

Michael Phillips

Today's player interview is a little different as Michael Phillips - our summer capture from Maidstone who has just signed a two-year deal - quickly emailed me back his questions from the team coach on the way to Weymouth. I love a quick response!

We later had a chat and he revealed his early career at Premier League Crystal Palace...

How did you come to join the Stones, Michael?

Me and Stuart Maynard spoke on the phone a few times last season when he was managing at Billericay with Dean Brennan - he wanted me to come and play for them. Things at Maidstone (where I was playing) were up in the air after Harry Wheeler came across as manager. I knew Maynard and Dean were still interested in the summer and I was happy to come to Wealdstone - there was no bad blood with Maidstone. I left there on good terms and had a good relationship with the club and fans. (Michael was actually voted the fans' Player of the Year last season)

I know you were at Crystal Palace in their youth system, but what was the most memorable game you've played in? 'Well, I went with the Palace first team squad to the Asia Trophy in Hong Kong two years ago - what an experience! There were around 40,000 in this huge stadium and I came on as sub for the last 35 minutes playing against the likes of Philippe Coutinho, Salah, Mane, Firmino, Trent Alexander-Arnold etc. That was my debut game and I also played against West Brom in the same tournament. We lost 2-0 to Liverpool but beat West Brom in the third



'We've got some great players and I can see us getting a long run going.. we don't fear anyone in this league'



Left: Michael tussles with Liverpool's Philippe Coutinho in the Asia Trophy two years ago. Above right: He is distraught as Divok Origi settles the game at 2-0; and (right) he gets on the ball against West Brom.

Far left: Michael and Dean Brennan



Who was the stand out player in that side? The stand out has to be Wilfried Zaha

Can you compare the current Stones side with any team you've played in? That's hard because I've been in different situations - at Crystal Palace I was coming up through the youth, Maidstone was my first year in men's football. But I would say that we have some outstanding players with big Ross, Greenie and Billy Clifford, Dennon and Jacob Mendy all really good - and we have a good bench too! That makes a difference because we have that strength to make up for the injuries you're bound to get.

Do you have a job outside the game? I currently just do coaching here and there, and I'm hoping to get involved with the Wealdstone under-23 set up next year

Did you know any of the players here before you signed? I've never ever played against Wealdstone but I know Michee from Palace, and then Maidstone while I used to play against Dennon when he was at Watford. And against Connor Smith too. And Ross was at Maidstone for a short while so yes, it was good seeing them all again

How do you think you're settling in? I'm really enjoying myself at the Stones - great facilities, superb supporters and a good group of lads and the staff. The pitch is ledge. I just want to play at the highest level possible and the best way is to keep playing well.

At the moment we're looking like we can string a really good runs of wins together, and if we can do that we have a great chance of making the play-offs or better. So far I've seen nothing to frighten us - we lost to Dulwich but I don't really know why as we missed a lot of chances - Weymouth weren't bad but probably Chippenham we're the toughest as they kept a good shape and were awkward.

'We've got some interesting games coming up and Welling and Havant & Waterlooville will be a test. But we're just enjoying growing as a team at the moment and don't fear anybody'

place game also 2-0.

Have you always been a midfielder?

No, I started in Sunday league football as a striker and worked my way back. Played most of my career in centre midfield but I've also played in many positions like including centre-back, right-back, as a No.10 behind the striker and on the wing - also making an appearance in goal!

Have you scored many goals in senior football?

I've scored a fair few goals, though most I've scored in a season was 14 from midfield in under-18s but I'd expect to score at least 4+ a season

What's your most memorable goal?

That was scoring against Woking in the FA trophy to help Maidstone get to the quarter final last season - I was playing at right back and underlapped inside, getting on the end of a high ball and heading over the keeper.

What was it like at Maidstone? Did you get on with the plastic pitch?

'It's not the best - I'd much rather play on grass and the surface at The Vale is great'

Whereabouts do you live? Is it tough to commute across for training and games?

'I've been living in Lewisham all my life but currently I've been living in Croydon for two years - and yes it's a long way! I travel by train to get to training during the week but I go back with Nick Arnold and to games as he lives round the corner from me.

Do you have any family who play the game?

I can say no one in my family can kick a football, unfortunately!
What's the best team you've ever played in? Well that was the Asia Trophy trip with Crystal Palace playing alongside Wilfried Zaha, Johan Cabaye, Townsend, Bentekke, Van Arnholt, Jason Puncheon... a strong side.



MICHAEL PHILLIPS

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