

# We had some great players and a decent pitch when I was at the Stones ... but most of all I loved the kit!

## SIMON QUAIL answers a few pertinent questions..

BY ROGER SLATER



**L**ANGUID striker Simon joined Wealdstone in September 1994 during Fred Callaghan's second season as manager.

He joined a side that on its day could beat anyone, but with support dwindling at Yeading and fast approaching the last throw of an expensive dice, those days became less as the season wore on. Simon however was one of few bright lights.

Having signed from Sutton United for around £3,000, Simon made 44 starts for the club and 2 appearances off the bench, scoring 24 goals along the way, including a goal on his debut against Bromley in the FA Trophy. The club dropped three divisions and changed leagues and managers at the end of that season and Simon - like almost the entire squad - moved on, though in his early thirties there were less games in front than behind him and he soon retired from the game.

A spell 'on the buses' followed and led to an in-joke at Wealdstone. If you were waiting for his bus at the stop, he'd drive up, reverse around the bust stop, go past you, turn round and do it again before he finally let you on - a tip of the cap to a skilful and entertaining player that made an impression even in a short time at the 'Stones.

Subsequently, Simon passed

his NVQ in Early Years Education and has spent almost 20 years now as a Sports Teacher, initially at Rushmore Primary School and more recently at Daubenev Primary School in Hackney.

**Now to the questions...**

**You joined Wealdstone in September 1994 - What else is on the CV?**

I started at Barking and after a couple of years moved onto Redbridge Forest - remember these were decent clubs at the time - but Redbridge I didn't enjoy as it was very cliquey



in the dressing room. I moved onto Leyton Wingate and then Dartford before Sutton signed me, and under Alan Gane I had a good spell there, but at the start of the '94-5 season, he was under a bit of pressure and his way out was to bring in new players. To be honest they weren't as good as the players they were replacing - me included... We lost Pete Burns. He walked in one day and said his dad had won the Pools and he was off - that was the last we saw of him! Gary Thomas too, a great mid-field engine, Dom Felton, Ricky Evans - we had a great team spirit and it was being broken up. The previous season, Woking had offered Sutton £20k for me and they'd turned it down.

I signed for Wealdstone for about a tenth of that! When I left at the end of the season I had brief spells with Hayes and then Hendon before I joined (the late) Steve Browne and Graham Roberts at Slough. Hendon sticks in the mind...the manager was an ex Sutton player and I went there for my first game in late November. It was freezing and the kit man put out short sleeve shirts...now you'll know from Wealdstone that I wear gloves most of the season. I went to put a shirt on underneath and was told that the Manager wouldn't allow it. At that point I knew I wouldn't

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be there long. Two weeks I think I lasted! I also had a spell at Tooting and briefly Bromley, but it just wasn't giving me the same feeling. With that and my daughter Brandi becoming a priority in my life, it wasn't long before I packed up..

**What brought you to Wealdstone, a club in some turmoil at the time?**

Fred Callaghan. He knew how I played and he sold me his vision of a club that only wanted to progress. It was a decent set-up even with the issues off the field, and he told me how he wanted to play, and his vision of where the club was going (and it wasn't Division 3!).

For me it was good to have a chance to be progressive and to enjoy my game again—I play better when I have a smile on my face, and I'd lost that at Sutton, and Ganey was sacked at the end of the season as well.

At the end of the season at Wealdstone, we hadn't achieved what we could have for a number of reasons but off the field the decision was made to drop down though I knew Gordon Bartlett wanted me to stay on...

He rang me; he explained about the drop and I said that I couldn't take the money I was on to play in Division 3 – he said it wouldn't be the greatest football either and to be honest I didn't want to drop down that far. I always wanted to play at the highest level – it wasn't even about the money. It never has been with me, it's about playing the best I can at the best level I can, playing with commitment and heart. I was about 30 and I wanted to stay at the same level.

**First impressions?**

Actually, very good. I'd left Sutton who had good support and knew that Wealdstone fans, even in the lower numbers at Yeading were passionate about their team. It was a good dressing room too, with some decent players when I

**STRIKE PARTNER** Tim Buzaglio, whose Stones career was ended by a tackle at Clevedon, enjoys his famous moment ... netting a hat trick as Woking KO'd West Brom from the FA Cup in 1990



arrived and a few more soon following. It was a decent pitch too and that mattered.

**Fred as a Manager?**

Calm at all times, called it as he saw it. He wanted us to play football not just lump the ball, he tried to instill in us the play out from the back and he would only bring in players that he thought would make us improve.

**Stones fans are known for "sharing their opinions" at some volume – how aware were you of that personally or to others in the team?**

You get a lift from the fans and they can make a difference when it's not going well. Generally the support was excellent – the number that travelled midweek for away games was great and we felt the fans' disappointment if we'd played well and lost, but the fans would be there till the end. Nowadays, if your team is losing with ten minutes to go people start to go home. What's that all about? We're in it together

**Were there any highlights?**

One of the highlights was the kit! I loved it and it was good to wear (warm too....ed.). The atmosphere at home some days was fantastic, and as I said the support...

The low point was the worst tackle I ever saw and one that destroyed our season, when we lost Tim Buzaglio away at Clevedon.

It was by far the dirtiest tackle I ever saw, and I was close by. Tim

had the ball and turned this big lump. As he moved away the lump ran and jumped onto the back of his calf and that was it. He only got a booking for an assault.

That really had an effect on us. With Tim on the field we were playing well and he was on fire. He took some of the pressure off too – I knew if he was up front with me, I could always find him with a pass and he'd do the rest; shoot, score or even lay the ball back, but when we lost him we lost a lot of confidence too.

We went from being a winning side to a struggling side because of the knock we took that night.

After the game, the players were genuinely shocked at what had happened and what they had seen. I think that when Eduardo was injured at Arsenal it had a similar effect.

**Off the field?** We had a good spirit and it was good to have a Chairman that came in, like most of the officials. Not faceless, but part of the club and the atmosphere. I always appreciated that, so say Hi to Paul Rumens!

**Are you involved in football at all now?**

Yes, I turn out for Walthamstow Vets. We've won a few titles over the years but we had a really good side – the likes of Reading's Michael Gilks, Lee Harvey and Steve Browne, RIP, have all been teammates. Picking up a few injuries on the way (an Achilles at 37!) a cartilage injury means an operation just before Xmas, and the side has changed a bit now – I'm the last of the old school and it's not the same anymore with the young players coming through!

The game now seems to be all about fitness and stamina and as an entertainment I think football is worse for it....

**Thanks Simon, you're on the list for the next Legends game....**