

# Trent Alexander-Arnold exclusive: 15 moments that have shaped my career



By James Pearce (/author/james-pearce/) 4h ago



Trent Alexander-Arnold has stopped off en route to training at Melwood. The setting is One Fine Day, a stylish restaurant in Liverpool's business district, and the place is packed with lunchtime diners who have escaped the torrential rain outside. Dressed in a black tracksuit and white trainers, the Liverpool full-back manages to navigate his way through to the upstairs function room unrecognised thanks largely to a black baseball cap emblazoned with the Red Bull logo. He's joined by his older brother and manager Tyler, who has shrewdly helped to guide the career of one of world football's most exciting young talents.

Alexander-Arnold has enjoyed an incredible rise but it's testament to the environment he's grown up in that he remains humble and grounded. He's a Champions League winner and the youngest player ever to start back-to-back European Cup finals. He has already represented England at a World Cup, been named in the PFA Team of the Year and been

shortlisted for the Ballon d'Or. He only turned 21 a few weeks ago but at Villa Park on Saturday he's set to make his 100th appearance for his boyhood club. He is a vital cog in Jurgen Klopp's title-chasing machine.

"It's been an amazing journey for me so far," said Alexander-Arnold as he sat down for an exclusive interview with *The Athletic*. "I never expected things to happen so fast. I'm very grateful for the opportunities I've been given. There have been a lot of highs and a couple of lows but mainly it's been an upwards rise. I feel very fortunate. Hopefully it will stay like that."

We meet on the third anniversary of his Liverpool debut and I've selected 15 images from his career to date. They chart the remarkable story of the boy from the West Derby area of the city who has firmly established himself as the Scouse heartbeat of Klopp's side.

### **1. At the Liverpool academy**



(Photo: Nick Taylor/LFC)

JP: How old are you there?

TAA: I must be nine or 10 in that picture.

JP: You look quite serious!

TAA: When it came to football, I was a serious kid. We were probably losing when that photo was taken. I look angry! They were probably the most enjoyable days when there was no pressure on results. You could just go out and perform and be happy and just enjoy playing football with your mates.

JP: It all started with your name getting pulled out of a hat at St Matthew's Primary School. You won the chance to attend a coaching camp at Liverpool's academy...

TAA: Yeah, I think it was a half-term camp. I was six years old. Everyone wanted to go but there weren't enough spaces, only six or seven. Luckily, my name was one of those that got pulled out. I went along the following week and after the first day the scouts and the coaches approached my mum and asked if I could go up there to train and play in a few games. From that day onwards I've been a Liverpool player. I always loved Liverpool. I was brought up in a family of Reds, believing that Liverpool were always the best. Going along to a few games as a kid with my brothers and my mum and seeing Champions League games like the quarter-final against Juventus back in 2005 was the best experience for me. I wanted to be part of nights like that.

JP: You played in a number of different positions in the youth ranks....

TAA: Yeah, I played everywhere! At the age in that photo I was a winger for Liverpool. In Sunday League football I was a central midfielder — running round everywhere, taking people on, scoring goals, trying to defend. I was probably 12 or 13 at Liverpool when I went from playing as a winger to centre-back for a bit. I played there until I was about 14 or 15. I played as a No 6 for a year or two under Pep Lijnders. Then I made the decision to move to right-back and that's where I've been since.

JP: What was the thinking behind moving to right-back? I know it was something you discussed at length with academy director Alex Inglethorpe and coach Neil Critchley...

TAA: Yeah, I was 17. It was my first season with the under-18s. At the start of that season I was playing wide on the right. We had a chat. I wasn't a natural winger, but I did it for the team. We spoke about how I could maybe get into the first-team set-up and what the best route was. We all decided that right-back was probably the clearest route. Being a midfielder was tough. I wasn't playing for the under-23s so I was nowhere near the first-team. There wasn't a right-back in the under-18s who was really pushing. In the first-team, Flanno (Jon Flanagan) was injured so we only had Clyney (Nathaniel Clyne) and Connor Randall. There weren't too many players in front of me so we decided to go for that. Alex and Critch were both a huge help to me. The same goes for Mick Beale and Ian Barrigan.

JP: Pep Lijnders, who is now assistant manager, was your under-16s coach. How important was he in terms of your development?

TAA: Absolutely massive. There was a real bond between us. His passion for football is something I hadn't really seen in a coach before. The detail he went into, his will to win – it was unbelievable. It was exactly what I wanted and what I needed. Pep and I used to stay out for hours after training just playing two-touch, messing around, head tennis. There were sessions when we'd been out on the grass so long after a session that the floodlights would go off. It was just us two out there until 7pm at Kirkby. It was amazing. The sessions we had, the fun of it, the way we played, we played in a 3-4-3 with a diamond in midfield. I was always the No 6 in that. He allowed me to go forward and dictate the tempo of the game. He gave me the freedom I wanted and he was a big influence on me.

## 2. His debut v Tottenham in the League Cup in October 2016



Walking to the dressing room before the game at Anfield (Photo: John Powell/Liverpool FC via Getty Images)

JP: What's going through your head there? Nerves or excitement?

TAA: Nerves! I'd only just come into the first-team squad. I had only played three or four games for the under-23s. That's me getting off the coach and walking to the temporary dressing rooms we were using when the Main Stand was still getting finished. It was one

of the best days for me. It was the day the dream came true. It was everything I always wanted. It was never so much winning trophies, first and foremost my target was just to play for Liverpool. No-one can ever take that away from you once you've done it. It was a proud day.

JP: When did you find out you were playing?

TAA: We had played Burton and Derby in the earlier rounds and I wasn't involved in those matches so I wasn't expecting it at all. But when we worked on shape the day before the Spurs game I realised I was in the starting XI. It was a surprise to me. You question whether you're ready and whether you'll be able to step up and perform. But the manager spoke to me and Ovie (Ejaria), who was in the team as well. He calmed us down and gave us the belief to go out there and play. It was a special occasion. I wasn't used to playing in front of crowds. My family were all there. I just tried to enjoy it as much as I could. I think I played around 65 minutes and we got the win. I remember I put a bad tackle in [on Ben Davies] and I was lucky to get away with a yellow. I was just eager to impress. The occasion got to me a little bit.

### **3. His first Premier League start, against Manchester United at Old Trafford in January 2017**



Dispossessing United's £70million signing Martial (Photo: Tom Purslow/Manchester United via Getty Images)

JP: What a place to make your first Premier League start. That was a baptism of fire with Anthony Martial for company but you rose to the challenge...

TAA: It was tough. We were disappointed we didn't get the win that day as United equalised late on. Again, I wasn't expecting to play. When we did shape the day before that game, Clyney was playing as usual. I went to the hotel and stayed over. I think it was a 4pm Sunday game. We had breakfast and then chilled. Later we went for a walk together and that's when the manager came up to me and said: 'Are you ready?' I said: 'Yeah'. He said: 'Good because I need you to start, Clyney has got a problem.' I only found out I was starting about three hours before kick-off.

JP: Did that help in a way?

TAA: Yeah it did. I think the manager probably knew earlier than that but didn't want me sat in my room worrying about anything. I didn't really have time to let it sink in and I was able to go out and put in a decent performance to be fair.

JP: Did any of the senior players give you advice?

TAA: I don't think any of the lads knew I was playing until the meeting before the game when it got announced. In the dressing room the likes of Hendo (Jordan Henderson) and Millie (James Milner) were great with me. They talked to me, told me to relax, enjoy it and not over-think things. That's what I tried to do.

#### 4. His first goal for Liverpool, a free-kick against Hoffenheim in the Champions League in August 2017



(Photo: TF-Images/TF-Images via Getty Images)

JP: Liverpool have achieved so much in Europe since that it's easy to forget what a huge game that was. There was so much at stake in that Champions League play-off round against the Bundesliga outfit. It had been a tricky opening half hour in Germany before you stepped up and whipped that 25-yard free-kick into the bottom corner...

TAA: It was another dream come true. After your debut, the next thing you think about is scoring that first goal for the club and how that will feel. You get caught in the moment. It's hard to describe the feeling of seeing the ball hit the back of the net that night. You never forget that first goal.

JP: Klopp said that he forced you to take that free-kick!

TAA: I think Gini (Georginio Wijnaldum), Hendo, and the gaffer really pushed me. I remember Hendo pushed Alberto (Moreno) away and said: ‘Trent is having this one.’ It was good to have that support and trust to let me take it and it worked out well. Phil (Coutinho) didn’t play in that game so the free-kicks were up for grabs.

JP: Where does that set-piece ability stem from? Was it something you could do as a kid?

TAA: Not really. The season before, 2016-17, I wasn’t playing much and we didn’t have European football so we didn’t have many midweek games. That meant you were able to get extra practice in after training. Throughout that season I was always joining in the free-kick sessions with the likes of Phil, Emre (Can), Alberto and Gini. I was trying to pick up techniques and I learned a lot from them. I think the lads maybe saw the quality in training and wanted me to have a go against Hoffenheim. I’ve always been able to get decent curve and whip on the ball. A lot of players use whip, others use dip or movement on the ball. You see the way that Harry Wilson can strike a ball is different to many other players. It’s about finding out what works best for you. I always found that whip was the best for me and that’s the technique I’ve always tried to use. Then it’s about routines and just trying to make it better.

JP: You scored a stunning free-kick at Watford last season and then the one at Stamford Bridge back in September when Mohamed Salah back-heeled it to you...

TAA: The one against Chelsea was a good one! I don’t know if it counts as an actual free-kick because it was touched off but it was a good strike and the keeper couldn’t reach it. Sometimes by moving the ball you can create a bit of chaos in their wall as they start moving. I always find with the ones close to the box, if you move the ball and you get players running out, it doesn’t help the keeper’s view. Then if you hit it with power and placement it’s very difficult for the keeper to save it.

JP: Both of Liverpool’s goals at Chelsea came from free-kicks which were touched off. For Roberto Firmino’s header, you rolled a free-kick to Andy Robertson, who delivered a pin-point cross. Clearly it was something you had worked on...

TAA: For some reason Robbo hits a moving ball a hundred times better than a static ball. Why? No-one really knows! That’s why sometimes when he’s taking a corner, it needs to be rolled out to him. Some people like the ball moving, some like it static. I personally don’t think it matters too much. We just decided to move it a little bit. It just changes the

angle, the little movement gets players in the wall moving, then putting it into the box creates a difference in their line. Look at the second goal at Chelsea, their line drops a bit more after the roll happens and then there's that space for Bobby to go and attack it.

JP: How important is the analysis and input of assistant boss Peter Krawietz when it comes to set-pieces?

TAA: He's always looking for different ways that we can attack different opposition, whether it's the front post, the back post or with a little routine. Cardiff away last season was a great example. Gini's goal was one that Peter had identified that worked perfectly for us. Gini pulled away to the penalty spot and I was able to pick him out with a low delivery from the corner. That attention to detail is key. What I've realised from playing international football is just how many goals come from set-pieces — it's where a lot of games are won and lost. If you can defend them well and attack them well you've got a much better chance of winning.

## 5. Marcus Rashford scored twice as United inflicted a painful defeat on Liverpool at Old Trafford in March 2018



(Photo: Simon Stacpoole/Offside/Getty Images)

JP: Now we can't just focus on all the positives....

TAA: (Laughs)

JP: Is it fair to say that was one of your most difficult days? Rashford scored two in the opening 25 minutes and there was no way back?

TAA: Yeah, the toughest in terms of a direct opponent and someone getting on top of me in professional football. I'd say I underestimated him. It was a massive learning curve for me. It was something that I hated happening. As a Liverpool player it's probably the worst game of the season to perform like that. But when things like that happen you have to learn from them.

JP: You went back to the academy after that game to speak to Alex Inglethorpe to get some advice...

TAA: I massively respect his opinion and he's always been there for me, he still is now. I found that growing up, he's someone who would always tell me the truth, no matter how much it would hurt me. That kind of honesty is exactly what you want from people. It's quite hard to come across in football because some people don't want to hurt your feelings. But Alex always tells me the truth. We talked about what had gone wrong and how I could improve and to try to make sure it didn't happen again.

JP: Can you use days like that as motivation?

TAA: Yeah, you have to. It was a wake-up call. You hate days like that. You don't want to experience that. You remember how it felt and that makes you try everything you possibly can to ensure you don't have another one like it.

## **6. The Champions League quarter-final against Manchester City at Anfield in April 2018**



(Photo: ANTHONY DEVLIN/AFP/Getty Images)

JP: That was a special night. City were beaten 3-0 in that first leg at Anfield and the individual battle between Leroy Sané and you was crucial...

TAA: We had the Man U game and then Palace soon after. I remember I didn't do that well against (Wilfried) Zaha either so a lot of questions were being asked about whether I was up to the task of facing Sané or whether I should be replaced in the team. I'd like to say I came out on top in that battle. It was an unbelievable game. Probably the best atmosphere I've ever witnessed. You literally couldn't hear yourself think. You couldn't hear the player next to you who was shouting. It was incredible.

JP: City targeted you that night...

TAA: To be fair, if I was their manager I'd have done the same looking at my previous games. If you were looking for a weak link, you would have pointed me out very easily. As soon as the game started I could feel it. As soon as Kyle Walker got the ball, he wanted to switch it over to my side. They all wanted to get Sané one v one against me. I had plenty of help from Hendo and Mo (Salah), who provided cover. We were able to force him

backwards or to the line. With Sane, he's heavily left footed so when he comes in, you know he wants to come back out. That was something I'd noticed beforehand and it was something I was prepared for.

JP: How do you view that rivalry with City now? Is it now bigger than the games against United and Everton?

TAA: Traditionally, no, because of all the history with United and Everton. But in terms of intensity, quality, concentration and tempo, they're probably the biggest games of the season now. You know that if you step one foot out of line against City you'll get punished. You need to be bang on all the time. The two games last season were so marginal. The 0-0 at home and then the 2-1 defeat away when one went in off the post and one was cleared off the line. Tight as you like. Those sort of games can define a season these days. Last season City away was probably the one game when we looked back with disappointment and thought if we had done better there things would have been different (in the title race).

## 7. The agony of losing the Champions League final to Real Madrid in Kiev in May 2018



(Photo: Shaun Botterill/Getty Images)

JP: From Salah's injury to what happened with Loris Karius and Gareth Bale's wondergoal, it was a night when everything went wrong.

TAA: Yeah, a lot of things went against us. That's the worst day I've ever had in football by far. To come so close to something you've always dreamed of and then miss out was horrible. Looking back on it now, we probably didn't deserve to win the game. I don't know if we were ready as a team to win that final. Real Madrid had been there and done it before. We got schooled. As soon as the third goal went in, it was game over, we couldn't get the ball, we couldn't create a chance. It was just a case of waiting for the game to finish. We learned from that. Over the course of last season we learned the art of seeing out games and grinding out results. Look at Bayern away, we were 1-1 at half-time and it was difficult but we stepped it up and won 3-1. We also did well in Porto. We matured. We used the ball better, we were less end to end, we were getting clean sheets. The season before we had some crazy scorelines — 5-2 and 4-2 in the two legs of that semi with Roma. Last season we played with more control in our game. We felt like a much better team second time around in the Champions League. It would be nice to have two Champions Leagues under our belt but we'll settle for one.

JP: What was it like marking Cristiano Ronaldo that night?

TAA: It was a challenge! They also had Marcelo playing like a winger at the time. Isco coming over, (Karim) Benzema drifting, Ronaldo drifting. A lot of world-class players. As a defence I thought we actually did well against them. If you look at their three goals, there wasn't much we could have done about them. Three weirdly unbelievable goals and the rest is history.

JP: Did you swap shirts with anyone that night?

TAA: No. I just wanted to get off that pitch. Then I got told I had to do the drugs testing.

## **8. Being part of England's World Cup squad at Russia 2018**



(Photo: VI Images via Getty Images)

JP: You made your debut in the warm-up game against Costa Rica and then you became only the fourth teenager ever to start a World Cup game for England when you played against Belgium. Did it help after Kiev that you had something so big to focus on?

TAA: It was difficult off the back of Kiev but having an experience like the World Cup helped me massively. I had a week off and then met up with the squad. If I'd had nothing that summer it would have been a lot harder to move on. Being part of it over the course of that tournament was amazing – the camp, the vibe, the morale. It was one big family together for a month or so, just trying to get as far as we could.

JP: There's a real contrast in personalities between Klopp and Gareth Southgate...

TAA: Yeah, they're very different. You can see that with how they are on the touchline and it's the same behind the scenes. Southgate is a lot more laid back, whereas Klopp is a lot more animated and in the forefront in training, getting heavily involved. But both managers have the same ideas in terms of wanting to win and the hunger to get better and wanting to improve.

JP: They both seem to be strong on man-management. They get the best out of people...

TAA: You want to play well for them, you want to repay their trust. You want to buy into the ideas and you feel that if everyone does that then we'll be successful as a team. We've already had success with my club and I feel like we're on the way to being successful as a country too.

JP: A lot of Liverpool fans don't have any real affinity with the England team. All they care about when you go away on international duty is that you come back fit. Clearly it's different for the players...

TAA: It definitely matters to me. There's always an element of pride in being selected to play for your country. To pull on an England shirt is massive. Growing up, I always wanted to play at Wembley and represent my country, and go to World Cups and Euros, and try to win things. To be in that position currently is a big honour and hopefully it will carry on for years to come.

## 9. Celebrating a late winner in the Merseyside derby at Anfield in December 2018



(Photo: John Powell/Liverpool FC via Getty Images)

JP: That was the first Merseyside derby you started. You couldn't have scripted drama like that with Divock Origi scoring the winner in the 96th minute.

TAA: That was one of the best moments I've ever had on a football pitch. The way we won the game, the noise, the scenes after... The Everton fans had just thrown a flare on to the pitch thinking they had got a point. Alisson made a world-class save in the first half, Joe (Gomez) cleared one off the line. It was a tough game and one of the best performances Everton have produced at Anfield for years. We were lucky to get the three points in the end. It was a lucky goal but that made it even sweeter. It's a goal that I don't think anyone will ever forget.

JP: You were heavily involved. Alisson played the ball to you from a free-kick and you launched it towards the penalty box...

TAA: It was just hit and hope. We knew it was the final few seconds. The ball got cleared out to Virgil (van Dijk) and when he had that shot and sliced that volley I'm thinking, 'Why have you done that?' It ended up coming back off the bar and Divock was there to capitalise. We got away with it – that was real elation. It was mayhem in the celebrations. I didn't know that the manager had been in the middle of the pitch until I saw the footage afterwards. It was an amazing day, amazing scenes. The derby still matters. Those games mean so much to the fans.

JP: That goal transformed Origi's Liverpool career...

TAA: You could see the confidence he took from it. Over the second half of last season Divock was massive for us, whether it was starting or coming off the bench. You think about Everton home, Newcastle away, Barca home, Tottenham in the final, the influence he had.

## **10. Providing a hat-trick of assists against Watford in February 2019**



Celebrating with fellow defenders Robertson and Van Dijk (Photo: Andrew Powell/Liverpool FC via Getty Images)

JP: You became the youngest player ever to contribute three assists in a Premier League game. It's such an important part of your game and the style of this team relies heavily on the full-backs to be creative...

TAA: Yeah, that's the way we want to play. Our wide men are more wide strikers than proper wingers. So that gives us full-backs a lot of space and it means we have to go forward to provide that width for the team. It's something that me and Robbo love to do. We want to get forward, create and provide goals and assists. It's a big asset for the team. That was a special day with me getting three assists and Robbo getting the other two. I don't think that's ever happened in a Premier League game before.

JP: Didn't Andy Robertson and you have a bet about who would get the most assists over the course of last season?

TAA: In pre-season, I was saying, 'I bet I get more goals and assists than you.' By the end of the season it was a big competition. There was nothing riding on it though, just pride! It's mad to think I got three in one game and only closed the gap by one.

JP: That game against Watford was also the first time that the Kop sang your song about there being ‘a Scouser in our team’...

TAA: Yeah that was unbelievable. I was having a really good game to be fair. Everything I was crossing was hitting the targets and putting in some really good deliveries. When the fans started singing that song in the second half it was an amazing feeling. It showed they appreciated my performance. It’s always great to hear it.

JP: There’s been a lot of talk about you potentially moving into midfield at some point. Where do you see your future? In this Klopp team it feels like you’re crucial where you are at right-back...

TAA: Centre-midfield is somewhere I played when I was a bit younger and I always loved that position where you’re able to dictate games. But now I’m finding I can dictate them from right-back. I just want to play football and be out there on the pitch whether it’s right-back, midfield or wherever. I’m open to any ideas that any managers have for me. But it’s not the case that I see stepping up into midfield as part of my development or anything like that. I’m happy where I am. It’s all about where I can best help the team to win games and win trophies.

JP: The role of a full-back has certainly evolved.....

TAA: For me, it was Ashley Cole who transformed it. Then you had the likes of Patrice Evra who carried that on. Marcos Alonso is extremely attacking too. Now you’ve got us two. Robbo is more of a runner and likes to come around, I’m more of a passer of the ball. We’re two different full-backs but both effective for our team.

## **11. *That corner***



Alexander-Arnold prepares to take the corner against Barcelona which Origi scored from (Photo: Rich Linley – CameraSport via Getty Images)

JP: After that 3-0 defeat in the Nou Camp when you were an unused substitute, did you honestly believe that reaching the final was still possible?

TAA: No, not really. But it felt like we had nothing to lose. There's no shame in getting beat by Barcelona, probably the best team in the world. The feeling was that if we go and get two or three goals back and they score, then at least we can hold our heads high. It was a case of let's just see what we can do and there's no negative that can come out of this because no-one expected us to turn it around. We just needed to attack and do what we do best. We knew that if we pulled it off it would be one of the best results ever. We never had Mo or Bobby (Firmino) so the odds were stacked against us. Then Robbo got injured, Hendo got a bad knock in the first half. Gini came on and changed the game massively for us. That gave us the platform to go on and pull off a miracle. The manager always had the belief that we could do it and we did.

JP: At what point that night did you think, 'This is on'?

TAA: After Divock's early goal everyone thought, 'Surely not, but let's carry this on'. They took the sting out of the game for the rest of the first half. They had a few big chances and brought us back down to reality. They're a world-class side and they were never going to just roll over and let us score four in 10 minutes. We had to ensure that we didn't concede. In the second half we stepped it up and when Gini's second goal went in to make it 3-0, in my head I knew we'd do it. 'We've got them here,' I thought. You could just tell.

JP: Salah famously turned up that night wearing that t-shirt with 'Never Give Up' emblazoned on the front...

TAA: It was the perfect message. That spirit and unity comes from the manager. We've had so many late goals that it can't be a coincidence. We never give up on anything and the fitness levels are so good. There was so much riding on that night against Barcelona. What made it even bigger was that City played Leicester the night before and (Vincent) Kompany had banged that one into the top corner. In the space of 10 days we'd gone from being at a point where we were in the semis of the Champions League and in a great position to win the Premier League, to it looking like we'd miss out on both. We had done so well over the course of the season but it looked like we were going to end up with nothing.

JP: What about your quickly taken corner for Origi to score the winning goal in front of the Kop? Klopp described it as 'a genius moment'. Initially you walked away and then you darted back to take it...

TAA: It wasn't planned. As I walked away from the ball, I just saw that the Barca players had all switched off. I don't think anyone expected me to turn back and take it quickly. I decided to turn back and as I did I saw that Divock was free and in a great position. No-one was even looking at the ball, no-one was really focused on anything. Their keeper was out, shouting at someone, he wasn't even in his goal. There wasn't a single Barcelona player who was watching the ball or paying attention. I thought, 'I'll just do it'. I was just hoping that Divock would see it. I never gave him a shout or anything. I hit it and hoped. I don't know how, but he had the instinct to turn and put it in the top corner – unbelievable goal.

JP: That's been described as the greatest night Anfield has ever witnessed...

TAA: Obviously, we had the fightback against Dortmund a few years earlier but given the opposition and the fact that it was a Champions League semi-final second leg, Barcelona was on a different level. It has to trump everything else.

## 12. The lap of appreciation at Anfield after beating Wolves on the final day of the Premier League



(Photo: Laurence Griffiths/Getty Images)

JP: That must have been a strange mix of emotions. You broke the Premier League record for most assists by a defender in a season that day (12). You also won the game against Wolves but it wasn't enough. Despite losing just one league game all season, you came up short in the title race by a single point...

TAA: In the last 20 minutes of that game I felt really deflated. You could just tell from the mood of the fans that City were beating Brighton, and us beating Wolves wasn't going to be enough. When Brighton took the lead early on, Anfield erupted. You think, 'This is incredible, this could actually happen.' Then it was crushed in the space of 10 to 15 minutes. I was gutted. To come so close and miss out, we felt like we had let people down. Ninety-seven points should be enough to win the league but City were good enough to see it through and it was difficult to take.

JP: Klopp put an arm around you during the lap of appreciation. How would you sum up what he's done for your career?

TAA: Massive. I can't think him enough for the opportunities that he's given me. The advice, the support and the trust, he's been incredible. He's done so much for me personally.

JP: Have you had many bollockings off him?

TAA: A couple! When you need a bollocking, he'll give you one. He's not scared of doing it. But most of the time it's arm around the shoulder, wanting to help you improve. He never overburdens you with information. It's not so much that he tells you exactly what to do on the ball and says you need to pass to here and here. It's more about giving you the ideas and helping you see the opportunities to play it in behind when Mo runs in behind. Or when Bobby comes to feet, finding that pass instead, maybe. Whether it's looking to break a team down through the middle or switching the play to the other flank quickly. He gives you the ideas and then it's down to yourself to take that in or not. I always listen to what he's said because I know he's such a wise man and someone who has had such a great career. His advice has always been top notch for me.

### **13. Celebrating with his family and the Champions League trophy in Madrid**



(Photo: Simon Stacpoole/Offside/Getty Images)

JP: This is my favourite one...

TAA: Wow, what a photo, there's a lot of emotion there. It was the polar opposite to Kiev a year earlier. The best day I've ever, ever had. That photo just epitomises everything. Sharing that moment as a family was so special. Everyone who has supported me along the way. You can see it's not just the joy on my face, it's the joy on all our faces. We all won that together.

JP: Your family must have made a lot of sacrifices along the way...

TAA: There's no way I could have got to this level without my mum, my dad and my brothers Tyler and Marcell. They have always been there for me. They have given up so much in order to help my dreams come true. My dad worked in London a lot when I was a kid to help provide for the family so my mum had to take me everywhere. My dad always worked so hard and was always there for us offering support. He made sure we did well in school and that our academic work came before anything else. I can never thank all my family enough for the things they have done and the sacrifices they have made. Madrid was for them. They won that final as well.

JP: Have you moved out yet?

TAA: No! I'm still living at home. I've got no plans to yet. I'm happy there.

JP: There was a great moment after the final in Madrid when you charged towards the Liverpool fans behind the goal...

TAA: Yeah, it was when they were setting up the podium and we were having to wait around to get the trophy. It was just a rush of joy. Pure ecstasy.

JP: What about the celebrations back at the team hotel that night?

TAA: I didn't go to sleep at all. I wanted to savour every minute. A fair few of us stayed up all night and then we jumped on a flight back to Liverpool.

#### 14. The homecoming parade in Liverpool after winning the Champions League



(Photo: Nigel Roddis/Getty Images)

JP: There were close to a million people on the streets of your home city. For a local lad, what was it like being on that open-top bus?

TAA: Unbelievable. I remember the 2005 victory parade coming past our house in West Derby. That was amazing. I always thought, 'Imagine what it would be like, being on top of a bus like that having won a big trophy for Liverpool.' To get that opportunity was a dream come true. It was better than I could ever have imagined. Hearing people shout your name, everyone being so proud and wanting to celebrate with you...

JP: Did that parade really bring home what you had achieved?

TAA: You can't ever understand what this club means to so many people until you win something big. You don't see it on a day-to-day basis. We get a glimpse on match days but this was on a whole different scale. You see everyone coming out to celebrate. Every time we went around a corner, the streets were absolutely packed with fans singing. It was for them as well. It means as much to them as it does to us.

JP: Fourteen years ago it was your hero Steven Gerrard getting that kind of adulation after Istanbul. Is it strange to think that kids now look up to you in the same way that you looked up to him?

TAA: He's obviously a legend, I'm not a legend so I don't think I can be looked upon as being on that kind of level. Stevie gave everything for this club, he did so much for Liverpool for so many years. It's nice to have the comparisons to him but I've got a long way to go before I've achieved anything close to what he achieved with Liverpool. He was an amazing player who still shows his support for the club. It would be great if he came back one day.

JP: Do you still keep in contact?

TAA: Yeah, we message each other sometimes. He was in the party in Madrid but he didn't want to bring too much attention on himself. He wanted to let us lads enjoy our time. He's been a massive influence on my career. I've always wanted to be like him and to follow in his footsteps.

## **15. The mural of him close to Anfield**



(Photo: Robbie Jay Barratt – AMA/Getty Images)

JP: You must go past that mural on the team coach to Anfield every home game?

TAA: The lads always point it out. I get a few looks when we go past it! It's bigger than I thought it was going to be. It's something I'm incredibly proud of. It's something you don't ever dream of because you don't see it happen much. You don't think that something like that would ever happen for you. It's unbelievable to be thought about in that way.

JP: It's not just a tribute to what you've achieved on the field but your contribution off it as well. You've really embraced giving back to the community with your support for charities like 'An Hour For Others' and 'Fans Supporting Foodbanks'. Why is that so important to you?

TAA: As a Premier League footballer you've got the platform to make a difference in your community so I think it would be selfish if you didn't take that opportunity. It's only right. That was the way I got brought up – to always give back to those who are less fortunate than yourself in any situation possible and try to help. To be able to do that in a much greater way is rewarding for me. This is my city and my club and I want to help.

JP: Have you seen your banner at the academy yet? They have put up new ones paying tribute to their most celebrated graduates. You're now there alongside Gerrard, Jamie Carragher and Robbie Fowler...

TAA: I haven't been up to see it yet but I texted Alex to say thank you for it. We've spoken about it since. He did tell me I could have one if we won something and he's kept his promise on the back of Madrid.

JP: What about the future? What's the target for the next 100 games?

TAA: I want to help this club achieve as much success as I possibly can. We had a taste of it in Madrid and now we want more. If there was one trophy that would mean the most to the fans it would be the Premier League. It's been too long. It's something all of us are desperate to achieve and hopefully that's the next step for this team. We've put ourselves in a strong position. Now we need to kick on.

JP: And, finally, longer-term, what about wearing the armband?

TAA: Hopefully one day that will happen. Becoming Liverpool captain has always been a dream of mine. I'm learning a lot from all the leaders we've got in the dressing room currently. I watch what they do and I pick things up on a day-to-day basis from them. It's a privilege to be a Liverpool player and I want to stay here for as long as I possibly can.

*(Photo: Michael Regan – UEFA/UEFA via Getty Images)*

### What did you think of this story?



MEH



SOLID



AWESOME

**James Pearce** ([/author/james-pearce/](https://twitter.com/james-pearce/)) joins the Athletic after 14 years working for the Liverpool Echo. The dad-of-two has spent the past decade covering the fortunes of Liverpool FC across the globe to give fans the inside track on the Reds from the dressing room to the boardroom. Follow James on Twitter [@JamesPearceLFC](https://twitter.com/JamesPearceLFC) (<https://twitter.com/JamesPearceLFC>).