

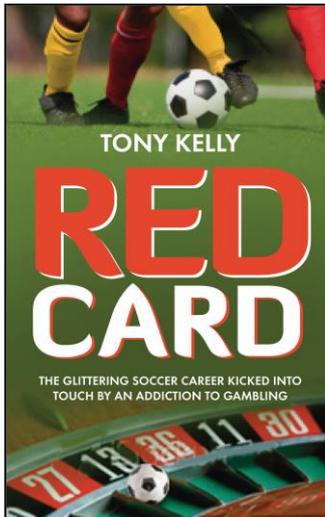
MEREO NEW BOOK: PRESS RELEASE

A professional footballer's true-life revelations about the gambling hell which destroyed his career, damaged his relationships and left him with debts in excess of £100K

This frank, shocking and powerfully-moving account is supported by a grant from the Professional Footballer's Association

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"If this story saves just one young footballing prodigy from self-destruction, it will have been worthwhile." Tony Kelly



RED CARD

THE SOCCER STAR WHO LOST IT ALL TO GAMBLING

by Tony Kelly

professional footballer, father of two – and recovering gambling addict

This book has been supported by a generous charitable grant from the PFA (Professional Footballers' Association) as part of their campaign to raise awareness of gambling issues within football and other highly-paid sports.



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A glittering soccer career kicked into touch by an addiction to gambling

Red Card is a tragic yet uplifting story of one sportsman's battle with his demons, on and off the pitch. When a promising young footballer seems to have it all money, cars, nightclubs, girls, a big salary and all the bling in the world ... what drives him to gamble it all away in betting shops and casinos?

Tony Kelly was football crazy from the age of seven. As a youngster playing in Sunday League matches, he became something of a local footballing hero in Coventry. At sixteen he became the youngest ever player in the first team at Bristol City FC – and, not long after, was snapped up to play as a pro for Second Division, Stoke City FC.

As a backdrop to his meteoric rise, the ugly spectre of racism was ever present. Like many black people in the UK in the 70s and 80s, Tony Kelly encountered racism from an early age but steadfastly refused to be bullied on account of the colour of his skin – even taking a dramatic stand against it aged just 11-years-old.



But his embryonic football career was already becoming marred by mishaps and misdeeds – many of which he admits were entirely of his own making. His attitude to his career, his love of fast cars, his penchant for street brawls and his womanising were all causes of friction and conflict. And then he started betting on the horses

"It seems crazy, I know – there is no logical reason why someone earning a large salary would gamble it all away rather than putting it in the bank or investing it. But then there is nothing logical about gambling – it's an irrational, evil addiction. Tony Kelly

Crippled by a ruinous addiction to gambling, he lost his career, his partner, his self-respect and all his money. Now, with no holds barred, Tony Kelly shares the story his secret gambling hell. This is a tale of a young celebrity out of control. It is an admirably candid account – but does contain strong language and some tales of sexual exploits and violence that some readers may find shocking.

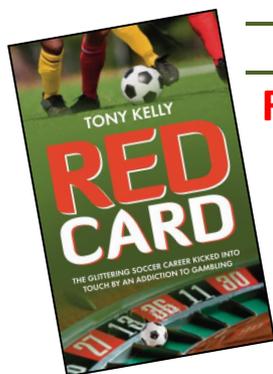


For more information, media opportunities and photos: see over >>>



To request a review copy or to be put in touch with the author, please contact

Elly Donovan PR elly@ellydonovan.co.uk tel: 0790 508 7779 / 01273 205 246 www.ellydonovan.co.uk
twitter: @EllyDonovanPR facebook.com/Elly Donovan Linked-In: Elly Donovan PR



RED CARD: THE SOCCER STAR WHO LOST IT ALL TO GAMBLING

“The issues I had to deal with – especially gambling and racism – feature prominently in this story, as they are issues which are still prevalent today ... Temptation and a big ego were demons I failed to conquer, so I hope my story educates youngsters in a positive way and ultimately ensures that they do not follow my path of self-destruction” Tony Kelly.

About the author: Tony Kelly

Tony Kelly and his identical twin-brother Mel were born in Coventry on Valentine’s Day 1966. At junior school he played in his school’s football team but his deep love-affair with football really took hold when he watched (on TV) Brazil playing in the 1974 World Cup.

As a teenager, Tony was no stranger to trouble. Frequenting the tough clubs of Coventry, indulging in petty-theft and driving cars underage, he was no saint. He hoped that a career in football could save him from the prison-life that many of his friends were facing.

His undoubted ability on the field, led to him joining Bristol City’s youth team and he made his debut as a pro footballer in 1982 at the tender age of 16. From there he went on to play for St Albans (as a semi-pro); Stoke City, Bury, Leyton Orient and Harlow Town. He hung up his football boots for the last time in 1999, aged 35.



Some high-points in Tony’s life: Becoming a pro footballer at just 16 • A successful season at a Swedish football club • Playing at Wembley • His career with Stoke City under football legend Alan Ball • His last-minute goal at Anfield against Liverpool (1991 League Cup) • Meeting his long-term partner • The birth of his two children

Throughout his career his addiction to gambling cost him dearly – not only financially but it affected his game (playing badly when he’d had a major betting loss); it affected his health (with panic attacks and acute anxiety); and it affected his relationships with his long-suffering partner and his closest family and friends.

Tony Kelly lives in North London. He works at Tottenham Hotspurs where he provides security for corporate events – and is involved with spotting and nurturing young football talent. He would like to become more involved in raising awareness of gambling as a powerfully addictive disease and the dangers it poses to young professional sportspeople who, like him, experience money and fame young in life.

Tony is still undergoing counselling for his addiction to gambling. His is no longer living with his partner of 20-years (although they are still very close friends). He is devoted to his two children (both in their late teens now). In recent years Tony has developed a deep religious faith (but is not at all “preachy”). He regards himself as having “95% beaten his gambling addiction” but freely admits that he will probably still “have the odd flutter” for the rest of his life.

Some of the lowest points in Tony’s life: Experiencing racially-motivated violence in the notorious nightclubs of Coventry • Being caught driving aged 15 • The Brixton riots of the early 1980s • Almost being stabbed – twice • Failing to join Southampton FC in a transfer-fee dispute • A nine-month ban from football for attacking a referee. (Tony changed his name to dodge the ban) • Selling a kiss-and-tell, three-in-a-bed-sex-romp story to a tabloid paper to fund his gambling addiction • In excess of £100,000 gambling debts

Media opportunities: Extracts/serialisation. The author is available for interviews – and representatives from the sponsors, the Professional Footballer’s Association, are available for interviews about their campaign to raise awareness of gambling problems among young footballers and other professional sportspeople.

Photos of Tony Kelly available: see overleaf >>>



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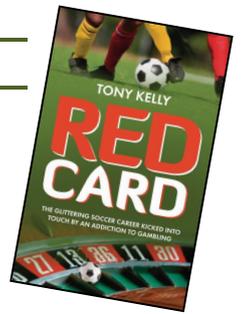
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Examples of photos available ...

The young Tony Kelly – the successful professional footballer, full of hope for the glittering career that seemed to be ahead of him ...

“That’s what gambling does to you – it takes you on a roller-coaster ride through all the emotions from exultation to total despair. Naturally this affected my game ... I was now deep in debt and my addiction was reaching new heights. This wasn’t just a pleasant little diversion to while away the time – it was hard-core gambling with big money changing hands and IOUs being issued all the time. It wasn’t unusual to lose £1000 in half an hour.” Tony Kelly



Below: Tony Kelly today: Older and so much wiser!

...and still paying an enormous price (both financially and personally) for his gambling.

“And the tragic thing is, for the gambling soccer player nothing has changed - except the amount of money that changes hands ... it’s imperative that something is done. Football clubs up and down the country need to realise how much trouble some of their players are getting into.” Tony Kelly



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