

FIVE MINUTES OF YOUR TIME

BY ROGER SLATER

LEO MORRIS

Back in the 2012/13 season Leo took five minutes out of his busy Wealdstone schedule to talk to Roger Slater. In honour of the great man the following is the interview in full.

Leo Morris, footballer. What was on the CV?

Nothing too spectacular really, I spent all my playing career at Hounslow FC playing in the Athenian, Hellenic and Southern leagues before moving into management at the same club.

I can still remember my debut as a 17 year old, scoring one and making the other in a 2 - 1 win over Herne Bay. I wasn't the most skilful player but I was fit, worked really hard in every game and wasn't afraid to get stuck in, the game was far more physical then and I'm pretty sure not too many of today's non league players would have coped with the way the game was played then. That's not to say there weren't clever footballers around in those days, but they also had to be able to handle the physical side as well.

I get frustrated somewhat when I see how good some players are today but just don't seem to have the passion and desire to go further in the game, I just wish I had had the ability of some of the players around today.

I played alongside some very good players in my time there, one of whom will be well known, if not that popular, with Wealdstone fans, Dave Howell. He was a fantastic player and competitor as his career in the game testifies.

I played against Wealdstone in the Southern League and still chuckle when I recall my manager's instructions before one game at Lower Mead, 'Leo, I want you to sit on Robin

Wainwright and stop him playing'. Yeah, right, he was probably one of the best players I've ever played against and I doubt if he even noticed me all game!

At the same time as I was playing for Hounslow I played for British Airways, who I worked for, in their midweek team on a Wednesday afternoon and their Sunday team. So I was actually playing on a Saturday, Sunday, Tuesday if Hounslow had a midweek game and Wednesday afternoon, then training on a Thursday, and players reckon they are tired today if they play twice a week! The BA midweek team was very strong actually and had two or three ex pros playing.

The great advantage of working and playing for BA was that I have played all over the world and a game that stands out most was playing in Miami against Fort Lauderdale strikers when George Best played for them. We were both skippers of our respective teams and when we shook hands at the toss up, that was the nearest I got to him again until we shook hands at the end!!

When did your path first cross with Gordon Bartlett and when did you first work with him as Assistant / Coach?

I knew of Gordon rather than know him personally, when he was manager of Southall, I remember going to watch their home leg of the FA Vase semi final the year they got to the final.

We first got together as a working partnership at the start of season 1986/87 at Hounslow. The previous season I had taken over as caretaker manager when Alan Humphries resigned after a league defeat towards the end of the season. We actually finished the season well and ended up in a promotion position which would have taken us back into the Southern League.

I say would have because that promotion was denied due to some ground grading issue (sound familiar!!). Anyway, I expected to be given the job on a permanent basis but during the summer the Chairman rang me and said that the club had appointed Gordon Bartlett. I

didn't really have a problem with the appointment as Gordon was starting to get recognised as a good young manager, but I guess I expected to be told face to face rather than over the telephone, after all I had been at the club for 16 years.

In fairness to the club, on their appointment of Gordon they did ask him to consider having me work alongside him in recognition of my services to the club so we met up, discussed how we might work together and decided to give it a go for a season and see how it progressed from there. I reckon it must have worked out ok as we are now in our 27th season together, that's more years than most of our current squad have been alive!!!

That first season saw us finish runners up and League Cup winners, the first success Hounslow had had for many years.

Had Coaching and Management always been in your future?

I hadn't really thought about what I would do when I finished playing and I moved in to management by default rather than design. I was still playing when Dai Jones and Colin Barnes took over the management reins and half way through the season they asked me to take over managing the reserve team, I can't remember why the vacancy arose or who was in that position at the time I'm afraid, far too many years ago! I was happy doing the job and thought my playing days at a senior level were over until Dai and Colin left and Alan Humphries took over. He spoke to me and said that he thought I still had something to offer as a player and wanted me back in the first team squad so my management career was put on hold, he even made me skipper of the team. Not a great comeback though, I was sent off in the first game of the season. I still remember what it was for as well, foul and abusive language directed at the referee!!!! Yeah I know, completely out of character!!!

When Alan resigned in the changing room after the defeat I mentioned earlier, the Chairman came into the changing room and spoke to all the players and offered me the Managers job there and then.

You're an established team with Gordon, but did you ever want to take up the



reins yourself and be solely responsible for a side?

As I said I hadn't really given management much thought and I 'fell' into it rather than planned to get into that side of football so I can't say I had a burning desire to be in charge as such. I guess what made it easier was the fact that Gordon and I got on so well together right from day one and the immediate success we had. Gordon was always willing to listen to my views and take on board any changes or ideas I had so I never felt the need to go on my own. I'm also a massive believer in loyalty and working together with people for the benefit of the greater entity and as the years together progressed I was more than happy to support Gordon and 'watch his back' so to speak, over the years I've probably dealt

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FIVE MINUTES OF YOUR TIME cont..

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with a few issues he didn't even know about, leaving him to get on with the job. I think it is important that the man in charge can trust and rely on the team backing him up and not have to worry that they might be undermining him in any way.

In any case I got my fix of being the main man by managing a Sunday team then managing at youth level for nine years also on a Sunday morning!

Were there opportunities? If so, why did you turn them down?

After we had been at Hounslow together for three seasons Gordon was offered the job at Yeading and he immediately asked me to go with him and this was the only time I have ever had to think hard about what I was to do because as soon as Hounslow knew Gordon was going they offered me the job. The move to Yeading was a great opportunity to take a young club forward and I really had built up a great relationship with Gordon but it was still difficult to leave something that had been a big part of my life for nearly 20 years but in the end I knew that it was time to move on.

It happened again when we left Yeading to come to Wealdstone. Although they offered me the job they knew that Gordon and I had become a real partnership, we'd been together nine seasons by then and they knew really that I wouldn't take up the offer.

The other thing to point out is that Gordon had discussed the move to Wealdstone with me completely before he made his final decision. If it helped make his decision easier I committed myself to sticking with him whatever he did.

Talking about the move from Yeading to Wealdstone a minute, as I said Gordon and I sat down and discussed it fully. I remember sitting in the managers office at Yeading and listing all the pros and cons of leaving/staying at Yeading and joining Wealdstone. At the end of that discussion there was no real logical reason to leave Yeading who were in the Premier Division of the Isthmian League playing on a great surface with big, warm changing rooms with built in treatment rooms and having both indoor and outdoor (grass and astro) training facilities. We'd been to

Wembley, won a couple of Championships and won a few cups as well during our six seasons there. Why would we leave all that to move to a club, albeit a club with massive history and support, who were struggling financially, ground sharing at a run down Edgware, had a team of over paid and under achieving big named players and to top it all drop down to Division Three of the Isthmian League!! No contest we had to leave Yeading!!

How would you describe the relationship with Gordon outside of Training and Matchdays?

Gordon and I are different types of individual, we don't really mix socially although we did a bit more when our children were very young but we rarely see each other outside of the football environment nowadays. To be honest I think I can switch off from all things Wealdstone far easier than Gordon, I am more likely to be down the pub on a Sunday sinking a few ales (alright, a lot) having a gamble on whatever sport is on TV and Gordon will be on the phone checking on a player or our next opponents. Probably another reason I'm not a number one somewhere!!

I am much less tolerant of, well most things really, than Gordon. There is no doubt I would have lost us a few good players in the past!

That doesn't mean to say we don't get on outside of football, we are very comfortable in each others company but we just enjoy different things away from the game. Although I do remember the end of season tour with Hounslow in Jersey one year, we certainly had one thing in common that week, yes it was the booze!!! Incidentally Gordon's wife Jackie was expecting their first child, Amanda, any time soon and I had to arrange an early flight home for Gordon to be present for the birth!!!

Is that why you've been able to work together for so long?

Yes I think it helps that we're not in each others pockets 24/7 and that we are different types of people. If we were both exactly the same and always agreed about everything, the working relationship wouldn't work.

Having said that it is uncanny how often over the years we have thought and said

exactly the same thing at the same time. There's also been numerous occasions when we have had conversations with the same person at different times and both said exactly the same thing, not unusual if the conversation is factual but a little less so when it is views on a subject or player etc.

Although we are different characters we do have very similar views on the game and as I've said previously Gordon will always listen to my point of view, he won't always agree, and nor should he, but if he thinks I've got a good point he's not afraid of changing his original view.

And if you could change one thing about the relationship?

I honestly wouldn't change anything, 27 years together must be testament to that.

What causes the biggest differences between you (and / or the Management Team) - Have you and Gordon ever thought your time was up as a pairing?

The biggest differences would normally be in team selection or shape of the side, but that makes it sound as if there are big differences but generally there are not. The way we all work is that after training on a Thursday we'll check the fitness/injury situation, review the previous performance, both individual and team, from the previous game and maybe put a tentative team together for the Saturday match. Then Gilly, Micky and I will forward our individual team selections to Gordon by Saturday morning ready to discuss when we get to the ground. We will all put our case across for why we've picked who and what we have and by the end of it we'll agree on the side. It certainly isn't a discussion based on Brian Clough's philosophy, in other words we don't all discuss the team then agree that Gordon was right in the first place!!

Generally these discussions, and it's been the same over all the years I've been with Gordon, are centred around one or two players, most times he and I will agree on 10 or most times, 11 of the starting line up. The only time I thought maybe a breakup of us was possible, was during the Andy Leese era. Don't get me wrong I didn't and don't have any problems or issues with Andy it was just that I

saw my role slowly diminish and I starting doubting my value to the set up so I wondered if it was time to go. As it turns out I didn't and I'm still here with him!!

Looking back over the twenty five or so years 'together' would you do it again?

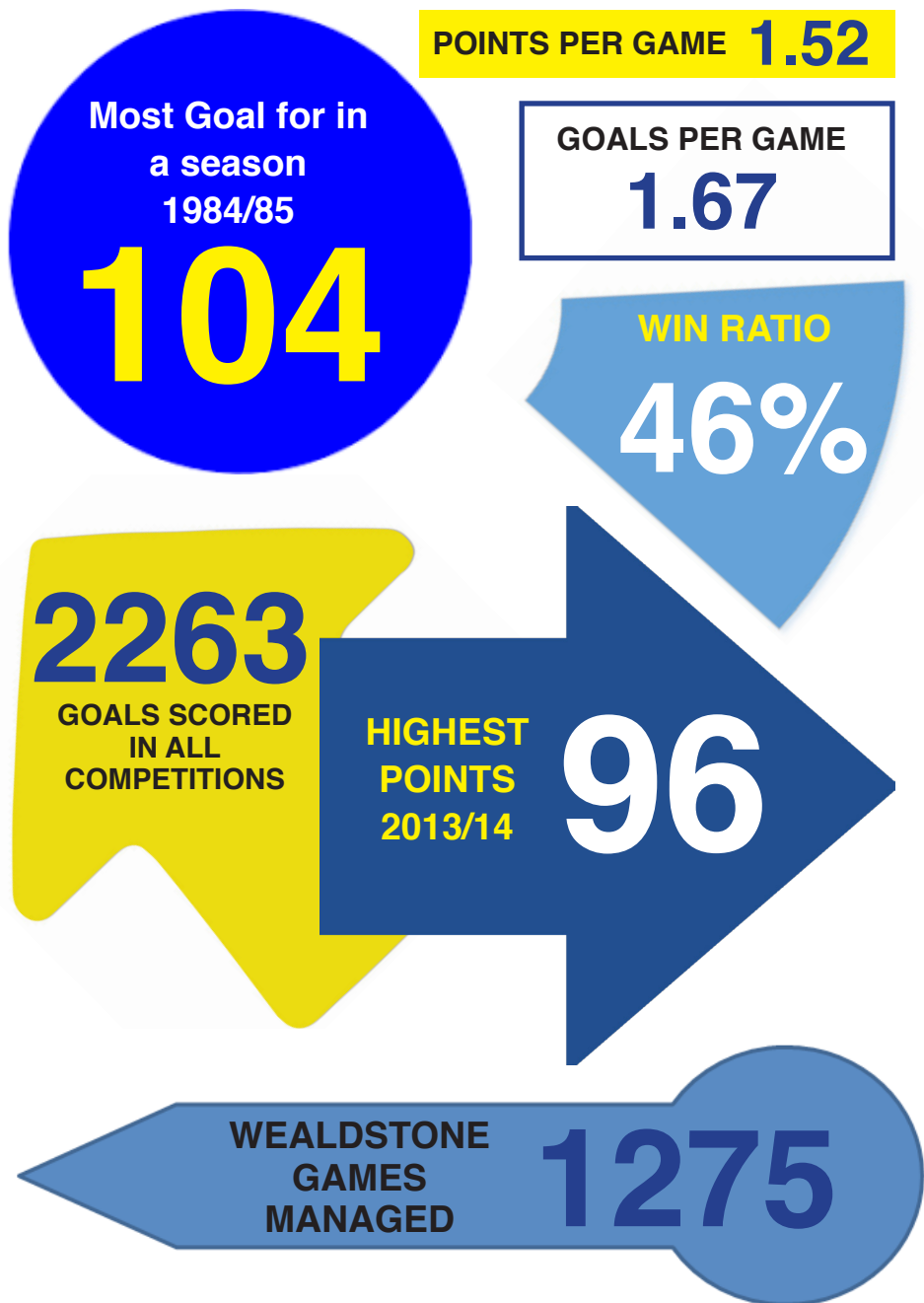
Absolutely!!!

We have been fortunate to have experienced the most fantastic times in football. Many, many managers go through their whole career without winning anything, or even experiencing the highs that we have. I'll never forget walking out at Wembley for the FA Vase Final with Yeading, leading the team out at Elland Road for the replay, the first round proper of the FA Cup, twice with Yeading, once with Wealdstone, the unbelievable night at Dulwich when we won the play offs, the Third Division Championship, it just goes on and on. I like to think the partnership had something to do with the successes.

Finally, pick the best XI from your time in Management - in any formation - and perhaps half a dozen that you got wrong?

Stuart McKenzie, Marvin McCoy, Dominic Sterling, Jon Denton, Steve Croad, Keiron Forbes, Gary McKeown, Steve Cordery, Paul Sweales, Jermaine Beckford, Richard Jolly, And Roy Marshall on the bench! We have made mistakes on a number of players, some weren't as good as we thought when we got them in, some under performed, and some that couldn't handle the pressure of playing for a club like Wealdstone with such high expectations and big noisy support but mostly they could not be blamed and just needed to find their right level, so I will not disrespect them and name names. I will mention one incident regarding a trialist though, I think it was the first or second pre-season that we were here and we had a friendly at Bedfont, with about 20 minutes to go we put on a trialist (I can't remember his name). After 5 minutes Gordon turned to me and told me to get some kit on, I was taking his place, that's how good he was! He was dragged off and I made my one and only appearance for the Stones!!

GORDON & LEO STATS....



WEALDSTONE FC

- 1996-97 **Isthmian League Division Three Champions**
Associate Members Trophy Finalists
- 1997-98 Isthmian League Division Two Third - Promoted to Division One
- 1998-99 Isthmian League Division One Third – Denied promotion to the Premier Division on ground grading
- 2001-02 Middlesex Senior Charity Cup Finalists
- 2003-04 Isthmian League Division One - Won play-off for a place in the new Premier Division
Middlesex Senior Charity Cup Winners
- 2009-10 Isthmian League Cup – Finalists
- 2010-11 **Middlesex Senior Charity Cup Winners**
- 2011-12 Middlesex Senior Cup Runners-Up
Middlesex County George Ruffell Shield Winners
- 2013-14 **Isthmian League Premier Division Champions**
Middlesex Senior Charity Cup Runners-Up

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Southall	60	32	12	16	119	82	60
Hounslow	163	83	19	61	273	248	163
Yeading	355	171	81	103	630	429	355
Wealdstone	1275	581	278	416	2263	1786	1275
TOTAL	1853	867	390	596	3285	2545	1853