Two and a half years ago, a few hundred of us sat in the back room of The Sandon [public house], and we weren’t talking about who we were playing or who we were gonna sign. Instead, we were talking about something that we never expected to be – about the future of our football club; about what’s happening inside our football club and what we can do to fight for our football club. Such talk in the past had always been about how Newcastle fans or other clubs – not Liverpool. I’m not old enough to remember Peter Robinson and John Smith, but we all know and we’ve all heard of ‘the Liverpool Way’. On the 6th February 2007, two businessmen – and I use that phrase in the loosest possible sense – bought into Liverpool Football Club. They came with it all: the billionaire status, we all know now that they are the poorest billionaires ever. They came with the promises, the words, the spiel. It all soon began to unravel. Tom Hicks told us how it wouldn’t be like the Glazer takeover at Manchester United and they’d be no debt on the club. We did believe him. George Gillett told us that they’d be a spade in the ground in 60 days and we’d see work on the new stadium soon. We believed him. They told us how they’d back the manager; respect the traditions of our great football club, our heritage, our history. They told us that they’d be custodians – we believed them.

Jay McKenna (2010) ‘Our Independence Day’ speech, 4 July

The fight which many Liverpool supporters undertook to displace Tom Hicks and George Gillett’s ‘Kop Holdings’ from the ownership of
the club they support was drawn out over three years but provides an example of how fan movements can achieve – at least some – of their aims. The action involved multiple forms of mobilisation, spread across several movements. On 15 October 2010, the club’s ownership rights were sold to fellow American John W. Henry’s ‘New England Sports Ventures’ (NESV) for around £300m, but with two-thirds of that fee going to pay off Hicks and Gillett’s acquisition debt, which had risen from £175m in February 2007 (Conn 2010c). Thus, the capital return that Hicks and Gillett received at the point of sale was much lower than the £500m that they hoped to achieve (as a minimum) when they declared the club to be for sale just six months earlier (Hunter 2010).

By detailing the Liverpool fan mobilisations during Hicks and Gillett’s tenure at the club, this chapter begins to unravel this story by unpacking the dynamics of local and transnational supporter protests by looking at the formation and protests of both first-wave movements such as ShareLiverpoolFC, AFC Liverpool and, centrally, Spirit of Shankly (SOS) and later, second-wave groups such as Kop Faithful, Save Liverpool FC (SaveLFC) and the reconfigured SOS. In doing this, an argument is presented that shows the complex intertwining of transnational and local repertoires of action.

As has been established in the earlier chapters of this book, Liverpool is a football club of genuine international standing in that it has countless numbers of supporters across the world, has won the joint highest number of English league titles (at the time of writing, tied with Manchester United at eighteen each) and five European Cup/Champions League crowns (a feat only bettered by Real Madrid and AC Milan). It also features highly in any of the criteria defining revenues generation and brand value/appeal, as discussed in Chapter 2. However, while Liverpool has been successful in recent years – at least when compared to many other clubs – most of its major playing victories were won in previous eras. So while the club won the Champions League in the 2004/05 season, its last English league title was in the 1989/90 season.

The interim years saw enormous changes to the structures within football giving rise to the EPL as the ‘global football league’. In December 1991, Jack Walker took the major shareholding at Second Division Blackburn Rovers and bankrolled its way to English Premiership (the EPL’s name before it was rebranded) Champions in 1994/95, after breaking the British transfer record twice and recruiting Kenny Dalglish, who had left Liverpool as reigning Champions in 1991, to manage the playing team. While this ‘sugar daddy’ phenomenon was not entirely new to football, it marked a change in the way