

Think Sunderland AFC and you think red and white stripes.

In these commercially driven days a variation on the home kit is inevitable on an annual basis as the clubs and manufacturers go all out to maximise the income from the sales of replica shirts.

Last season the narrow stripes with the plain red back came in for a lot of criticism and reminded me of a stick seaside rock.

For the 2018/19 League 1 campaign the stripes are wider but the plain red back remains. Under the ownership of Ellis Short and with Glaswegian Martin Bain as chief executive, the impression I have is that the club allowed the manufacturers more or less free rein, as the original contract would have seen the team running out in red shorts, home and away, but as I understand it, the appointment of a new managing director, himself a Sunderland fan, led to negotiations which means that for home games at least, the shirts of the first team are paired with the change kit's black shorts. While this would meet with the approval of the majority of supporters, the plain red back which apparently Adidas combine with all their striped shirts, was less well received. In U18, U23 and the majority of senior away games red shorts have still been worn with the striped shirts as was originally intended.



I am expecting under the change of ownership and their desire to connect with the fan base, the club will have a greater say on future kit design.

Red and white shirts, black shorts, black socks. That's the traditional kit with many saying that the middle stripe of five or seven, should always be red.

Except it's not always been that way. Certainly that was the norm during most of the 1970s and it was that kit which was worn on the two occasions the club won the FA Cup at Wembley, but there were other colours before the club adopted red and white stripes.

The original colours, when the club was formed by James Allen in 1880 was all blue. Then in 1884 the team began to turn out in red and white halves with black shorts, but the story goes that the club was so hard up that in 1887, they accepted the offer of a second hand kit from Middlesbrough based club South Bank, who had been formed in 1868 and played in the colours we now think of as synonymous with Sunderland.



Source - Wikipedia



And when I first started going to Roker Park, and all through the 60s, white shorts were the norm. As for the layout of the stripes, in many of the photographs of these early teams, like this one of the 1967 FA Youth Cup winners, you see a lack of consistency, some players' shirts having a red centre stripe, some with a white

stripe in the middle and some totally asymmetrical, with no central stripe.



Then there was the controversial candy stripe strip with the red shorts that the team sported in the early 1980s. There were many who thought it a travesty but I quite liked it at the time and it still proves popular with those who wear replica shirts and someone can always be observed wearing it on match days.

Finally, no mention of change kits, which is a topic all of its own, but I couldn't leave the subject without pointing out that when we were due to play the quarter final of the 1955/56 FA Cup at St James Park, presumably for the benefit of the black and white newsreel cameras that were there, the home team abandoned their traditional stripes and played in plain white shirts with black shorts. We on the other hand turned out looking a bit like the Arsenal in red shirts with white sleeves and black shorts. Watch the

Pathe News footage by following the link. Believe me if you are a Sunderland fan you'll enjoy it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tiyzNgx8WEo>