

Talent spotted: Our writers pick six of the best from the class of '93-'94



Stewart Castledine
(Wimbledon)

VINNY JONES'S deputy is not at all as one would imagine. Skilful, disciplined and equally comfortable with either foot, Stewart Castledine, 21, represents the new face of Wimbledon. But for cruciate ligament damage that put him out of the game for nearly two years, the Dons by now would have been long blessed with his ability. Castledine, who has yet to appear in a losing side at reserve or senior level, made his return in March from an injury that required a second operation to remove a blood clot. After eight games, this tall, imposing figure looks as if he could become a permanent fixture next season — at Jones's expense. He took the eye in the London five-a-side competition at Wembley Arena on Monday, scoring a peach of a goal, and has taken heart from the progress of other youngsters at Selhurst Park such as Neal Ardley and Peter Fear. He comes from a sporting family: his father played Australian Rules football, his mother is a keen swimmer and his sisters, Ellen and Jenny, a promising sprinter and South of England representative respectively.

Clive White



Robbie Elliott
(Newcastle United)

THIS 20-year-old from the prosperous Newcastle suburb of Gosforth was one of a group of talented youngsters encouraged by Ossie Ardiles and bequeathed to Kevin Keegan. Unfortunately he was already a victim of knee damage, and had not appeared in the first team for two years when he returned in November, deputising impressively for John Beresford at left-back, which the club had always assumed to be his position. But what makes Elliott different is that he has a classic midfield player's poise and precision. Against Manchester United at St James' Park, despite his lack of experience, he was the neatest user of the ball on view. Later he filled in for Paul Bracewell as a central midfielder and did just as well. As an emergency centre-back at Hillsborough, he was rated man of the match by Keegan. After Ipswich in March, however, he needed a further operation. All he needs now is a change of luck.

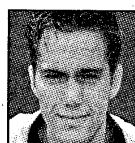
Patrick Barclay



Stephen Guppy
(Wycombe Wanderers)

HE IS great grandad's idea of a real winger. Operating on the left, Guppy is at his best when running directly at a defender, beating his man with either pace or ball-mastery, sometimes both. His crosses are a striker's dream and he can also shoot with venomous accuracy. However, in great grandad's day, of course, wingers of Guppy's class were not required to run and sweat until their socks rotted in the extra cause of helping the team out defensively. It is Guppy's willingness to do this that has impressed Wycombe's manager, Martin O'Neill, almost as much as the player's pure ability. These qualities have also made Guppy, who was once on the books of Southampton, a source of constant enquiries from bigger clubs. O'Neill says: 'If we were good enough in defence to cope on our own and keep him fresh to do his stuff he would look even better. As it is he definitely has everything to go all the way with a big club. Because he is such a good character we would all be delighted for him if it happened. In full flight there is no finer sight.'

Frank McGhee



Jason McAteer
(Bolton Wanderers)

THE story goes that McAteer was signing programmes after a Bolton Cup win when he noticed that one of his admirers, the tall figure in the flat cap, looked a bit old for autograph hunting. A signature was nevertheless what Jack Charlton wanted and after due consideration — he had all the home nations except Scotland to choose from — McAteer, 22, threw in his lot with the only team going to the World Cup. The midfielder, an ever-present in his first full season at Bolton, was a late starter in league football, having served an apprenticeship with Marine. Lately he has been wooed by Arsenal, but Bolton are in no hurry to sell. If a move to a big club comes off McAteer's loss to the English cause will be all the more keenly felt. Yet he is sure he has made the right choice, and not just because of America. His last instinctive decision was to join Bolton instead of Everton, and that didn't turn out too badly, did it?

Paul Wilson



Danny Murphy
(Crewe Alexandra)

THIS 17-year-old attacking midfielder is the latest talent off the Gresty Road production line which in the past few years has been the starting point for David Platt, Rob Jones and Geoff Thomas — all English internationals. Crewe's manager, Dario Gradi, has developed a formidable reputation as a man who nurtures and encourages talent. The Chester-born Murphy scored on his debut against Preston in December, 'with virtually his first kick', says Gradi, and again soon after at Huddersfield. Raised in a football environment — his mother is sister of the Fletcher twins — he played five times and was substitute eight in Crewe's successful push for promotion. Gradi believes the best role for Murphy, now at Lilleshall with the England under-18s, is just behind the strikers. 'He's got a good attitude, a good footballing brain and a good eye for goal,' says Gradi, who first brought him to Crewe four years ago. Gradi believes he has a great future but adds: 'I don't like to say too much about them. I don't know how much good praise does them.'

Michael Walker



Martin Phillips
(Exeter City)

I SAW this skinny YTS trainee on a squally afternoon at Hull. It was a game the home team won easily, but the player who caught the eye was the 17-year-old Phillips. Exeter's manager, Terry Cooper, rates him for his ability to receive a ball at any height, kill it with his first touch and lay an inch-perfect pass. Phillips, who stands 5ft 6in, weighs 9st and answers to the training-ground nickname of Buster, plays wide on either flank. He has attracted the interest of Everton, Aston Villa and Southampton, managed by the former Exeter boss Alan Ball who has reputedly said Phillips will be the first £10 million player. Cooper acknowledges Phillips may have to go within the next year. 'But nobody's going to pinch him — they'd better come with a sensible offer.' Just how much he won't say, but it is likely the bidding will start at a million. If Phillips realises his potential he will be the buy of the season.

John Wilford