

podcast user magazine

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Quittin' the day job...

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Shownotes & RSS - should we ditch them?

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Getting Your Kicks With Soccer Podcasting

by Christopher Harris, a.k.a. 'The Gaffer'

Soccer star David Beckham's recent multi-million dollar transfer from Spanish legends Real Madrid to L.A. Galaxy illustrates the rising interest in the sport stateside. But American soccer's dirty little secret is that more fans watch the English variety on television than attend homegrown Major League Soccer games. Podcaster Christopher Harris, aka The Gaffer, explains more and describes why he traveled 3000 miles to England to record several podcasts for Americans who have an insatiable craving for the English soccer experience.

The world's most popular sports league in the world attracts more than 1.3 billion TV viewers a year. It's not the NFL or Major League Baseball. Instead, it's the English Premier League, the soccer league that's so popular in the USA that three of the 20 teams are now owned by Americans.

While the English Premier League (better known as the EPL in the States) continues to attract millions of new viewers each year, only a small percentage of those viewers have actually experienced an EPL game in person. In the United States, viewers can watch as many as 10 live games from England each week. What's attracting these American viewers to the EPL are concepts foreign to traditional American sports such as promotion and relegation of teams, 90 minutes of non-stop action with only a minimal commercial break at half-time, and the incredible noise and support that these English teams capture inside their historic stadiums.

In the US, meanwhile, the homegrown Major League Soccer brand is played at a much slower pace that is frankly, at times, boring to watch. Even David Beckham won't change the sport overnight in the States.

With a backpack loaded with a plane ticket to England, an Olympus digital voice recorder, a sturdy laptop, digital camera and a Logitech headset/microphone, I had everything I needed to record and publish a daily podcast from England. The rest was up to me.

Here's an inside look at what it was like podcasting just one of the eight episodes from England, and some of the lessons I learned.

Podcasting From Liverpool

Arriving at Manchester Airport after an overnight flight from Fort Lauderdale, six hours remained before the kick-off between Everton and Bolton Wanderers. I took the train from Manchester to Liverpool, arrived at Everton's Goodison Park stadium, and quickly began my work.

Without a doubt, one of the most historic stadiums in English football is Everton's Goodison Park because it still features pre-WW2 stands built by legendary football ground designer Archibald Leitch. Goodison is also the only stadium in the world to have a church within its walls, tucked between the walls of Goodison Road Stand and the Gwladys Street Stand.



It was outside this church where I interviewed an Everton fan named Liam Fogarty who expressed his concern about Everton wanting to move away from Goodison Park, and how the soccer clubs are now so out of touch with the fans due to exorbitant ticket prices.

With the interview 'in the can' and press pass in hand, I made my way inside the Goodison Park Stand and marveled at the expanse of the green pitch and the incredible coziness of the four stands enveloping the field. Of course, I also marveled at the architecture on display. After all, this is a cathedral of soccer where World Cup matches and FA Cup Finals have been played.

In the build-up to the match, I was able to walk back outside and capture the sounds of the increasing number of fans making their way to the stadium. When I grew up in the UK and went to matches as a teenager, this was something I remember with great detail as the throngs of soccer fans swarmed towards the ground, singing with enthusiasm and creating a wild carnival atmosphere.

But that was in the early 80s. On the afternoon of the Everton match, I was disheartened to hear no singing outside the stand. Instead you could hear the buzz of the crowd, the programme sellers making their voices heard over the fans, but the overall volume was far quieter than I expected. A lot had changed in 20 years.

Lessons Learned

Fast forward three hours from then, and I was in the home of my aunt who lives in Liverpool. After watching the uninspiring match between Everton and Bolton – only punctuated with greatness by Everton's Mikel Arteta scoring one of the goals of the season to win the match for the Toffees – I rested my weary legs and proceeded to download all of the audio I had recorded throughout the match on my Olympus digital recorder, and I began to edit it with WavePad software.

Some of the challenges I encountered included the interview I recorded earlier in the day. The audio picked up the sound of the wind much more than I anticipated, so I had to edit out some of the conversation that was inaudible. Next time I'll know to conduct the interview indoors rather than outside.

After the podcast episode was recorded, the other challenge I encountered was trying to get an internet connection. The dial-up account through BT (British Telecom) wasn't working correctly at my aunt's house. Luckily, though, I was able to find a wireless internet connection (Liverpool is a big city, after all) and uploaded the file to my Libsyn account.



Overall, the podcast episode was well received by the listeners with a few thousand people downloading it. The feedback was mostly positive, with many soccer fans in the States commenting how appreciative they were. Many of them, for the first time, were able to get a better understanding of what the experience was like going to a live Premiership game instead of seeing it through television. That alone was worth the trip.

The Gaffer's web site and podcast can be found at <http://www.EPLtalk.com>

