

## Five minutes of your time, please – with John Smith

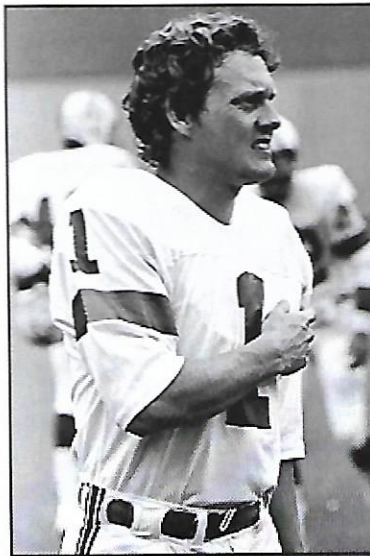
Five Minutes of Your Time is a series of interviews with people from different areas and eras within the game. This one features John Smith, former centre forward at Winchester City and Wealdstone, though you may know him better from a 13 year career as a kicker with the New England Patriots and Chanel 4's groundbreaking NFL coverage in the eighties!

**You joined Wealdstone for just four matches at the end of the 1972-73 Season from Winchester City – in fact a 'Stones career that lasted just one week – how old were you at the time and how did that come about?**

I was 24 on December 30th 1972. I scored a goal for Winchester City in the home game against Wealdstone and played in the return match later in the season. Following the game, the Stones Player-Coach, Terry Dyson did a deal with the club to sign me, so I ended up a Wealdstone player.

**What was the football career up to that point?**

I had turned down a football



apprenticeship at Swindon Town at 16 and I went to King Alfred's College and Southampton University to get a degree in Education, though I did continue to play for Swindon's Reserves for two years, before I joined Winchester City. Then came Wealdstone. Terry Dyson was going to hook me up with QPR at the end of the 1972-73 season – that was part of the reason I signed - but I ended up trying out with the New England Patriots and I

didn't come back to England.

**Do you have any memories of Wealdstone or the players at that time?**

Ha! I am sixty four and senile! My memory is almost non-existent, though I do remember training with the club and I enjoyed a brief but busy time playing there.

**Though you were expected (by Wealdstone) to play a prominent part the following season, and there was the promise of a QPR trial, you still went to the USA. Was the National Football League (NFL) something you'd looked to try for a while? Was it a real ambition?**

During the first week of May 1973, an agent from the USA called me and asked me to go to Boston to try out as a Kicker with the club. I went for the weekend, stayed an extra week, and to my surprise, they offered me a contract. I came back to England, got married on June 2nd, went on my honeymoon and decided to go back to the

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States in July.

It wasn't planned as I always thought I'd play professional football in England and teach. My strength was shooting and I was able to use that ability to kick in the NFL for over ten years.

**The following season, the Wealdstone side you had left went on to win the Southern League. Did you stay in touch with the club at all at that time?**

No. I was so involved during my first season in the NFL I didn't have the time or the energy to keep up with English soccer!

**Offered a contract, what did John Smith, Semi-Professional Centre Forward make of suddenly becoming an NFL**

**professional place kicker?**

When the Patriots gave me a three year contract, teachers were getting paid about the equivalent of \$5,000 in England, and Professional players in the old First Division were getting about \$10,000. The Patriots offered me an \$18,000 a year contract. I thought, 'That's a fortune just to kick a football. It sounds great – and it was – but in the NFL you have to compete year on year, the contract is not guaranteed as it is in soccer. You are paid to produce and if you don't, you are fired or cut, however being in the NFL is an incredible experience as American Football is the No1 sport in the States. In my first year, I was No2 in the league, a huge star in Boston and soon doing TV Adverts for

'Weetabix' and Boston's Department Stores!

Life in the NFL is like Disney – fairyland, but I know that I would have been a success in the English Premier League had I not made it in the NFL...

**How did the Chanel 4 TV link come about?**

I suppose I was English and in the right place. I covered the NFL for Channel 4 for five years and the shows were a huge success until the contract was bought out by Sky TV and everything changed.

**When was John Smith Sports formed? Was that something that started during your pro career or subsequently?**

John Smith Sports Centre began in 1988 although I had been



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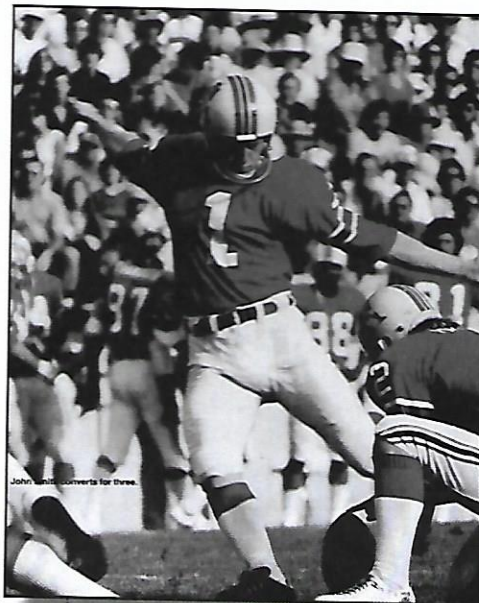
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running Soccer Camps and Training Programs since I arrived in the US in 1973. I started a company called 7 Star Sports running them in New England. I always wanted to teach and coach, so it was a natural progression to run my own business.

At the time, soccer was new to the US – there were no professional or licensed coaches. Because of my notoriety with the Patriots, I was able to utilise my fame to expand and market the business. I ran the Soccer Programmes in the NFL Off-season between February and July for the Boston Globe, Providence Journal and Worcester Gazette – the three largest newspapers in New England.

**The profile of Soccer in the US has been raised dramatically in the last ten years or so with players coming over to the UK, the improvement in the National Side and the success of the USA Ladies Team, but it still doesn't seem high on the radar as a domestic sport in the US. Do you think it will ever have the profile of the NFL, NBA or Baseball?**

No. Soccer will never be more



John Smith converts for three.

than the fourth or fifth sport at the 'pro' level, however it is the biggest participation sport in the USA – and 60% of the players are women.

**Looking back over your career(s), if I grant you two wishes, you can change one thing in the past and one in the future. What would you change?**

I wouldn't change a thing. In 1976, my best buddy at college, Mickey Mellows – who played for Portsmouth for many years – came to visit me and tried to get me to go back and play Centre Forward for them.

At the time, I was very successful in the NFL and earning a lot more than he was at Pompey. I stayed.

The game has given me some incredible opportunities – teaching American people English Soccer and teaching English people American Football through Channel 4 and I have developed a family business teaching my favourite sport of soccer.

Check out the website at [www.johnsmithsports.com](http://www.johnsmithsports.com)!

PS John's career in the

NFL is well covered on the web (which is why it's not repeated here) but there is also an unfortunate link to John Lennon... <http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/otl/news/story?id=5880125> will tell you the story.

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