

Andrew Devine, the 97th Hillsborough disaster victim dies 32 years after suffering lifelong injuries

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Andrew Devine, who died on July 27, has been named the 97th victim of the Hillsborough football stadium disaster. He was 55 years old when he passed away. Andrew suffered lifelong injuries at Hillsborough that left him with severe and irreversible brain damage requiring 24-hour care.

The horrific loss of life took place during the April 15, 1989, FA Cup semi-final between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest at Hillsborough Stadium in Sheffield.

Ninety-five men, women and children died immediately or soon after being caught in the crush at the Leppings Lane end of the stadium. The 96th victim, Tony Bland, who also suffered irreparable brain damage in the crush, died in 1993. Bland was just 18 when he went to Hillsborough. He died aged 22, after being in a coma for nearly four years during which he never regained consciousness. A court granted permission for his life support to be withdrawn.

The Hillsborough fatalities are the largest loss of life at a sporting event in British history. The youngest victim was 10 years old and the eldest 67.

Just minutes before the scheduled 3pm kick-off, David Duckenfield, the South Yorkshire Police officer in command, gave the order to open Hillsborough Stadium's Exit Gate C at 2.52 p.m. Several thousand fans waiting to enter the ground were directed into two already dangerously overcrowded terrace "pens." Many of the fans suffocated in the crush, while others passed away after managing to escape onto the pitch from which they were impeded by large steel fences.

Andrew was among those 766 people injured in the crush. His injuries left a fit young man of 22, who was studying to be an accountant, requiring professional health care for the rest of his life. Andrew was looked after by his family. He was unable to speak, confined to a

wheelchair and could eat only puréed food.

A day after his death a coroner ruled that, as with the other victims of the disaster, Andrew was unlawfully killed.

In the crush, Andrew's brain was deprived of oxygen, his chest was crushed, and doctors believed he would not survive even 24 hours.

He was treated for six weeks in the intensive care unit of Sheffield's Royal Hallamshire Hospital and then at specialist health units elsewhere in the UK. Even though he survived the first day, his parents were told he would probably not survive six months. It was later established that no human being had ever survived more than eight years with the injuries that Andrew suffered.

Following his death, Liverpool Football Club published a statement from Andrew's family: "We welcome the conclusion of the coroner, Mr Andre Rebello, made today at Liverpool Coroner's Court, that Andrew was unlawfully killed, making him the 97th fatality of the tragic events that occurred on April 15, 1989.

"In the intervening years, Andrew has been a much-loved son, brother and uncle. He has been supported by his family and a team of dedicated carers, all of whom devoted themselves to him."

The club's own statement noted, "At an inquest held in Liverpool today, it was ruled that Andrew was unlawfully killed as a result of the disaster, providing a further tragic reminder of the toll that Hillsborough continues to take on all affected by it."

Although Andrew was unable to communicate, he still attended, when possible, Liverpool matches at the Anfield ground. At the request of club vice-captain James Milner, during their parade through the city after winning the European Champions League in 2019, the open top bus stopped outside Andrew's home so that he could see the

players and trophy.

Andrew's fate encompasses in many ways the tragedy of all the victims. He lived the vast majority of his adult life prior to his premature death with injuries he suffered as the result of decisions of the South Yorkshire Police, the football and corporate authorities and the government. The tragedy he endured, as was the case with 96 fans who died and the hundreds also injured, was massively compounded by their denial of justice, despite a determined decades-long fight by the families and local community.

Andrew was still alive in May this year, over three decades after the events, when the collapse of the prosecution of retired police officers Donald Denton and Alan Foster, and South Yorkshire Police solicitor Peter Metcalf, ended any possibility of bringing to justice anyone responsible—at any level—for the deaths and injuries suffered. Likewise, no-one has been brought to account for a cover-up of these crimes.

In May 2019, the South Yorkshire Police match commander, David Duckenfield, who gave the order to open the egress Gate C leading to the crush, was found not guilty of gross negligence manslaughter for the deaths of 95 Liverpool fans, in a retrial. Duckenfield was not tried over the death of Tony Bland, because under law he died more than a year and a day after the disaster.

No corporate entity was ever prosecuted over the Hillsborough disaster, despite the match being played at a stadium that was unsafe for the tens of thousands of football supporters who attended that day. The Football Association selected the Hillsborough ground for the prestigious semi-final event despite it not having a valid safety certificate and two previous incidents when games had to be delayed due to crowd congestion.

Many of the guilty figures involved are either rotting in their graves or nearing the end of life. Thatcher died in 2013, Irving Patnick—a local Tory MP who spread lies immediately after the disaster blaming Liverpool fans for the crush—died in 2012. Thatcher's Home Secretary at the time, Douglas Hurd, under whom a massive cover-up over Hillsborough got underway, was never prosecuted and is now 91.

Leading police figure Peter Wright died in 2011. He was chief constable of South Yorkshire Police from 1983 to 1990 and was responsible for overall policing at the Hillsborough football stadium. Just five years prior to Hillsborough, Wright led SYP's brutal government-backed state operation against the 1984-85 miners' strike.

These could only evade justice as the result of a decades-

long cover-up by Thatcher's government and successive Labour and Tory governments. They continued spewing out lies blaming Liverpool fans for the disaster and exonerating the police, with the Murdoch press leading the charge. These lies became the official narrative for decades, even in the face of live TV footage from the day that showed fans doing all they could to help the dying and injured, including breaking apart advertising hoardings to use as stretchers to carry the injured to safety, as police officers looked on.

Those killed and maimed were still deprived justice by the British ruling elite, despite the publication of the 2012 findings of the Hillsborough Independent Panel (HIP). The panel reviewed 450,000 documents, including some previously confidential, in order to establish the truth about the events which the state had by that time covered up for 22 years. HIP demolished the official version of events that had cleared the police. It found that the deaths were the result of police and corporate negligence. Michael Mansfield, the legal representative of the Hillsborough Family Support Group, described what was done to the families by governments over several decades as "the biggest cover-up in British legal history".

The then Labour government only agreed to set up the panel in 2010 in the face of widespread public anger that not a single individual had been brought to justice.

The panel findings led to the setting up of new inquests into the deaths. After the longest case heard by a jury in British legal history, the jury delivered its verdict in April 2016 that the 96 men, women and children who died as a result of the Hillsborough disaster were unlawfully killed.



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