



FIND A WHOLE WORLD OF MEMORABILIA AT THE WEALDSTONE MEGASTORE: www.wfcmegastore.co.uk

It's Stuart

'Good recruitment is not just about signing players.. they must fit our strategy for the football club'



Dean Brennan (fourth left) is shown a yellow card by the referee at Chelmsford watched by the stern-faced Stuart (2nd left) and Tony Waugh... and the not-so-stern-faced Kirk Rayment!

You'd think that someone who played through two decades - indeed, the 19th and 20th centuries - for Wealdstone might have racked up more than just 11 appearances.

Stuart Maynard is now, of course, the Stones' assistant manager but 20 years ago he was with us briefly as a player in that awkward 1999-2000 season.

Trying to perform in that Wealdstone side must have been about as far removed as you can get from the current smooth-passing team!

"I'd just been released from pro football, from Watford who'd just been promoted into the Premier League.... but I quickly worked out what non-League was all about" said Stuart when I nabbed him for a chat last week. "I'd actually gone to play for Groningen in the Dutch league in pre-season but I was 19 years old and homesick

and was back in two months. In Holland it was all very technical, lots of ball work but then suddenly I'm back in England, playing for Isthmian Prem St Albans in a midfield that was pretty much by-passed. We were just picking up scraps - nobody would pass to you".

Bob Dowie was the Saints boss, and he allowed Stuart to dual-sign for the Stones after he'd been out injured for a few months. He was working as a builder and stood on a nail - and the wound became infected.

"If you look at that Wealdstone team now - it was the one that should have been promoted to the Ryman Prem the year before - there were some decent players. Rocky Baptiste, Lamby, Jonah, Dom Sterling, Noel Imber... I remember thinking that the squad was as good as St Albans.

"Maybe fitness levels were a bit lower, but that was the only difference".

Maynard

Stuart, a neat and tidy midfielder, scored just one goal in his seven starts (and four appearances off the bench) in a 1-1 draw at Worthing but it was a long stale run of a dozen games without a win for Gordon Bartlett's side and soon he would be rejoining St Albans.

"I then had some good years at Aylesbury United, including a good FA Cup run which ended in an unlucky 3-0 defeat at Port Vale (details above). In the aftermath of that, the manager Cliff Hercules was forced out and his assistant Terry Back asked me over to play for Enfield. It was a bit of a shambles there with the chairman pulling the plug after just six games. There were just six of us on contract and the rest were kids so we just muddled through - but the best thing about my time there was meeting Deano (Brennan) for the first time.

"He was playing against us for Hitchin and had scored a hat trick, but we had a bit of banter on the pitch and he said 'you should come and play for us'.

"So we had a beer after the game and I went and signed for them. Robbie O'Keefe and then Kerry Dixon were the managers".

So did you learn anything from Kerry Dixon to take into management? "Absolutely nothing!" he laughed. "Well to be fair he was a big character but he'd earned his money at Chelsea and was really just in it for the enjoyment. He had our respect but tactically, no he wasn't the best!"

I suggested that he probably didn't have the sort of commitment that you need, watching football four or five times a week to keep on top of the game.

"Well that's true. Deano and I watch more like five or six games a week - tonight for example Dean's at Corby and I'm at Farnborough. Always checking out players.



Stuart (left) in action for Aylesbury in the classic FA Cup 4th Qual Rd tie ten years ago ... Stones won 4-2 and Ryan Ashes (right) grabbed the clinching goal

"The clubs all know what we're up to and these days most of them at Isthmian and Southern League level don't have players on contract, so you can come in on a seven day approach. We also have 'Scout Seven' which is full-match video of National League games so we can work things out tactically."

Stuart and his family live in North Watford - and Deano not far away in Leighton Buzzard - so they're pretty much in each others pockets.

"We were on the same wavelength even when we were players" says Stuart. "In the dressing room we were talking about containing other teams and the ways to exploit them - then when we were together at Hemel Hempstead seven or eight years ago the chairman Dave Boggins asked us to take over

CONTINUED OVERPAGE

STUART MAYNARD CONTD

temporarily when the manager left. "We did okay - kept Hemel up in the Southern Prem by getting ex-Watford mates like Paolo Vernazza and Jamie Hand to sign, and Luther Blissett in as coach - but he appointed Colin Payne that summer. Payne lasted two years and then we were asked again - on a permanent basis. And it kicked on from there".

The new management team has obviously had specular success since pitching up at Grosvenor Vale.

So what is the magic ingredient when it comes to player recruitment?

"Hard work" says Stuart. "Getting out there to watch players. And realising that the players you sign have to fit our strategy for the club, and have the right character".

Me and Deano were technical players and we wanted to bring that philosophy into management. If you look at the Conference National now, it has definitely become more physical.

"People say that clever players like Billy Clifford and Greenie wouldn't cut it but they can play anywhere - a lot of our players could play in the Football League, I'm convinced of it.

"And Michael Phillips - I was so happy he signed for us from Maidstone. Crazy really

that he's at this level. That took a lot of work, but he makes the team tick. He allows people like Billy to play - in that very first pre season game when Michael made his debut, we noticed that no-one was running at our back four any more. He's hugely important to us.

"The danger of course is that League clubs will come in and try to take players off us. But this is such a good group - great togetherness and no cliques - that they are really enjoying what is happening here. They want to be a part of it"

And is the management philosophy a non-favouritism one? "Absolutely. You saw that Sanchez (Watt) started the season and then Mendy came in. And Dennon started the season on the bench. If you play well you keep the shirt, it's as simple as that".

It's a philosophy that has extended to the No.1 shirt, with Aston Oxborough retaining the gloves from Jonathan North despite being a loan signing.

"The Ox has been outstanding and although Northy is a legend and a terrific keeper he's not been able to get back in. Now he's out on loan and getting match fit again - the Ox made that one mistake against Havant, taking one too many touches but he's learned from that. He's a one-touch player now!"



STUART MAYNARD

Pic: STEVE FOSTER aqueoussun@gmail.com