

THE STONES INTERVIEW BY TIM PARKS



WEALDSTONE v CONCORD RANGERS 30.11.2019

Dave Parratt



Left: Dave (centre, with moustache) heads the ball away in the epic 0-0 draw with Hereford at Lower Mead in 1977. Above: The Parratt family with his boys Jake (at back), Dean (left), Craig right, daughter Jo and wife Jackie (far left)

Stones head boy Dave tells the untold stories of QPR and the FA Cup run of '77...



Dave Parratt was a Wealdstone giant in his time - a converted centre forward who found his true vocation leaping and heading the ball back at the other end of the pitch.

One moment summed him up for me. The Stones were playing arguably the biggest match in our history, away to QPR in the FA Cup third round and there were over 16,000 inside Loftus Road. Rangers wanted to put their stamp on the game early on and their skipper John Hollins played the ball high into the inside-right channel for Republic of Ireland striker Don Givens to use his

muscular presence against the Southern League side's back four.

Givens shaped to protect the ball - but Parratt climbed magnificently early to meet it a good six feet above the surprised striker and power the ball back into the Rangers half.

Talk about putting down a marker!

There was a collective intake of breath from the South Africa Stand crowd and Dave said: "I was determined to let them know what I was about and win that first ball... to let Givens know he wasn't going to have an easy ride".

It set the tone for a terrific first half performance from the Stones against a QPR side who - despite an array of stars like Stan Bowles, Leighton James and Hollins - were struggling in the First Division, just a year after finishing runners up behind Liverpool

But then: Disaster. The Stones conceded a free kick out by the right hand touch line and that wily old warrior Hollins drove the ball across the box at the School End of the ground, where the majority of the Wealdstone support (including myself) were gathered. There seemed a moment's hesitation in the non Leaguers' defence and there was Givens, rising unopposed to head the ball towards

Chris Lightfoot's right hand post... it seemed a routine save for the Stones keeper but we watched in disbelief as the ball squirmed from his grasp and into the net.

"What nobody has mentioned is that Chris called for the ball when it was in the air" said Dave Parratt from his St Neots home a few weeks ago, when I finally managed to track down the former centre-back. "He called and so I never challenged. It was a mix-up. At the time I thought I could beat anybody in the air, even First Division centre forwards, so that was a calamity really.

"And it didn't get any better. We were great in that first half and Keith Furphy nearly scored. Brinky (Steve Brinkman) was all flicks and tricks, the best player out there and me and Fred Barwick kept it tight in the middle.

"Rangers were much better in the second half but they had the luck and a bad referee on their side. Mick Leach won a penalty from me when he overkicked the ball as I came in to challenge - then just fell over. I didn't touch him. The third was decent, a strike from Leighton James but their fourth came after our keeper was clattered from a corner and they put away the rebound. But I must have

CONTINUED OVERPAGE

STONES INTERVIEW CONTINUED



done okay as I found out, years later, that QPR had sent scouts along to watch me in the next couple of games. Nothing came of it though”.

It wasn't a bad cup run to be part of: The best in the club's 120-year history.

“It was brilliant. But to be honest, even the wins over Hereford and Reading on the way to QPR, it was just a case of doing your job. We were well organised - I joined the club as a striker but then we had two centre backs injured and me and Willie Watson dropped back into the back four.

“What a player he was! I could stand up for myself but the opposition were actually scared of Willie - he just went round kicking the **** out of them! I would win the stuff in the air and he'd win everything on the ground. He could play a bit too.

“In my second season, the FA Cup season, Fred Barwick dropped in and he was a tiger. Willie was back in midfield then and we played football the right way, playing the ball in to him and Brinky, or Furphy and Bobby Moss.”

So would you rather have stayed as a No.9 or as a No.5? I asked him.

“I was more effective as a centre half, you're coming onto the ball all the time and attacking it and I was very comfortable with that - but when I joined the club I was playing up top with George (Duck) and that was a great experience.

“My job was to flick the ball on, or hold it up on the ground but you knew that if you got the ball in to George he was going to score. The man was class. It's only when you played up front with him that you knew how good he was.”

Dave, now 65, was brought up in Boreham Wood and was playing Sunday football in the mid-1970s when his club's trainer recommended him to Bedford Town.

The Southern League Prem side (same level as the Stones) were managed by Barry Fry and centre-forward Dave went straight into the team - but within a few months the flamboyant boss had moved to moneyed fellow SLP outfit Dunstable Town. Fry persuaded George Best and Jeff Astle to turn out at Creasey Park, and later that season he also persuaded Dave to switch to Dunstable.

“But that was a mistake- the money ran out, Dunstable folded and I think Barry felt a bit bad that he'd left me in the lurch. He said he'd find me another club- and that summer I moved to Wealdstone. The best move I ever made”.

Dave made his Stones debut in September 1976 and quickly struck up a partnership with the legendary George.

“Me and (my wife) Jackie, and George and Sue would go out socially and I'm actually Godfather to George's kids. “The most

LIGHT FANTASTIC! Above: QPR's international stars **Leighton James (far left)** and **Don Givens** applaud **Stones keeper Chris Lightfoot** for an amazing save in the second half of the game at Loftus Road. Our defenders **Paul Thomas** and **Dave Parratt (foreground)** seem to think the **Rs stars** are being a bit patronising, and they weren't wrong.

Right: The R's programme report on our Cup tie, which we reproduced for a friendly v QPR three years ago

WEALDSTONE v CONCORD RANGERS 30.11.2019

IT'S A RECORD! THE VITAL FACTS ON RECENT GAME

GROUND	v. WEALDSTONE	
DATE	Home	
ATTENDANCE	Saturday 7th January 1978 (K.O. 3 p.m.)	
PLAYING CONDITIONS	16158	
FIXTURE DETAILS	Pitch rather heavy and sanded. Cool afternoon	
TEAMS	F.A. Challenge Cup (3rd Round)	
GOALS	QPR Wealdstone (20th in Div 1)(Southern League)	
RESULT	Parkes Shanks Gillard Hollins Howe Cunningham Wallace Leach James Bowles Givens	Lightfoot Thomas Fursdon Watson Parratt Barwick Ferry Brinkman Furphy Duck Moss
RANGERS REPORT	Givens James Bowles (pen.) Howe	(1) 4 (0) 0

AND THE PRESS SAID

Wealdstone fought hard to hold their own during the first half but First Division experience eventually won the day.

A goalkeeping error by 32-year-old PE teacher Chris Lightfoot after only seven minutes signalled the end of Wealdstone's Cup hopes. It was Don Givens who caught Lightfoot out, nodding a Hollins free-kick past the slow reacting keeper. Lightfoot made amends by pulling off a sensational save from Leighton James but could not stop Rangers cruising to a fourth round place. Rangers certainly breathed a sigh of relief when Givens opened their account. Wealdstone had a couple of shots from Rangers' reject Keith Furphy that caused flutters and Brinkman looked dangerous. But Rangers took complete control in the second-half. After Givens hit the bar with a header, Bowles set up a chance after 50 minutes, crossing for James to net the second goal. Bowles made it 3-0 from the penalty spot after 63 minutes after David Parratt brought down Mick Leach. If the penalty decision looked harsh, Wealdstone were equally angry over the fourth goal which brought loud protests from Lightfoot and Watson. Both players felt that the goalkeeper was fouled before Ernie Howe scored his first goal for Rangers 20 minutes before the end. (Dennis Signy "News of the World".)

THE best-known Rangers v Stones game was of course in January 1978 when our teams met at Loftus Road in the FA Cup 3rd Round - the furthest we've ever gone in the competition - and happily their programme carried a report and details of that momentous afternoon in their following home issue.

There was also a small cutting from the 'Michael Wale Report' in that same programme, complaining about the price of top flight players. Coach Frank Sibley is quoted on their wages being "as much as £500 a week". Okay, that was nearly 40 years ago but a lot of NON-LEAGUE players earn similar amounts these days....

memorable game around that time was the FA Cup first round tie at Reading- though I don't remember much of it! We were winning a lot in the air and the Reading manager told their centre back "do him" and the next thing you know I'm laid out cold by an elbow.

"It got a bit tasty after that and John Arnold, who'd come on as sub for me, drop kicked one of their players out by the touch line- he caught him so high his feet were around the bloke's chest. He was sent off, then Willie waded in and we were down to nine men.

"But in the end we lost 1-0 when Lenny Prince hesitated on the goal line when he had all day to clear the ball."

The Stones were struggling in the league in the spring of 1977 and boss Alan Fogarty signed the clever defender John Downes from Stevenage and brought in right back Paul Thomas from local football, while swopping over Byrne's and Parratt's roles in a re-jigged side. It was a winning formula and the team lost just once in 16 games to finish the season in 14th place.

It was a similar story in 1977-78 after the cup run - 22 games unbeaten saw the club finish 8th, ensuring its place in the newly-formed Alliance Premier League. The squad is pictured below with Dave (circled). But he was to play no part in the Conference days.

"I honestly don't know the whys and wherefores of my move to Aylesbury United" he says. "I was called into the club at Christmas 1978 and told that I was being transferred to Aylesbury- was I sold? I had no say in the matter but I was getting one and a half times the money I was on at Wealdstone, despite playing a couple of leagues lower. They had

some investment, some decent players and we only missed out on the league title on the last day. I was there for two years- then it was off to St Albans City in the Isthmian League and back to playing up front.

"I scored seven in eight games but then my baby son was rushed to hospital - I was fined for missing training, even though I'd told the club what was going on. I had a row with the manager and that was me finished!

"Then it was off to a Stevenage for a couple of games, then to Barnet in the Conference under Barry Fry for a couple more. My mates wanted me to play in the Herts County League which I did for a few years - even going in to management at Cuffley - but I stopped playing a long time ago.

"My three sons - Jake, Craig and Dean - have all played at a decent level and in fact the last time I saw Wealdstone play was about ten years ago when Jake was in the Potters Bar team for the FA Trophy game at the Vale.

"That ended in a draw and I was furious with the Wealdstone player - Chris O'Leary I think it was - who broke Jake's leg with a really bad, late challenge in the replay. I tried to get to him in the changing room afterwards".

I spoke to Jake soon after the chat with his dad and he was more upset with the referee. The match report didn't even mention the leg break - "that's because the idiot ref only saw it as a yellow card - I'd just scored a goal to bring it back to 2-1 when the tackle came in, and it broke my shin pad in two". It must have been all the more infuriating as it was O'Leary who then headed the clinching goal in our 3-1 win.

Dave was working as a window cleaner - with John Arnold! - during his Wealdstone days but later became a stagehand at film studios around the London area. He retired last year and now lives in St Neots, Cambridgeshire.

"It looks like the team are having a good season so I'll be down to watch them soon... today for the Concord game in fact!"



Wealdstone's first team squad are pictured back row—(left to right): Alan Fogarty (manager), Steve Brinkman, Paul Thomas, Ian Cranstone, Keith Furphy, Pat Ferry, Vince O'Kane, Alan Furdon, Ron Sharp (Remedial Gymnast). Front Row: Fred Barwick, Dave Parratt, George Duck, John Watson and Bobby Moss.