

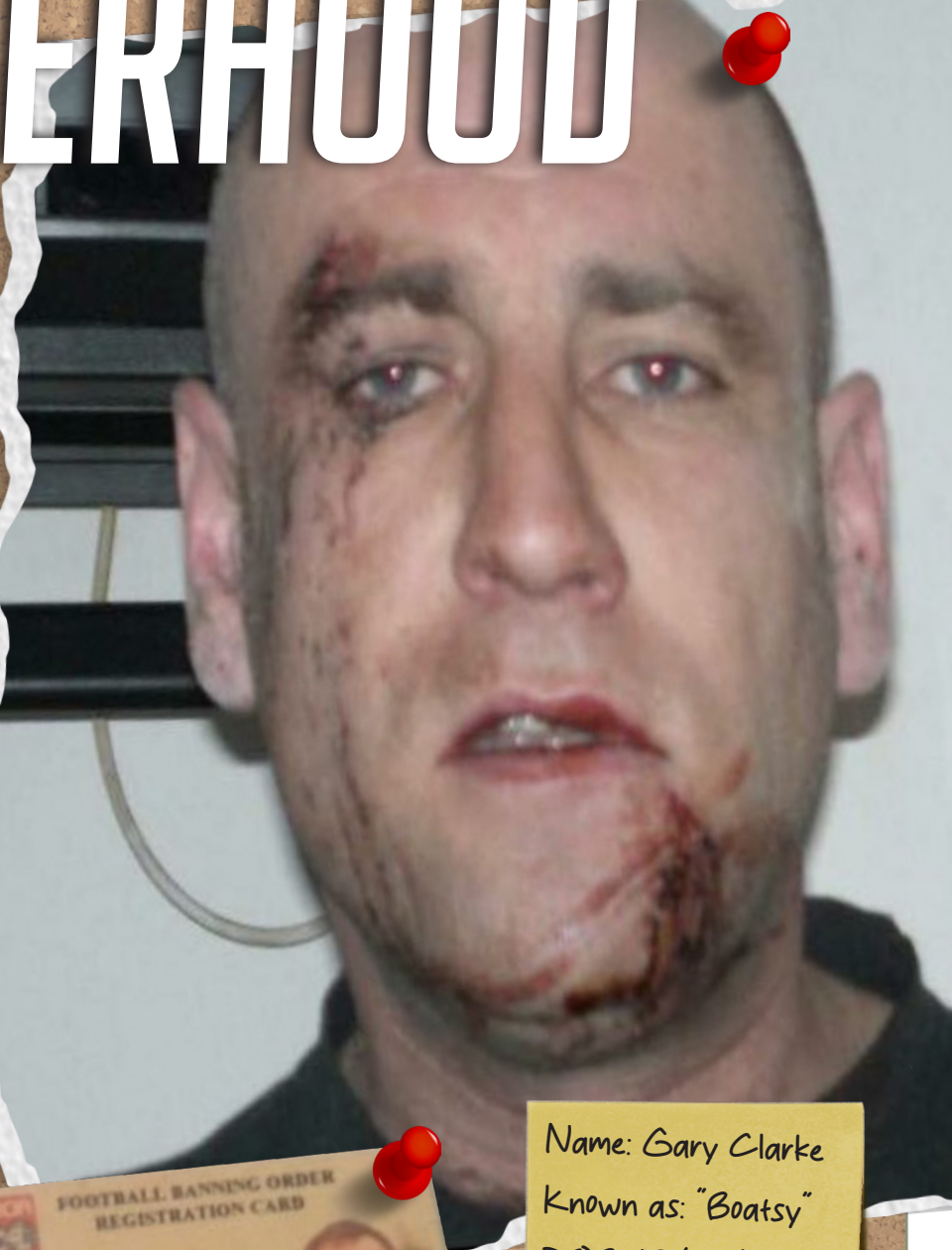
BLOOD, BOOZE & BROTHERHOOD

THEY'VE TERRORISED THE COUNTRY, THE CONTINENT, AND COVERED THE BEAUTIFUL GAME IN SHAME. BUT WHY DO THEY DO IT? BEHIND THE LINES GOES INSIDE THE MIND OF ONE OF ENGLAND'S MOST NOTORIOUS HOOLIGANS.

WRITTEN BY
ATHENEALIM



Name: Gary Clarke
Known as: "Boatsy"
DOB: 12/06/1965
Firm: Forest Executive Crew





A young Clarke with his little sister



A manic herd of England fans sprinted and shoved their way through the streets of Warsaw, towards the mob of Polish fans just waiting to pounce on their next victims. There was more excitement and adrenaline coursing through the air than in the lacklustre 0-0 draw they would soon watch their national teams play out.

A flurry of makeshift missiles were hurtled into the air - bricks, dustbins, bottles, and anything else the Polish could use to draw English blood. The band of Brits preferred a more classic form of combat, and swung their fists about in a booze-filled rage.

One of the Englishmen was stabbed in the leg, while another had his head split open with an axe. Gary "Boatsy" Clarke had gotten off easy. Though he was covered in blood, most of which was his own, he was still in one piece.

It was just another holiday abroad with the lads - as far as one of England's most notorious hooligans was concerned.

"HONESTLY, I DON'T KNOW HOW WE'RE STILL ALIVE."

The now 59-year-old Clarke says, on the Polish and English bloodshed before the unmemorable 2002 European Championship Qualifier. "But it was all good fun and games."

After over 30 arrests and 15 convictions, Clarke hung up his

Puma G Vilas and left the football casual scene in 2004.

"I know, I know - it's wrong and we shouldn't have done it." Clarke admits, "But it's just a subculture like the Mods and Rockers in the 50s - lads just grow up and find a culture.

"I don't regret it, I wouldn't be the man I am today if I hadn't been in that era."

Clarke first watched his beloved Nottingham Forest play when he was nine-years-old. His dad had bought him a big red-and-white rosette before the match, which he wore around like a badge of honour.

But it wasn't until a few years later that he got a glimpse of the darker side of the beautiful game.

"I remember going to a cup final at Old Trafford, where Forest played Liverpool." Clarke says, "My mum was there and she didn't go to another football match for 25 years afterwards, it was a terrifying night.

"That's how football was in the 70s, and I grew up into that culture."

Clarke was also a proficient footballer, but even as a boy, his aggressive streak often got the better of him.

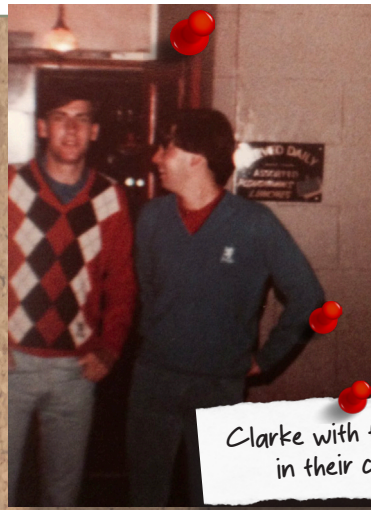
His entire family had come down for his match against St. Bernadette's secondary school, beaming with pride as they watched on from the stands.

"It's our ball." An opposition player



Clarke's first day of secondary school





Clarke with the Forest boys in their casual best

said, after the ball had gone out for a throw-in.

“How do you figure that out?” Clarke retorted, to which the opposition player spat at him.

Clarke violently flung out expletive after expletive, resulting in his sending off, and a grandfather so ashamed that he refused to speak to the teenager for months afterwards.

“It wasn’t my fault, but I retaliated.” Clarke says, “I’m not one to stand down, that’s one of my downfalls.”

Clarke was later sent off again for punching his teammate for being a “greedy wanker”, marking the end of both his short-lived football career and his time at school.

“I left school at 15 and started working down the markets.” Clarke recalls, “But most of the time I was knocking around Nottingham city centre, drinking and going out with pals.

“I GUESS THAT’S WHEN I STARTED TO GO DOWN THE WRONG PATH.”

Now a tall, broad-shouldered young man, Clarke would go to the City Ground on his own, and soon encountered the infamous Forest Executive Crew.

Clarke knew they were nothing but trouble, yet something about them intrigued him

Was it the rough and tumble that enticed him? Or was it perhaps the prospect of away trips with his fellow Forest fans?

“I loved the clothes!” Clarke grins, “The faded jeans, Slazenger jumpers, wedge haircuts, and the Burberry...”

“Obviously the rest came with it - the excitements of the day.”

Clarke soon grew just as fond of the “the rest” as he was of his fashion.

“One week I decided, sod it, I’ll go with the Forest boys to see what it’s like - just for a laugh.” Clarke says, “We went to Arsenal away and we all got arrested.”

The Highbury Stadium’s away section was separated only by a line of tape, and away fans would have to walk through the blood-thirsty Gooners to get there.

By the time the Forest boys reached the away section, they were covered in spit and were the laughing stock of the stadium.

“It’s human nature to defend your plots.” Clarke explains, “It stems back hundreds of years to the Ice Age and the Vikings.”

But Clarke was never one to back down. After the match, the Forest boys took on the Gooners in a fierce battle that stretched across the streets of North London.

Clarke’s casual essentials



Puma G Vilas



Faded tapered jeans



Slazenger jumper



Burberry

THE DAY 400-MAN TERROR CAME TO SQUARE

By ANDY BUCKLOW

POLICE have drawn up emergency plans to prevent a repeat of Nottingham's worst outbreak of hooliganism — when 400 people fought pitched battle in the Old Market Square. The last of more than 60 youths were dealt with in court — 30 of them have now been jailed or given suspended sentences — for their part in the mob violence on June 23 last year, a senior officer said in the case. "We are determined to clear the city centre of hooligans," he said. "We are determined to clear the city centre of hooligans."

Rush for cover

It happened in the Square when seven officers were attacking high-charged football supporters. Bystanders had to rush for cover as bottles, cans and roadside debris were hurled through the air. The youths were armed with knives and bats.

Retaliation

They allied with Leicester youths to form the Derby-Leicester Alliance. Their trip to Nottingham was in retaliation for violent incidents when Nottingham youths visited Leicester earlier in the year. But the Nottingham hoodlums had recruited a reception party when the DLA appeared in the Square, the Nottingham contingent poured out of nearby pubs.

who had lived in the city later. "It was in my trouble I was in North-derby."

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with the aim of causing disorder at football matches, particularly against Forest.

"It was just a case of having to defend yourself, and I liked the camaraderie of it." Clarke explains.

Clarke quickly became one of the Crew's most feared members, and one of the masterminds behind their elaborate battle plans.

"As soon as the fixture list came out, we'd plan all our trips." Clarke says, "We'd organise battle buses, trains, planes, and what route we'd take to avoid the police."

Clarke was living the high life. He and the boys would dress up to the nines and get boozed up every matchday - funded by money nicked from their local pub's fruit and condom machines, and someone else's credit card that they'd just happened to 'find'.

Clarke began following England around Europe too, which was a whole new battlefield.

Hooliganism in England was at an all time high, and the Europeans relished showing their disdain for the bullish Brits.

"When English clubs go abroad, it doesn't matter whether you're with your son or daughter." Clarke says, "Every English fan is fair game."

"But we brought it upon ourselves, we gave it to the world and now it's coming back to haunt us."

With his antics abroad, Clarke had become the England police's number one target.

"IT WAS A GAME OF CAT AND MOUSE, AND THE POLICE WOULD TELL YOU THE SAME."

Clarke says, "But it was all good fun!"

Despite racking up dozens of arrests, Clarke still loved the excitement of the scene. It wasn't until 2003 in Sunderland that things went sour.

Clarke had gone to watch an England match with his mates from Newcastle, and was nursing a post-match pint with them at the pub.

Suddenly, they found themselves dodging flying bottles and glasses. Although it wasn't a Tyne-Wear derby day, the mere presence of the Geordies on home turf was reason enough for the Mackems to wreak havoc.

Clarke furiously rolled up his sleeves, prepared to retaliate, when he felt someone grab his back.



Clarke's fiercest football fights

- Birmingham City (0-1) Nottingham Forest [20/02/1988]**
 - 87 arrests (Clarke not arrested - for once)
 - Birmingham mob applauded the Forest boys for their efforts afterwards
- Lazio (1-5) Roma [10/03/2002]**
 - Clarke got bottled in the face, had to get ten stitches
- Manchester United (1-0) Nottingham Forest [12/04/1992]**
 - 500 smug United fans showed up, the Forest boys couldn't compete
 - Footage of the Forest boys running away was aired on national TV





Clarke and his son, Charlie

He spun around to see a police officer with a snarling dog, who sunk its teeth into Clarke's arm, leaving him in complete agony and a strange burning sensation in his chest.

Worse yet, the Mackems had fled, and Clarke was alone and arrested at the scene of the crime.

"I got stabbed under the chest and it came through my arm." Clarke says he later found out, "I got put in hospital and had to get ten stitches."

After Clarke was released on bail the next day, he realised that it was only the start of his misery.

"That morning when I saw the newspaper, I spat my tea out and fell out of my seat." Clarke says, "I couldn't believe it!

"I had been named and shamed."

Pictures of Clarke's arrest were plastered in national newspapers, and even aired on Sky News.

The case was taken to Crown Court, where Clarke pleaded not guilty. Now a seasoned hooligan, he figured it would just be another slap on the wrist.

"The case went on for nearly a year, and I didn't tell my parents about it because I thought I'd walk." Clarke admits, "But then I got sent to prison for months, and I had to call my parents from the prison wing.

"IT WAS THE HARDEST CALL I'VE EVER HAD TO MAKE."

Clarke's family had always stood by him, but this was a different story.

"I didn't speak to my parents for a while after that." Clarke says, "My grandad died of cancer, and we didn't speak for the last six months of his life.

"So... things like that I regret."

Slapped with a six-year football ban and a prison sentence, Clarke knew he had to leave the scene for good.

"All of the boys looked up to me, so leaving created a big void." Clarke says, "But I had to do it for myself."

Two decades later, Clarke still

has the hardened exterior of a head hooligan, but speaks with all the softness of the family man he has become.

"I have a son now, which gives you a different outlook on life." Clarke smiles, "He loves Forest so we still go to all their games.

"I don't regret following football, and I've got mates to this day that I wouldn't have met if I hadn't started in them ways.

"The good thing is I can now bring my son up to not go down the same path."

Clarke now spends his time doing charity work for non-league club Carlton Town, which has helped repair his relationship with his beloved Forest.

"I took a lot out of football in my early years, but I feel like I'm putting something back into it now." Clarke admits.

"I'm even friends with Forest now, and I've been invited into the director's box a few times!

"From the terraces to the director's box - who would've thought that?"



Clarke supporting Carlton Town

