

St James' Park

Contributed by Mark

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St James' Park is an all-seater stadium in Newcastle upon Tyne, England, the home of Newcastle United Football Club.

The stadium has a capacity of 52,387, the seventh largest football stadium in The United Kingdom, behind Wembley, Old Trafford, Millennium Stadium, Celtic Park, Emirates Stadium, and Hampden Park.

Located in the centre of Newcastle, its distinctive white cantilever roof supports are visible in the surrounding city skyline. The stadium has a distinctive lop sided appearance, due to restrictions surrounding recent redevelopments.

Occupied by the Toon Army fan-base in the Milburn Stand, the East Stand, the Leazes End and the Gallowgate, the ground has been the home ground of Premier League club Newcastle United since 1892. Following expansion the stadium has also hosted international football and rock concerts.

Layout

The stadium has a rough pitch alignment of north easterly. The four main stands are as follows:

Gallowgate End (officially the Newcastle Brown Ale Stand), at the southern end of the pitch, named unofficially for it's proximity to the Gallowgate Road, and officialy after the long association with the club of sponsor Scottish and Newcastle Breweries;

Leazes End (officially the Sir John Hall Stand), at the northern end of the pitch, named unofficially for its proximity to Leazes Park, and officially after the club's Life President Sir John Hall;

Milburn Stand, the main stand, on the west side of the pitch. Named after 1950s legend Jackie Milburn East Stand, whose name is self explanatory.

The Milburn stand and Leazes end are double tiered, separated by a level of executive boxes; The East Stand and Gallowgate End are single tiered, with boxes also at the top of the Gallowgate. In common with most modern stadium developments, all four corners have been filled in with seating, joining the main stands up to a uniform level. The Milburn Stand and Leazes End rise higher than this level, up to Level 7, inclusive of the north west corner, covered by a one piece catilivered roof. A further smaller section rises behind the Gallowgate End.

The main stand and entrance to the stadium is in the Milburn Stand. The Milburn is the location of the directors box and press boxes, and the main TV camera point for televised games such as Match of the Day, and the location of the dugouts. The player's tunnel is located in the traditional position of the middle of the main stand.

While appearing lopsided when viewed from outside, developments have ensured the lower tier of seating of the ground forms a continuous bowl around the pitch, below the level of the executive boxes. This gives a rough illustration of the size of the stadium after the first major expansion. The lopsided nature of the stadium allows views of the city centre from many seats inside the ground.

Away fans for league matches are accommodated in the upper level, in the north west corner. This has attracted criticism due to the poor view offered by being so far from the pitch due the the height of the stand. For FA Cup matches the lower section of the corner is also used.

The traditional home of the more vocal fans is considered the Gallowgate End, in the same veign as The Kop for Liverpool FC. The Gallowgate End is the end that the team attacks in the second half if they win the coin toss.

Facilities

As well as the normal Premier League football stadium facilities, the stadium contains conference and banqueting facilities. The Milburn stand houses premium seating arranged in clubs, each with their own access to a bar and lounge behind the stand.

The Gallowgate End houses Shearer's Bar, effectively another city centre nightspot in Newcastle, accessible only from the exterior of the ground. It is named in honour of former player Alan Shearer, and a large club shop in partnership with main kit sponsor Adidas. The Milburn stand houses the main box-office. In the south west corner there is also a cafe and a club museum.

Capacity

The capacity of St James' Park is an often raised subject in football culture, both by supporters of Newcastle and rival fans, due to the stadium being one of the largest in the Premier League despite the relative lack of trophies of Newcastle United in recent history. The stadium has seen near full houses since the first arrival of Kevin Keegan as manager. The stadium has a capacity of 52,387, making it:

- the third largest Premier League ground, behind Arsenal's Emirates Stadium and Manchester United's Old Trafford;
- the fourth largest football stadium in England when including Wembley Stadium;
- the fifth largest football club ground in England when including Celtic Park and Hampden Park in Scotland;
- seventh largest football stadium in The United Kingdom overall when including the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff.

As a conservative estimate, the ground has a theoretical maximum seated capacity of approximately 70,000, ignoring planning and design constraints, if the East and Gallowgate stands were raised to the height of the redeveloped stands. This is still low compared to the club record attendance of 68,386 in 1930, when standing was allowed in football stadia.

Redevelopment

Initial expansion

The ground had received only modest expansion until the early 1990s when businessman Sir John Hall, who had led a consortium in a hostile takeover the club, invested heavily in the stadium. By 1995 the stadium had reached a capacity of 36,610 seats.

Leazes Park relocation

As the expanded stadium still received full houses due to continuing success of the team led by the returning Kevin Keegan, in 1995, plans were submitted by the club to relocate to Leazes Park to the north. A new purpose built stadium would be erected, less than two pitch lengths away from the original, but rotated, which would be similar to the San Siro in Italy. The old ground would be redeveloped, reducing in size, to be used by Newcastle Falcons Rugby Club. The surrounding area would have been land-scaped to allow large movements of fans, and restoring the views of the park from Leazes Terrace.

These plans fell through due to political wranglings, led by a conservation group headed by Dolly Potter. Instead, at extra cost, the club decided to expand the current St James' Park by adding extra tiers to the Sir John Hall Stand and the Milburn Stand, ironically spoiling the Leazes Park views for even more Leazes Terrace residents.

Second phase expansion

During the second expansion, executive boxes in the East Stand were demolished and replaced by seating blocks from pitch level up to the existing rows, in a mirror image of the Milburn Stand, increasing capacity to approximately 52,143. The cost of the new construction work was estimated at Â£42 million, significantly higher than the proposed Leazes Park stadium. The upper tiers on the West and North sides of the ground were completed in July 2000, with seats and executive boxes also installed.

The redevelopment caused controversy as the club intended to move 4,000 fans to make way for executive seating, some of whom had purchased bonded seats which they believed entitled them to a specific seat for 10 years. After two high court cases and a Save Our Seats campaign, the club was allowed to move the fans, due to exceptional circumstances. As a gesture of goodwill, the club did not pursue the fans for legal costs awarded over their insured limit[1]

Gallowgate End

In 2005 the Gallowgate was redeveloped, with a new bar being built beneath the upper tier of the Gallowgate End, named "Shearer's" after Newcastle player Alan Shearer. During excavation underneath the stand during building work, the builders uncovered the original steps of the old Gallowgate End stand, which had simply been covered up when the stadium was fully renovated in 1993. These steps were removed for Shearer's Bar. The completion of the redevelopment of the Gallowgate saw the creation of Shearer's Bar, an expanded club shop, a club museum and a new box office.

Proposed expansion

It was announced on 2 April 2007 that the club intend to submit plans for a new Â£300million development of the stadium and surrounding areas, to include a major conference centre, hotels and luxury apartments[2]. The proposals also include a plan to increase the Gallowgate End, eventually taking the capacity to 60,000. This expansion would be funded by the city council and linked to redevelopment of the land behind the stand and over the Metro Station. Expansion of the Gallowgate involves difficulties due to the proximity of a road, Strawberry Place, and issues surrounding reinforcement of the underground St James Metro station. The club had already purchased the land around and above the St James Metro station.

These redevelopment plans are uncertain since the takeover of the club and it's plc holding company by billionaire, Mike Ashley.

Expanding the Gallowgate would possibly leave a horseshoe arrangement of completed two tier roofed stands, like Parkhead, of Celtic FC. Development on the remaining fourth side is restricted by the proximity of Leazes Terrace

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Source:http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_James'_Park

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