

Five minutes of your time, please – with Frank O'Brien

Five Minutes of Your Time, Please is a series of interviews with people from different areas and eras within the game. This one features Frank O'Brien, former Wealdstone Coach and now Children's Service Officer and Academy Coach at Chelsea FC.

and become a Coach?

I broke my leg in 1980 and was struggling to recover. Someone mentioned to me about a coaching course and the thought appealed to me.

I had never had much exposure to coaching as such and it certainly interested me - I

From then on we had kept in touch and we often spoke about the game and we shared our experiences. I had been sacked at Leighton Town which very much hurt and it looked likely that I was going to start the following season back at Kingsbury with the Youth Team.

Frank, you joined Wealdstone in the early days of Gordon Bartlett's reign. What was on the football CV before that?

I played for Kingsbury Town from about 1976 until 1977 then in 1977 I moved on to play for Cessnock City in New South Wales (Australia).

After about three years over there I came home and re-joined Kingsbury Town where I played until 1986 – then I became Youth Team Coach and three years later, Manager.

After four years I moved on again to take over as Manager of Leighton Town in 1993...then I got the sack!

What made the decision for you to start your qualifications

thought it might help me further down the line once I stopped playing.

How did Gordon get you involved at The Stones – what convinced you that Wealdstone was the right move?

I'd met Gordon in 1982 on the same coaching course. He was at Yeading I was at Kingsbury.

It wasn't a problem and at the time which wasn't a problem and at the time I actually thought that was probably best for me as I had, had a bit of success as youth coach there previously. We had a couple of good runs in the FA youth cup and thought maybe that was my strength.

Wealdstone had appointed Gordon and Leo and the club were about to start their season in the Isthmian League Division Three. Wealdstone was at the time and still is one of the biggest clubs in Non League and then Gordon contacted me and



5 Minutes of your time

Roger Slater

asked if i would consider joining the club as coach. I felt it was a great honour then and I feel the same looking back – it was a real honour to be asked to work at such a club. The memory of their Non League double was still fresh in my mind and here was I being offered the opportunity to join the club.

Whilst slightly apprehensive myself Gordon as always was completely reassuring and felt I could certainly help the club move forward.

The club had some success with you in the Management Team – what are your memories of that time? Any regrets?

There are nothing but good memories throughout my time at Wealdstone. The players, the people who worked for the club and the fans were all good to me and it was and still is a great club.

Regrets? perhaps that we did not get automatic promotion first time around, in that first season when we finished fourth...

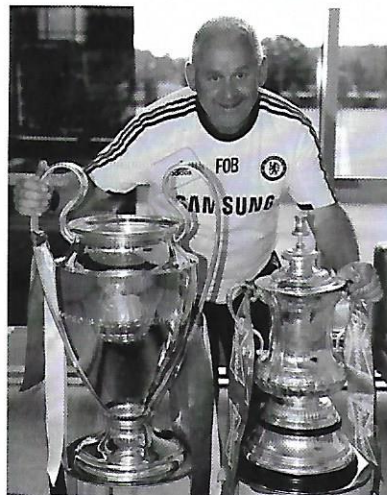
Later, you got involved with the Youth set-up, coaching in the PASE scheme, both with Wealdstone and later Boreham Wood. What are the biggest differences between coaching adult and youth players?

I think when working with any group of players you must make

the session player focused. I think you must ensure that the practice is challenging, interesting and is improving the player.

Once players understand that what you are doing is to help them improve. In my experience they will have you!

The question the coach must ask himself is 'why am asking the players to do this practice. What



is the purpose?' Sometimes not all players get it and you have to show a bit more patience. You may have to explain the reasons in a bit more detail.

Sometimes adult players may test you to see what you got but again in my experience once you start working and they realise you have a bit of knowledge and can get it across, they're in.

What do you look for or try

and instill in a younger player when you are coaching them?

They have to be self motivated, be enthusiastic and have a good work ethic. That they can show in a match situation, but in their manner and in conversation they have to have a willingness to want to improve their game and their understanding

Since you left Wealdstone, there have been positions I believe at Arsenal, West Ham and some fifteen years at Chelsea on the coaching side and also coaching and developing the next generation of coaches and as a coach tutor at the FA. Which is the most enjoyable; working with players or working with coaches?

I was involved in the pro game alongside my time at Wealdstone and I have been at Chelsea since 1996, so I've been working with players for a long time.

Working with both players and with coaches is enjoyable. However working with players is probably my preference. Seeing them develop and go on to the top clubs is very satisfying.

Some Coaches however, think they can coach based on a coaching course or manual and think they have arrived – twenty five years on and I am still learning on a daily basis.

You've also been a featured

5 Minutes of your time

Roger Slater

speaker at International Coaching Conferences. Is that something you enjoy, and is there much cross fertilization of ideas between the coaches and speakers present?

I enjoy speaking about the game with anyone who equally has a love of the game. I have been lucky to meet football people from all over the world and tap into their knowledge and their experiences, no matter at what level they work at. That experience itself is valuable.

You have done some scouting of players and opposition. What would be your job of choice in the game?

That's it!

Either scouting players or the opposition is the job I would like to move upto at some stage .

Do you get the opportunity (or the time!!) to watch games purely for pleasure? Do you find yourself studying players and thinking 'if only he'd done this and not that...'

I watch as many games as possible.

Sometimes I want confirmation of how a team sets up, what they do to change if they go a goal up or a goal down. Changes in the tactics or formation mid-game. A great example is Barcelona - watch how quickly they get the ball back when they lose it.

Looking at players; what's he good at when attacking, what's his reaction when the ball is lost,

what is he doing prior to receiving the ball. Paul Scholes always scanning the game before he gets it...

Do you pay much attention to the top levels of the game? Is there much that can be learned from that level and applied day to day?

I certainly do.

In my experience, the very best players have a desire to work the hardest and have great self discipline on a daily basis. They train as they play; Ashley Cole, John Terry, Frank Lampard, no matter what the perception is, they have worked their socks off to get where they are and to maintain their level of performance. The three of them no matter who you support have been outstanding players for both club and country.

Finally, given a magic wand would you change the way Coaching is structured in the UK - through Youth Systems right up to the top of the game? Also, is there one change that you think would make a difference in the short term?

An understanding from coaches that if they are talented and think they can improve players, they work with the very young players for a period of time as part of their development. They should become good at that before they are allowed to move up the ladder.

Coaches must be encouraged

to be open to other ideas and be prepared to learn from others. Sometimes you have to accept they do it better. A great example is Holland. They have played in three World Cup Finals since 1974 and European Championship Finals as well. Their clubs have won the Champions League on several occasions too. As a nation, they continue to produce world class players .

Spain similarly - what has been their philosophy to get where they are now. Over the last couple of years look at Belgium. How is another small nation producing so many top players?

The answer maybe opportunity, being prepared to give players a chance

In the short term, I think that we should limit all teams in the Premier League to a maximum of three overseas players in the starting 11. The rest of the squad should be made up of players developed within the clubs.

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Five Minutes of Your Time is one of a number of articles produced for the blog at www.2ndyellow.com where there is a regular column on Wealdstone.

**Pics - Roger Slater
Graham Smith**