

Jonathan Agnew



A sports team can be motivated by any number of factors and the most skilful and successful coaches are those that can identify and tap into a common purpose to get the very best from their players. A grievance or

sense of unfairness is a common source of inspiration, which is one reason for a depleted football team often playing better after a colleague has been sent off.

For Liverpool Football Club, the tragedy of the Hillsborough disaster is forever a powerful bond between the fans and players who are closing in on their first premierships title since 1989/90 – the year after 96 supporters lost their lives on that dreadful afternoon in Sheffield. It is clear what drove Liverpool to win then, and now the 25th anniversary appears to be having a strong impact on galvanising the club, coinciding as it does with the inquest into the tragedy in Warrington. With each horrifying story of what occurred in that Leppings Lane stand, and the reasons for it, Liverpool links arms in grief with a shared goal that the 96 will never be forgotten and that responsibility for the dreadful events will finally be accepted.

There is the sense to know that winning the title is not the solution to the questions that the Hillsborough families are currently seeking. Justice and closure is more important than

winning games of football. But it was sport and particularly a love of Liverpool FC that brought those fans together on that fateful day, and the Liverpool manager, Brendan Rodgers, is using the ‘96 in the sky’ as a powerful stimulus to get his players over the line at the end of a long season. They have already shown that they can deal with the emotions and also the significance of this year by beating Manchester City at

‘Hillsborough is forever a powerful bond between the fans and players’

Anfield on Sunday following a stirring tribute to mark the 25th Anniversary, but Steven Gerrard, the 33-year old captain, betrayed his true inner feelings when he burst into tears at the end of the match.

Liverpool have four matches remaining this season, starting this weekend with a trip to Norwich City who face relegation and have recently sacked their manager. Liverpool need to win every game, but if Gerrard and his team stay on track, Liverpool’s final match of the season – at home to Newcastle on 11 May – promises to be one of those events that transcends sport.

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