman used to organise travel to and from away games. A civil servant who had only missed two home games between 1975 and 2012, he helped form the Cardiff City Supporters’ Trust and wrote a blog on all things Cardiff. The club had been a huge presence in his life over four decades. ‘I was travelling back from West Ham on a coach I had organised and although Cardiff had been well beaten, everyone was in good spirits,’ reflects Sugarman, on that fateful day.

‘One of my best mates, Chris Nelson, came up to the front of the bus and told me that rumours on the internet messages boards were suggesting that the club’s Malaysian backers were going to rebrand the club during the summer. It seemed such an obvious wind-up that I told Chris to behave himself, go and sit back down and stop being so daft. About ten minutes later, he came back to the front of the bus and said the rumours sounded like they had some substance, judging by the people who were posting messages

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about them. Again, I told him to stop being daft and sent him away. He was back again a few minutes later and by now half of the bus was talking about it, so I lost my rag and told Chris that if he continued to spread such stupid rumours, I would stop the bus and sling him off as this nonsense was spoiling our journey home!

‘I didn’t think much more about it for the rest of the day, but the following morning I got a few texts from people who were reasonably well connected at the club at that time, and they all seemed to believe the rumours were true. Then, at around lunchtime, I got a call from the Cardiff City Stadium manager Wayne Nash asking me to attend a meeting at the club that evening.

‘Without stating as much, he effectively confirmed the story was genuine. To be honest, I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. It sounded far too bizarre to be true.’

Curtis was also contacted. ‘I had a phone call to ask if I could come to a specially arranged meeting with a selection of fans, or what they were calling at the time “fan representatives”. We didn’t know what we were going to be told, but being called to a meeting like that, you knew there was something that the club needed to say. They didn’t release a statement saying

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it was untrue, so obviously there was some truth in it, but how much truth?’

It would appear that the leak had caught the club by surprise, who were therefore denied the opportunity to roll out the changes on their own terms. The local press were seemingly caught on the hop too.

‘Speaking personally, I found out from a phone call just after leaving my seat at Upton Park in that play-off semi-final,’ explains Chris Wathan, who attended the game in a professional capacity and has been a football writer with *Wales On Sunday* and Wales Online since 2007. ‘The funny thing is, I remember speaking to some members of the club’s media team about how I thought there could be a real positivity going into the next season, that you sensed something was being built and within a couple of hours the football was the last thing on anybody’s mind. It was difficult to stand up for a while. You can’t just rush out and repeat what had obviously been on message boards by then without trying to ensure you made the necessary check calls and we were less digital centric at that time. By which, I mean the papers had gone to print and there was less of a 24/7 operation that we pretty much have now, so it was left until the following day. I can’t say whether

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colleagues or others in the building were more aware of what was going on but, personally, I guess I was as surprised as anyone.'

Terry Phillips worked for Media Wales for 22 years before retiring in November 2015, covering Cardiff in all four divisions. He concedes, 'There were rumours about red/blue talks, but it's a fairly tight ship on non-football matters since Vincent Tan became owner. I had a good relationship with the club and officials, often given the heads up when something of that importance was about to come out, but I don't believe there were any major exclusives flying around.'

The assumption was that there had to be substance to the rumours, otherwise a meeting wouldn't have been organised. The club would have instead issued a statement rubbing the claims. The meeting was arranged with around 15 prominent supporters, who were unprepared for the burden that awaited them.