# Shirt restoration booms as fans seek to revive football’s vintage heritage



Last year, a poignant story unfolded involving Ian Jefferson and Bill Henderson, the founder of The Dream Shop, highlighting the deep emotional ties many fans have with their sporting memories. Jefferson reached out to Henderson to reconstruct a baseball jersey in honour of his late father, Jesse Jefferson, who pitched in the MLB during the late 1970s. The restoration journey took an unexpected turn when Henderson discovered an original match-worn jersey from 1975, which he restored and sent to Jefferson. This heartwarming act not only exemplifies personal nostalgia but also marks the burgeoning trend of sports shirt restoration, a niche yet growing market that breathes new life into cherished athletic artefacts.

Henderson, who turned his shirt restoration passion into a full-time endeavour after leaving a marketing career, has quickly become a prominent figure in this emerging field. “I’ve become the go-to guy for restoration work,” he notes, reflecting on his transition into a profession where he dedicates countless hours but finds immense joy. This sentiment resonates within the broader context of football culture, where retro kits are increasingly celebrated, not merely as items of memorabilia, but as integral elements of personal identity and fashion.

The restoration of football shirts encompasses various practices, from accurate historical repairs to more creative customisations. Phil Delves, a content creator and community partnerships lead at Cult Kits, elaborates on this: while some restorers focus on reviving shirts to their original conditions, others take liberties, adding custom sponsors or altering designs to reflect personal meanings or artistic expressions. As a result, the landscape offers a fusion of tradition and creativity, making shirt restorations particularly appealing to fans seeking unique memorabilia.

In recent years, the retro shirt market has exploded, driven by both nostalgia and a desire for sustainable alternatives to mass-produced merchandise. Many fans struggle to acquire desirable jerseys that are often either priced out of reach in secondary markets or unavailable altogether. Shirt restorers have emerged as an avenue for fans to revive their cherished pieces without the hefty price tag attached to pristine, vintage jerseys. Oliver James Howitt, the founder of OJ's Football Shirt Restorations, embarked on his journey in this marketplace, finding a significant opportunity in the restoration niche after observing a lack of service providers. Since then, his business has flourished, propelled by partnerships and a burgeoning following on social media.

Beyond the mere act of restoration, the popularity of retro shirts is indicative of a wider cultural phenomenon. Football shirts have transcended their athletic roots, evolving into significant fashion statements. With modern collaborations and visibility through celebrity appearances, the demand for both vintage and contemporary kits has surged. Collectors and casual fans alike are drawn to unique designs, successful seasons, and limited editions, appreciating the fusion of sports and fashion, wherein a mere piece of fabric embodies history, nostalgia, and identity.

However, the booming market has also attracted counterfeit products, particularly in the UK, where the estimated annual sales of fake Premier League shirts reach a staggering £180 million, equivalent to nearly a third of legitimate shirt sales. This situation reflects a potential risk in the burgeoning restoration industry, where the lines can blur between genuinely vintage items and restored replicas. The importance of transparency cannot be overstated; customers deserve to know when a shirt has been altered to prevent deception in the marketplace.

The art of shirt restoration in the UK, while still at an early stage, has the potential to expand significantly. As clubs and manufacturers recognise the appeal of retro shirts, the encouragement for sustainable practices in fashion continues to grow. With restorers offering affordable and creative solutions to revive well-loved jerseys, this trend not only preserves sporting heritage but also supports a circular economy in an age increasingly aware of sustainability.

In conclusion, the intersection of nostalgia, personal stories, and creative expression within the sports shirt restoration market presents a dynamic evolution of how fans engage with their teams and celebrate their shared history. As new players emerge and the market matures, it’s clear that the art of shirt restoration will play a vital role in preserving the past while connecting generations of fans through the fabric of sport.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6388474/2025/06/02/football-shirt-soccer-restoration/), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/1ba3797e-1bdd-4845-a3a6-7ca4de5c45bc)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6388474/2025/06/02/football-shirt-soccer-restoration/), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/8104a31c-a743-495d-835a-7d9680b8071c)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://corsearch.com/about/press-releases/counterfeit-uk-football-shirt-market-estimated-at-shocking-180-million-per-year-2024-08-14/), [[5]](https://www.fashioncapital.co.uk/insights/industry-insights/how-retro-football-shirts-are-continuing-to-populate-fashion-in-the-uk/), [[6]](https://ojsfootballshirtrestorations.com/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/1ba3797e-1bdd-4845-a3a6-7ca4de5c45bc), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/8104a31c-a743-495d-835a-7d9680b8071c)
* Paragraph 5 – [[4]](https://corsearch.com/about/press-releases/counterfeit-uk-football-shirt-market-estimated-at-shocking-180-million-per-year-2024-08-14/), [[5]](https://www.fashioncapital.co.uk/insights/industry-insights/how-retro-football-shirts-are-continuing-to-populate-fashion-in-the-uk/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[6]](https://ojsfootballshirtrestorations.com/), [[7]](https://www.grandviewresearch.com/horizon/outlook/licensed-football-merchandise-market/uk)
* Paragraph 7 – [[4]](https://corsearch.com/about/press-releases/counterfeit-uk-football-shirt-market-estimated-at-shocking-180-million-per-year-2024-08-14/), [[6]](https://ojsfootballshirtrestorations.com/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6388474/2025/06/02/football-shirt-soccer-restoration/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/1ba3797e-1bdd-4845-a3a6-7ca4de5c45bc> - Diana Al Shammari, a London-based artist, has gained a significant following for her bespoke floral embroidered football shirts. Despite societal discouragement in Iraq, her passion for football was unwavering. After fleeing war, first to Egypt and later to the US, Al Shammari maintained her love for the sport, turning it into an artistic business. Now based in London, she works in the advertising industry but dedicates significant time to her embroidery business. Her intricate designs, inspired by fashion and the heritage of football clubs, have attracted high-profile clients like singer Joe Jonas and footballer Jules Koundé. Al Shammari began posting her work on Instagram, where she amassed over 70,000 followers. Her creations, each taking several days to complete, have led to collaborations with major brands such as Adidas, Puma, and Nike. The embroidered shirts, reflecting her identity and passion, have become sought after for their unique fusion of femininity and football culture.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/8104a31c-a743-495d-835a-7d9680b8071c> - Football shirts have transcended the stadium, becoming an integral part of mainstream fashion. Modern collaborations and public appearances by celebrities have fueled this trend, increasing demand for both vintage and contemporary kits. Collectors and fans are actively seeking unique and classic shirts partly driven by nostalgia and the frequent changes in club kits. Classic designs, successful seasons, and limited edition releases boost a shirt's value. Collectors are advised to rely on trusted retailers to avoid fakes. The trend's rise in fashion showcases the cultural fusion between sportswear and daily wear, making football shirts iconic investments.
4. <https://corsearch.com/about/press-releases/counterfeit-uk-football-shirt-market-estimated-at-shocking-180-million-per-year-2024-08-14/> - The market for counterfeit UK Premier League football shirts has been valued at £180 million per year, equivalent to almost a third of legitimate sales. Criminals are producing and selling an estimated 16.2 million shirts annually, with an average price of £11 each, compared to legitimate sales of 10 million shirts per year at an average price of £76.50. This means that, on average, counterfeits are being sold 86% cheaper than legitimate football shirts, and there are over one and a half counterfeit shirts in circulation for each real shirt sold. As a result, Premier League clubs and kit manufacturers are losing an estimated £246 million in football shirt sales per year, not including the significant brand damage that such counterfeits deal to a club’s reputation.
5. <https://www.fashioncapital.co.uk/insights/industry-insights/how-retro-football-shirts-are-continuing-to-populate-fashion-in-the-uk/> - Football shirts have become more than just athletic wear; they have evolved into fashion statements. Retro shirts are in demand, with fans often preferring to wear shirts from previous seasons or decades. Manufacturers have capitalized on this nostalgia by re-releasing classic kits or offering new designs inspired by historical kits, allowing fans to wear a piece of their team’s past. This trend reflects a broader cultural appreciation for football history and its integration into contemporary fashion.
6. <https://ojsfootballshirtrestorations.com/> - OJ's Football Shirt Restorations offers a comprehensive range of top-quality services tailored to meet all your shirt restoration and customisation needs. Whether you require sponsor and name set replacements, professional stain removals, or bespoke shirt printing, they have you covered. Using only the finest materials available in the UK, they ensure that each service is performed to the highest standard, guaranteeing exceptional results. Your satisfaction and the quality of their work are their utmost priorities. Trust them to restore your shirts with the care and precision they deserve.
7. <https://www.grandviewresearch.com/horizon/outlook/licensed-football-merchandise-market/uk> - The UK licensed football merchandise market is expected to reach a projected revenue of US$ 1,320.5 million by 2030, growing at a compound annual growth rate of 6.4% from 2025 to 2030. In 2024, the market generated a revenue of USD 916.3 million, with sports apparel being the largest revenue-generating product segment. The market's growth is driven by increasing fan engagement, the popularity of football, and the rising demand for official merchandise.