

## 5 Minutes of your time

Roger Slater

# Five minutes of your time, please – with Steve Tapley

Five Minutes of Your Time, Please is a series of interviews with people from different areas and eras within the game. This one features Steve Tapley, former Wealdstone defender, now Essex Assistant Development Manager, Chelsea Football Club - Foundation

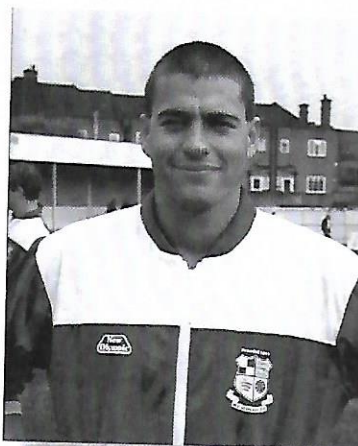
**Steve, your football career started in the pro game – what was your career path and how long had you been involved with pro clubs before you took the step into non-league?**

I left school and went straight to Fulham FC as an apprentice and I did my first two years cleaning boots and picking up kit, then signed my first professional contract.

I had six years with Fulham FC in all before heading into non-league with Wealdstone FC.

**Can you remember how you felt? Was the aim to play or to try and play yourself back into a League club?**

I had a ruptured both my achilles tendons and didn't think I would be able to play professional football again but when the opportunity came to train with Wealdstone FC I took it. In



fact, I grabbed the chance as my body wouldn't be under the same stress.

I loved it at the club from the first minute I joined and was happy with my form and at the time I felt that if it was a stepping stone back to a league club then even better.

**You had quite a long spell at Wealdstone, first joining for the season after the side won the FA Trophy and Conference 'Double'. Was that a difficult environment for a new player to come into, as the previous season quite a tight knit squad had done so well?**

No I didn't have any problem with joining the squad after their brilliant previous season.

All the lads were great with me and brought me straight into the fold. I'm still mates now with a few of the boys even after all this time.

**You also played through the last game at Lower Mead and the first season at Watford.**

**How did those situations impact on the players?**

I loved playing at Lower Mead, the atmosphere was great especially against Enfield FC and Barnet! The lads really enjoyed home games there.

Playing at Watford was nice from a playing point of view but it was not the best choice for the club and the supporters. That period at the club was difficult for all concerned with managers and players coming and going and it was difficult to settle into a routine.

**What was your playing career post Wealdstone? Did Coaching and Management figure in your plans at that time?**

After Wealdstone FC I joined Chelmsford FC, my local club

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► Steve with Brian Hall

close to where I lived in Essex. It was a big club and I was happy to be there but my wife was pregnant with our first child and half way through the season she had complications and my son was born premature. I had picked up another achillies injury and with this I decided to stop playing and spend time with my wife and son who spent a lot of time in hospital. He's a very healthy 6ft man now though!

I loved coaching and always wanted to it in some capac-

ity and even as an apprentice I coached young players. I didn't have a plan to go into management I just wanted to complete my coaching badges and look at it then.

**Post player, you've been involved at West Ham and Chelsea – have there been any other steps on the path?**

I have been involved in Football in the Community schemes for about 25 years now and have loved every minute. It means I have been involved in football

my whole life which is great as I have always been a massive football fan.

**How closely does FITC work with the main club? Is there an opportunity perhaps for players you see to 'be moved' into the main Chelsea Youth system if they are good enough of catch the eye?**

Yes.

Our Chelsea FC Foundation does work with the main club and there are pathways for players to have trials with our Academy

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► Steve with a very young James Smith

if coaches and scouts think the same about the young person.

**Alongside the coaching that you give to players what would you look for in a young player – what would make them stand out from the crowd?**

The best young players have to have good technique, be athletic and understand football intelligence – they have to show that they can 'think' the game. Most of all, the player has to have a desire and be passionate about the game – and have a personality!

**You are also involved in the Youth System at Bowers and Pitsea FC. Is this a 'first**

**step' towards "Steve Tapley, Manager" of a club climbing up through the leagues or...**

Yes It is.

I'm a good age for it, I have the right qualifications and I'm good at getting the best staff around me and building football teams.

I will be looking to manage at a decent level from the start of next season. Watch this space!  
**How much has the game you are involved in now changed from the game you played?**

The game hasn't changed that much apart from the pitches (better), stadia (better) and the non-tackling!!

**Given a magic wand, is there**

**one change you'd make to the game today?**

To give the referee more respect and stop the back chat!

**Finally, 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?**

The top level is full of quality and young people learning to play football can see this on the TV all the time.

It means that

football is in most people's lives regularly and it offers so many young people the opportunity to have fun, make friends and be inspired.

Players and clubs are role models and they need to remember this to make a difference.

Five Minutes of Your Time is one of a number of articles produced for the blog at [www.2ndyellow.com](http://www.2ndyellow.com) where there is a regular column on Wealdstone.

Pics - Roger Slater  
Graham Smith