

5 Minutes of your time

Roger Slater

Five minutes of your time, please – with Simon Garner

Five Minutes of Your Time, Please is a series of interviews with people from different areas and eras within the game. This one features Simon Garner, Blackburn Rovers stalwart for fourteen years who picked up his only Championship Winners Medal as a player when Wealdstone won the Icis Division III Championship in 1997. Now, Simon is an active participant in "Rovers Trust" as they try and gain control of Blackburn Rovers FC.

Simon, for a generation, you were synonymous with Blackburn Rovers - what was on the football CV before you joined them?

I joined Blackburn straight from school. I had the choice of Blackburn or Scunthorpe but it became an easier decision as Blackburn offered me £16 a week compared to an £8 offer from Scunthorpe! Blackburn were also in a higher league.

It wasn't long before you were



a fixture in the starting XI at Blackburn – are there any particular memories from those early days?

I remember scoring my first league goals in the first team, away at Fulham and we won 2-1. There was also a great team spirit at the club, all the players got on well with each other and that made it easier to settle in.

You scored 194 goals in 474 games at Blackburn over fifteen seasons in the Second Division – did you turn down opportunities to move into

Division One in that time?

No. I was always under contract with the club and they told me that if a better club came in for me they would let me know. I never got the call!

There was more loyalty between players and clubs in those days, not like today when player's agents get their players moves if they are unhappy at a club. We didn't have agents

when I first started in the game. I'm not having a go at agents though, I think there are some very good ones, but like most things there are some bad ones as well!

In your final season, you were part of team that won promotion to the new Premier League but you moved on by the time the new season started. How big a wrench was it to go?

Actually, it wasn't too hard. The manager, Kenny Dalglish had told me I could stay but I would

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not get a game....they had also signed Alan Shearer!

West Brom wanted to sign me and they were a big club with Ossie Ardilles as manager. I had played with him at Blackburn and I knew his style of play would suit me and that helped to make the decision.

I got the first serious injury of my career at West Brom – a broken ankle, then Ossie got the sack and Keith Burkinshaw (the ex Spurs manager) took over. I knew straight away he didn't want me in the team so I moved on again, this time to Wycombe Wanderers where Martin O'Neill was manager.

He was a brilliant manager, certainly one of the top 3 I played under. We had a great team who had just won promotion from Non-league – the Conference - and we got promoted in our first season via the play offs at Wembley.

When Martin left Alan Smith (the ex-Crystal Palace manager) took over. Déjà vu! Once again he didn't fancy me so I left and joined Woking. Alan Smith was the worst manager I played under in nearly 20 years as a pro footballer!

Had you ever thought of moving into Coaching or Manage-

ment?

No, although I did coach my son's under 11 team for one season!

After such a long career was it hard to step back into the Non-League game? What was the motivation – what kept you going?

It wasn't hard at all. I just wanted to play football for as long as possible

And what finally made you sign for Wealdstone? Did you know anything about the club before you joined?

I didn't really know anything

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about the club but I met the manager, Gordon Bartlett and he sold the club to me straight away the first time I met him. From then on.....

Whilst at Wealdstone, the club received a Seven Day approach from Dagenham and you left to join the Daggers only to come back a fortnight later – what were the reasons behind that?

Simple. It was the worst decision I ever made in football. They were playing in a higher league but I knew as soon as I got there I had made a massive mistake. I phoned Gordon straight away and lucky for me he took me back to Wealdstone.

Looking back on the season and a half at Wealdstone, the fans have some great memories – do you? Is there anyone you are still in touch with from that time?

I think the fans at Wealdstone are brilliant they stick with their team through and through. As a team, we had a great spirit at that time, in fact it was one of

the best 'dressing rooms' I had, had in football.

Unfortunately, I'm not in touch with anyone from the club - that is the bad bit about football, you lose touch with former team mates as you change clubs and move to different areas. You all go your separate ways.

After such a long career, your first love must surely be Blackburn Rovers. It must upset you to see the club going through its present trials and tribulations?

In a word, Yes.

I could go on for ages about it but it really upsets and annoys me the way the club is being run by the present owners. The sooner they sell the club the better.

That's why I am involved (Non-Executive Director and Ambassador) with the Rovers Trust. We want to buy them out.

The top level of the game is now so money-orientated that only the mega rich can hope to compete. Fact or Fiction?

Fact.

The Premier League to me is like three separate divisions. There are five teams competing for the Champions League places, eight who battle out the mid-table positions season after season and the rest fighting relegation.

A side who escapes relegation may be able to move up into the next bracket, but to move into the battle for the Champions League and the title?

Finally, there's a magic pill in a bottle on your desk. You can take it and it will take you to any part of your career where you can change one thing.

Where and why?

You know what? I don't think I would change one thing about my career. I enjoyed every moment.

More information on Rovers Trust can be found at <http://>

Pics -

Roger Slater &
Graham Smith

