

MEET THE NEWISH STONES: MARVIN MORGAN

Royal Blue Review

'It's great to be back and I'm so pleased for Gordon that he's had some success'



IT'S a sign of the galloping years when a player like Marvin Morgan returns to the club - someone you remember as a raw, gangly teenager - and you realise that a decade and a half have passed and he's now in his early thirties!

'Yeah, it's amazing - so much has happened and yet here I am again, back at Wealdstone and beginning to realise that I have 'come home' - I'm really enjoying playing football again' said Marvin last week.

He had just scored the opening goal at Weston Super-Mare in our 2-1 win - a week after joining on loan from Havant & Waterlooville and his first goal in a Stones shirt since October 2004 when he netted in a terrific 5-1 FA Cup win over Boreham Wood. It's been 12 long years since the club decided to accept Yeading's £3,000 offer and launch the then-20-year-old on an upwards trajectory towards the Football League.

'Why did I leave? I suppose I wanted a challenge, to play higher-level football and Drax Hippolyte (the Yeading boss) convinced me he could push me on to greater things. Wealdstone also had Jermaine Beckford waiting in the wings so the club let me go... I was talking to Jermaine

Get in! Steve Foster captures the marvellous moment at Weston when Marvin bagged his first goal in a Stones shirt for a dozen years

just a few weeks ago and he said how strange it was that life sets you off in these directions, for my leaving was his chance to shine. He's not done too badly for himself has he!?' laughed Marvin.

'But I'm so pleased to be back at the club. Players perform so much better when they want to play for the manager and everyone wants to play for Gordon Bartlett - I've know him for 15 or 16 years and he's not changed at all.

'It's great that he's had some success in the last half dozen years because there were certainly some low times early on. There must have been otherwise I wouldn't have got in the team at 16!'

You could write a book about Marvin's experiences since he left

the White Lion Ground that autumn of 2004. But let's go back to when he first signed as a 6ft 4in, 11-stone-dripping-wet youngster.

It was at the end of the old millennium. Marvin Morgan was playing for West Herts College in Watford as a precocious 16-year-old, scoring goals for fun when a college coach (ex-Stones centreback Richard Horner) recognised his potential. Marvin played a few games for our PACE team, along with fellow West Herts goalkeeper Charlie Leary, in early 2000 and soon they were being spotted again.

'It was funny' said Marvin. 'I remember sitting in the changing room before a PACE match, and

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everyone was talking about the first team, the Wealdstone first team, and how amazing it would be to get a chance to play men's football. And then suddenly, after I'd played a few PACE games and scored a few goals, I was playing for the first team. A dream!

Marvin's debut was off the bench as a substitute at Chertsey for a Ryman League Div One game on April 1st, 2000. He says: "I got smashed by this defender, my very first touch of the ball, and he glared at me 'Get up you little kid'!

But Marv quickly proved he was no April fool. He started the next game, wearing the No.8 shirt up front with Mickey Swaysland and Brian Jones in a 2-1 home win over Worthing.. and netted his first goal for the club two weeks later in a 1-1 draw at Leatherhead. The kid was raw, but talented!

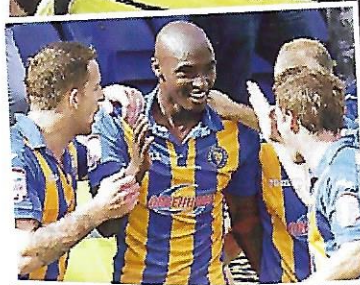
He became a fixture in the team for the next three and a half years as a foil for people like Swaysland, Brian Jones, Brian Hammatt, and then Richard Jolly and Ben Alexander.

His Wealdstone stats of 64 goals (including one penalty) in 154 starts (192 in total) is not a bad return and there were mixed feelings when high-flying Yeading came in with their offer - especially when he scored the winner in our defeat at The Warren in the league game later that 2003-4 season.

BUT there was a bit of heartache for Marvin too, as he was cup-tied (having played in our own FA Cup run to the 4th Qual Rd) as Yeading continued their own FA Cup adventure that went all the way to the Third Round Proper, and a home tie with Newcastle. The game was staged at QPR and Yeading lost 2-0 - but were rewarded



Goals everywhere he's been: Marvin celebrates scoring for Aldershot (above with Scott Donnelly) and below left for Shrewsbury, Hartlepool (last season) and Plymouth - just after his son Miles was born



when Toon invited them to play in a pre-season friendly at St James Park the next summer. Yeading were beaten 3-1 but Marvin scored.

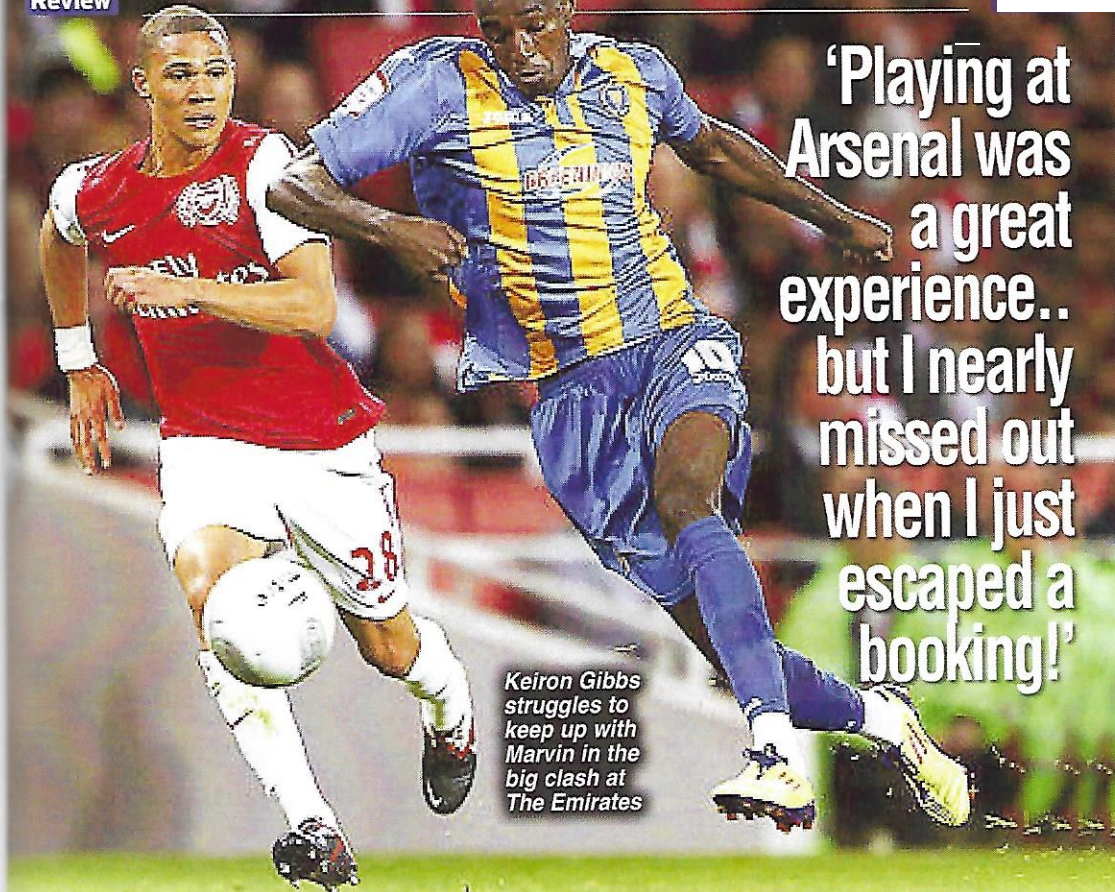
"I had a good partnership up front with DJ Campbell and the offers were coming in for both of us, but I was probably a bit overpriced. DJ was sold and went on to have a good league career, while I went on a free to Woking in the Conference National, at the age of 24. I had a good season there and Aldershot - who had just won promotion into League Two - paid Woking £60,000 for me, their record transfer fee," said Marvin.

He found himself making his Football League debut at Accrington Stanley, 'a terrible place!' But Marvin scored 15 goals that first season with Scott Donnelly, who had played a season with the Stones ten years

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Keiron Gibbs struggles to keep up with Marvin in the big clash at The Emirates

'Playing at Arsenal was a great experience.. but I nearly missed out when I just escaped a booking!'

ago, providing assists for about ten of them.

'The fact that Scott was at Havant & Waterlooville had a lot to do with me signing for them last season' said Marvin.

But let's return to early days. Marv had three years at Aldershot, and a short loan spell at Dagenham, before League Two Shrewsbury snapped him up in 2011. It heralded the best period of his career.

'That first season at the Meadow, I was on fire' said Marvin. 'I scored seven goals in the first ten games, and we even went to Arsenal in the Carling Cup and went 1-0 up - I helped set up the goal for James Collins. We lost 3-1 in the end but it was a

great experience in front of a 46,000 crowd'.

The Shrews had beaten Derby and Port Vale on the way to the Emirates Stadium, but Marvin so nearly missed out as he was just one booking away from missing the Arsenal clash. "Man, it was scary. I went into a tackle and the referee was reaching for a card - but I was saved by our skipper Ian Sharps, a big Scouser, a lovely guy, who convinced him not to yellow card me!"

The Gunners had made their worst-ever start to a season under Arsene Wenger - and defeat that night might have tipped the balance with the Arsenal board finally listening to unrest among disgruntled fans.

So Marv helped save his job!

Under Graham Turner, Shrewsbury finished the season as runners-up behind Paolo Di Canio's Swindon Town, playing some sparkling football with Marvin playing up top with either Terry Cornell or John Collins.

'That was the best team I've ever played in. If we played with just one up front we had Lionel Ainsworth and Mark Wright as the wide players' said Marvin. 'People ask me if I prefer to play as a lone striker, but it depends on so many things. So long as everyone plays the system well, it doesn't matter'.

But as often happens - and certainly happened to Turner after he'd won promotion with outsiders

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Hereford a few years earlier, the Shrewsbury team that started life in league one was weaker than the one that won promotion. Missing the loan players that had sparked their season in 2011-12, the Shrews plummeted back down and Marvin's form reflected their failing fortunes.

He moved to Plymouth Argyle in 2013, playing 37 games in two seasons but scoring just two goals in an injury-plagued spell. A brief loan spell at Hartlepool United followed last season - including the winner on his debut v Northampton Town - before Marvin was off again, cross-crossing the country to end up at Havant & Waterlooville. He had talks with Gordon Bartlett in the summer but a permanent move was out of the question as soon as wages were compared!

Right then, let's get down to asking Marvin some of the usual questions.

Where do you live? Well, I'm based both in Watford but I've also got a place in Newcastle, where my partner Jerri is from.

Are you married, any kids etc etc? No, not married but we have an 18-month old son Miles, who is into absolutely everything!

Do you have a job outside football? Yep, my own fashion company Fresh Ego Kid (freshgokid.com) which I started because I was getting bored in the pro game, after training. I've always been into fashion and wanted to give it a go - and it's going well. Problem was that when my football wasn't going so well people latched onto it as an excuse, saying that I wasn't committed. Yet I had a manager to look after the business so that wasn't the case at all... social media has a lot to answer for.

What are your attributes as a striker? Well, strength and pace - maybe not as pacy as I was five years ago, but the pro game has

helped my link-up play... when I started out I was selfish on the ball - you probably remember that from my early days at Wealdstone - but professional coaching has taught me that you are more successful playing as a team.

Last goal you scored? Ha! Easy one this, last week at Weston Super-Mare.... great delivery, through ball from Scotty Daves (it was probably a mishit shot) and I tucked it away.

Last car you bought? A BMW 3-series.

Last Trophy won? Runners-up in League Two with Shrewsbury, four years ago

Last time you were sent-off? Oh that was crazy! Playing for Shrewsbury at Portsmouth in front of a big crowd, I scored after 55 minutes, was booked after 55 and sent off after 56! Pompey kicked off after the goal and I tackled their guy in the centre circle and was booked, though it wasn't a foul. We all got very angry and we surrounded the referee, but because I was at the front of it he showed me a second yellow for 'intimidation'. So I had 15,000 people singing 'Cheerio cheerio, cheerio....'

Last holiday you had? 'Didn't have one last year because Miles was just born so it would be Mexico in 2014.

Best player you've ever played against? Djouru at Arsenal in that League Cup tie. He beat me up all game! I had to go out wide looking for the ball, cos I just couldn't operate inside. Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain made his debut in that game and you could see he was pretty special too.

Best goal you've ever scored? Ah, there's one on You Tube with me scoring for Woking against

Rushden & Diamonds, dribbling half the length of the field before slotting in.... and one for Shrewsbury against Port Vale, nutmegging someone after a long run and whipping the ball far corner... and one for Aldershot against Oxford in a 1-0 win outside the box...

What about for Wealdstone against Aylesbury in 2001? A run across their box and a 20-yard blast with the left foot? No, I don't remember that to be honest!

Worst moment in football?

When I was sent off at Bury for Aldershot - I'd just missed a penalty when I put in a striker's tackle and caught their player late. I wasn't very popular.

Favourite restaurant? Nandos.

Favourite meal? Nandos

Biggest influence on your career? None of my family played,

so it would probably be my mum. She ferried me around and believed in me.

Best mate in football? Ben Alexander. He was at Wealdstone of course about 10 years ago, but he's got a great job in the City in IT, and he just plays power-league now, and

sometimes for Oxhey Jets. He should have been a star in football, but had bad luck and injuries at the wrong time - he definitely had more talent than me or Jermaine.

That reminds me of a great Wealdstone memory - the game against Thurrock in the FA Trophy one Friday night way back when. The gaffer picked Ben up front with Jolls, and stuck me on the wing. I couldn't believe it - no way was it going to work. But it worked a treat and I got the winner I think. Great days! **Interview: Tim Parks**

