

= Roy of the Rovers =

Roy of the Rovers is a British comic strip about the life and times of a fictional footballer named Roy Race , who played for Melchester Rovers . The strip first appeared in the Tiger in 1954 , before giving its name to a weekly (and later monthly) comic magazine , published by IPC and Fleetway from 1976 until 1995 , in which it was the main feature .

The weekly strip ran until 1993 , following Roy 's playing career until its conclusion after he lost his left foot in a helicopter crash . When the monthly comic was launched later that year the focus switched to Roy 's son Rocky , who also played for Melchester . This publication was short @-@ lived , and folded after only 19 issues . The adventures of the Race family were subsequently featured in the monthly Match of the Day football magazine , in which father and son were reunited as manager and player respectively . These strips began in 1997 and continued until the magazine 's closure in May 2001 .

Football @-@ themed stories were a staple of British comics for boys from the 1950s onwards , and Roy of the Rovers was the most popular . To keep the strip exciting , Melchester was almost every year either competing for major honours or struggling against relegation to a lower division ; a normal , uneventful season of mid @-@ table mediocrity was unknown at Melchester Rovers . The strip followed the structure of the actual English football season , thus there were several months each year in summer when there was no league football . By far the most common summer storyline saw Melchester touring a fictional country in an exotic part of the world , often South America , where they would invariably be kidnapped and held to ransom . The average reader probably stayed with the comic regularly for only three or four years , therefore storylines were sometimes recycled ; during the first ten years of his playing career , Roy was kidnapped at least four times . Roy also made numerous appearances for England , depicted playing alongside actual players such as Malcolm Macdonald and Trevor Francis .

The stock media phrase " real ' Roy of the Rovers ' stuff " is often used by football writers , commentators and fans when describing displays of great skill , or surprising results that go against the odds , in reference to the dramatic storylines that were the strip 's trademark .

= = Publication history = =

Roy of the Rovers first appeared on 11 September 1954 , as a weekly feature in the comic magazine Tiger , debuting on the front page of the first issue . After 22 years of continued popularity , the strip was judged successful enough to sustain its own weekly comic , the eponymous Roy of the Rovers , launched on 25 September 1976 . The comic ran for 851 issues , until 20 March 1993 , and included other football strips and features . At the peak of the comic 's success about 450 @,@ 000 copies were sold each week . There were also hardback annuals and holiday specials featuring a mix of reprinted and original content , and for a brief period , starting in 1986 , Roy of the Rovers was serialised in the now defunct Today newspaper . These were all @-@ new strips , focusing largely on the relationship between Roy and his wife Penny , rather than the action on the pitch . Between 1988 and 1993 , a Best of Roy of the Rovers monthly comic was published , reprinting older stories .

Following the closure of the weekly title in 1993 , the strip appeared in a relaunched monthly publication in September that year , with grittier storylines intended to attract teen and young adult fans who had read the weekly comic in their youth . Between January 1994 and January 1995 , the monthly strips were mirrored by a weekly edition in Shoot magazine , which had in the late 1980s published a parody called Ray of the Rangers .

The comic strip was resurrected in July 1997 , printed as short (usually two @-@ page) features in the BBC 's monthly Match of the Day magazine . These strips ran until the magazine 's demise in May 2001 . By then the strip 's wholesome tone , often espousing the virtues of fair play and strong moral character , was beginning to seem old @-@ fashioned . The editor of Roy of the Rovers comic , Barrie Tomlinson , has commented that " everyone seemed to be growing up a bit more quickly , and they wanted stories that were more realistic " .

There has been no new material since 2001 , but reprints of the strip have appeared online and in print . The Roy of the Rovers website has archived all of the Match of the Day years ' material , in addition to excerpts from other classic strips . In October 2007 , Setanta bought the original strips , which they featured on their web site .

The present rights holder , Egmont , published a 64 @-@ page " collectors edition " of the comic strip in April 2009 , gathering together a number of 1980 's era Roy of the Rovers stories in addition to other backup strips from the comic . Two Best of Roy of the Rovers books , featuring successive runs of strips from the 1980s and 1970s , were published in June 2008 and 2009 respectively .

= = Plot = =

For more information on the fictional career of the Race family , see Melchester Rovers

The story followed Roy Race , a striker for the fictional football team Melchester Rovers , based in a town of the same name in an unspecified part of England , where Roy lived with his family . In the first episode , a teenaged Roy and his best friend , Blackie Gray , signed for the Rovers after being spotted playing for a youth club team . Eight months later , Roy and Blackie made their first @-@ team debuts against Elbury Wanderers in a game that ended in a 3 ? 3 draw , with Roy scoring twice . He soon became a star , leading the team to either the Football League title or a cup almost every season . In January 1975 he was made player @-@ manager , a position he retained for most of the next 20 years . Although the strip followed the Rovers through nearly 40 seasons , Roy did not age at the same rate and appeared to be at most in his late thirties by the time the weekly comic ended . This unrealistic longevity was never remarked upon by the weekly comic , although the monthly comic attempted to address the anomaly by explaining that more than one Roy Race had played for Melchester over the years .

Roy won a number of trophies during his career with Rovers , including nine league titles , eight FA Cups , three League Cups , three European Cups , one UEFA Cup , and four Cup Winners ' Cups , and he also made several appearances for England . He married club secretary Penny Laine at the end of the 1975 ? 76 season , with whom he had three children : Roy Jr . (later known as Rocky) , Melinda , and Diana . Penny left Roy in the early 1980s , in a high @-@ profile storyline that was covered on national television news . The following year Roy was shot in his office by a mystery gunman , in an incident clearly mirroring the shooting of J. R. Ewing in the hit television series Dallas the previous year . Roy lay in a coma for several weeks . The culprit was eventually revealed to be Elton Blake , an actor who had been cast as Roy in a television series about the Rovers , but who blamed him for his dismissal . In early 1983 Roy swapped Melchester Rovers for ambitious London side Walford Rovers after a fallout with the Melchester directors , but his stint away was short @-@ lived and he was back at his spiritual home by the end of the year . In July 1986 eight members of the Rovers team were killed during a club tour of the fictional middle @-@ eastern country of Basran , when terrorists accidentally crashed a bomb @-@ laden car into the team bus . Roy escaped with a dislocated shoulder . Author Mick Collins has commented that " Even as youngsters , we knew that this certainly bordered on bad taste , and probably overstepped the mark . "

The final incident of Roy 's playing career came in the closing pages of the last weekly issue , in March 1993 , when he lost control of his helicopter and crashed into a field . Thus the weekly strip ended its 39 @-@ year unbroken run on a downbeat and unresolved cliffhanger , as Roy was taken into hospital while fans , the media and his family awaited news on his condition . The mystery of whether or not Roy had survived his crash was unresolved until the first issue of the new Roy of the Rovers Monthly in September 1993 , in which readers discovered that the accident had resulted in the amputation of his famous left foot , ending his playing career and resulting in his move to Italy as the manager of Serie A side AC Monza (a fictional top @-@ level Italian club , rather than the real club of the same name) .

Reconciling the continuity of the monthly strip with the stories that preceded and followed it presented difficulties , forcing the story 's writers to alter its history in a number of ways , a technique known as retroactive continuity . Significantly , the strip rewrote various parts of Melchester 's history , and shortened Roy Sr. ' s recorded playing career to a more realistic level .

By the time the strip ended in March 1995 Melchester were in dire straits , on the verge of bankruptcy , and their long @-@ term future far from certain . When the strip returned in Match of the Day magazine in May 1997 , much of the monthly comic 's new continuity was ignored , although the basic thread of the club having struggled against relegation and being severely in debt was continued . It was revealed in the first strip that in the intervening years , while Rovers had managed to survive the threat of bankruptcy , a bribery scandal had caused a mass exodus of players and eventual relegation to Division One . Rocky , meanwhile , was playing for fierce local rivals Melborough , after a bitter falling @-@ out with his father over a car accident in Italy in which his mother , Penny , had been killed . Roy , who had quit football as a result , was blamed by some (including his son) for the accident , even though he had no memory of it , and the precise circumstances surrounding the event were never resolved .

Roy was persuaded to rejoin Melchester as manager and part @-@ owner , backed by the unscrupulous Vinter brothers , and he arrived just in time to save the club from relegation . The following season , Roy and Rocky resolved their differences . Rocky rejoined Melchester , and the club was promoted back into the Premier League at the end of the year . When the magazine closed in 2001 , Rovers were attempting to achieve a league placing that would secure them UEFA Champions League football , giving them financial security . Although this storyline was never resolved , there was nevertheless a certain sense of closure as , shortly beforehand , Roy Sr. had wrested full control of the club from the Vinters , thus completing his 44 @-@ year progression from player to owner .

= = Recurring characteristics = =

Over the years , the strip became famous for its employment of certain types of storyline and stylistic storytelling devices . For example , despite the fast @-@ paced nature of a football match , exposition would be provided by members of the crowd apparently commenting to one another . Fans made lengthy comments in the short time it took the ball to travel through the air ; as the ball was struck towards the goal a member of the crowd might be seen saying " Racey 's had a shot ! " , followed by another responding " The ' keeper won 't make it ! " . Nonetheless , loyal readers would usually suspend disbelief , a characteristic later parodied by Viz magazine 's Billy the Fish , a fish with a human head who plays in goal for Fulchester United .

In the interests of keeping the strip exciting , it seemed that no season for Melchester Rovers could ever consist of mid @-@ table obscurity . Almost every year , the club was either competing for the major honours at the top of the domestic and European game , or struggling against relegation to lower divisions . Often , such spells of good and bad fortune and form would directly succeed one another ? a Rovers team that won the European Cup one year could find itself struggling to stay in Division One the next .

Storylines often centred on new signings who were unable to settle easily in the Melchester team , either because they refused to change their style of play and expected the Rovers to play around them , such as the uncompromisingly tough defender Duncan McKay , or had personal characteristics that made it difficult for the other players to accept them , such as ex @-@ circus ball juggler Sammy Spangler . As the average reader probably stayed with the comic for only three or four years , many storylines were recycled . For instance , during the first ten years of his playing career Roy was kidnapped at least five times .

When playing foreign teams , particularly in the European club competitions , the opposition would often cynically employ overt gamesmanship or downright dirty tactics . Continental sides were considered to be " sneaky " :

If they went ahead , they didn 't try to extend their lead , like proper footballers , but defended , like blackguards and cowards . It was , Roy always believed , something of a character defect , probably caused by the pencil @-@ thin moustaches they wore , in order to distinguish themselves as foreign .

The strip followed the structure of the football season , thus there were several months each year when the Rovers were not playing football , but the strip needed to depict something more exciting

than the players going on holiday and then reporting for pre @-@ season training . As a result , the players tended to spend their summers involved in activities such as competing in charity cricket tournaments , but by far the most common summer storyline saw the Rovers go on tour to a fictional country in an exotic part of the world , normally South America , where they would invariably be kidnapped and held to ransom . " Melchester played more pre @-@ season games at gunpoint deep in the jungle than they ever did in more mundane settings . " The summer would often also see Roy fending off lucrative offers to leave Melchester , as in 1978 , when the Sheik of Basran , an oil @-@ rich Middle @-@ Eastern state , offered him £ 1 million to coach the national team .

Especially during the 1980s , real @-@ life personalities often made appearances . Former Division One stars Bob Wilson and Emlyn Hughes were brought out of retirement to play for Melchester in 1985 , along with longtime fans of the strip Martin Kemp and Steve Norman , of the pop group Spandau Ballet . Geoff Boycott served for several years as Melchester 's chairman , and Sir Alf Ramsey had briefly taken over as manager of Melchester in 1982 , while Roy lay in his coma . Players such as Malcolm Macdonald and Trevor Francis would sometimes line up alongside Roy in England matches , despite the fact that the clubs they played for in real life were never featured in the strip .

The concept of TV pundits and anchormen making appearances was a later development . When Roy announced his resignation as Rovers manager in 1992 , he did so live on Sky Sports in front of shocked presenters Richard Keys and Andy Gray .

= = Creators = =

= = = Writers = = =

Roy was created by the author Frank S. Pepper , who had created the similar strip , Danny of the Dazzlers , but he only wrote four instalments of Roy of the Rovers , because of his commitments to another of his characters , Captain Condor . His role was taken by the strip 's first artist Joe Colquhoun , who used the pen @-@ name " Stewart Colwyn " . He was replaced after four @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half years by Derek Birnage , the editor of Tiger , who had commissioned the strip . In 1960 , in an attempt to whip up publicity , it was announced that the footballer Bobby Charlton had taken over as writer , although in reality it was still written by Birnage (who claimed that he did consult with Charlton occasionally for story ideas) . The longest @-@ serving writer of the strip was Tom Tully , who began in 1969 on an intermittent basis and then continuously from 1974 until the end of the weekly comic in 1993 . Ian Rimmer became the main writer for the strip during the Match of the Day years , until the magazine 's closure in May 2001 .

= = = Artists = = =

After Joe Colquhoun departed , he was succeeded first by Paul Trevillion , then by Yvonne Hutton , who illustrated from 1967 to 1974 , before David Sque took over in 1975 . Despite reportedly not being a football fan , he was responsible for one of the strip 's more definitive looks in its early ' 80s period . He was replaced in 1986 by former 2000 AD artist Mike White , who gave Roy a more muscular look and the strip a more modern feel . Barrie Mitchell took over in 1992 , with a style quite similar to White 's . A number of artists worked on the monthly comic , such as David Jukes , Sean Longcroft and Garry Marshall , in contrast to the lengthy tenures of the weekly strip 's creative team . Tony Harding often illustrated Roy for the Roy of the Rovers annuals and also drew the Roy 's Action Replay strip that appeared in All Action Monthly in the late eighties (Fleetway) . Mitchell returned in 1997 as the sole artist of the Match of the Day strips for all four years .

Filmmakers Luke Dormehl and Tom Atkinson , released a documentary called " Roy " in 2008 , featuring interviews with some of the key members of the Roy of the Rovers creative team . The film was shown at The End of the Pier International Film Festival in 2009 , where it won the prize for Best Documentary Short .

= = Cultural impact = =

The phrase " Roy of the Rovers " has become a trope familiar to generations of British football fans and sports commentators , used to describe a memorable sporting achievement such as winning against the odds , or an unexpected comeback . The Guardian newspaper of 10 April 1995 , for instance , described future England captain Alan Shearer as " the classic working class sporting hero ... everything legend demands an English centre @-@ forward should be ... As a striker he comes closer to fitting the Roy of the Rovers fantasy than anyone else lately admired by English crowds " . Shearer was at that time the leading goal @-@ scorer for " unfashionable " Blackburn Rovers F.C. , who were on the verge of winning the Premiership title .

Comparisons have been drawn between the fictional Roy Race and the captain of England 's 1966 World Cup winning team , Bobby Moore , whose playing career spanned a similar time @-@ scale to that of Roy 's . Moore 's death in 1993 , just days after the last edition of the Roy of the Rovers comic was published , produced a " literature of tribute " , framed around themes " remarkably similar to those at the center of the Roy Race fiction and ideology ... there was a clear sense of mourning for the loss of an age " .

Reading Roy of the Rovers and reflecting on the response to the death of sporting heroes such as Bobby Moore , demonstrates how children 's popular cultural experiences , and the recollections of them in later life , traverse the boundaries of , and fuse , the fictional and the real ... The world of representation in the comic strip is mobilized as an everyday trope , tapping into modes of thinking within the reality of football discourse ; and in turn , football discourse draws upon the narratives , conventions , and myths of football fictions .

= = Spin @-@ offs and merchandise = =

Roy of the Rovers Annuals were produced every year from 1958 until 1994 , and again in 2000 . A number of tie @-@ in books were also published , including a handful of paperback prose storybooks in 1977 and 1993 , and two football quiz books in 1978 and 1979 . Roy of the Rovers never made the leap from page to screen , although he did make an appearance on the BBC comedy sports quiz They Think It 's All Over in 1999 , in the form of a cardboard cut @-@ out .

A Roy of the Rovers computer game was released , on the Commodore 64 , Amstrad CPC and ZX Spectrum in 1988 . It was split into two parts : the first an adventure game , in which ? taking the role of Roy Race ? the player had to find and rescue the kidnapped Melchester team , before then playing the second part , which consisted of a charity match to raise funds for the club . The fewer players recovered before the match began , then the smaller the team who could take part . In the extreme , Roy would be the only player for Melchester . The game received mixed reactions ; the Spectrum version received 7 / 10 from Your Sinclair , but only 3 / 10 from Sinclair User .

A number of official Melchester Rovers Subbuteo teams were produced in the 1980s and 1990s . There was also an officially licensed board game in the 1980s , which saw players take on the role of Roy Race and manage the club . The Old Fashioned Football Shirt Company now makes officially licensed replica shirts .

In 1990 , " Roy Race " and footballer Gary Lineker released a single , " Europe United " , described in the comic as " a hot rocking heavy metal rap " , which failed to chart in the UK Top 40 . The confectionery company McCowans produced a pineapple @-@ flavoured " Roy of the Rovers " chew bar in the 1990s .

= = Collected editions = =

On 29 February 2008 it was announced that Titan Books had acquired worldwide book publishing rights to a range of Egmont 's comic strips , including Roy of the Rovers . The first of their compilations of Roy 's playing days , The Best of Roy of the Rovers : The 1980s was released in May 2008 and included the " Relegation " and " Who Shot Roy " story arcs . The Bumper Book of

Roy of the Rovers was published in October 2008 , and reprinted strips , articles , short stories and features taken from Roy annuals dated from 1957 to 1971 . Two further titles were released in 2009 , The Best of the 1970s and The Second Bumper Book , and a third Best of , focusing on the World Cup , was released in 2010 . All five of the titles were edited and compiled by David Leach .

The trade paperbacks :

The Best of Roy of the Rovers : The 1980s (208 pages , June 2008 , ISBN 1 1 84576 1 948)

The Best of Roy of the Rovers : The 1970s (208 pages , June 2009 , ISBN 1 1 84856 0 024)

Roy of the Rovers : World Cup Special (208 pages , June 2010 , ISBN 1 1 84856 6 671)

The hardcovers :

The Bumper Book of Roy of the Rovers (112 pages , October 2008 , ISBN 1 1 84576 1 958)

The Second Bumper Book of Roy of the Rovers (112 pages , October 2009 , ISBN 1 1 84856 4 443)