

Mapes is determined to stay in Cole position

JOE Cole's former midfield partner will make his Football League debut tomorrow determined to make up for lost time.

Charlie Mapes will start the match against Stockport County eight years after he and England international Cole used to sparkle for Islington and Camden Schools.

He said: "It's nice to be up there at last. It has taken me a long time to get my Football League debut. I've gone the long way round but I have got there in the end."

This time last year Mapes was preparing for a new season with non-league minnows Berkhamsted Town after dropping out of professional football following spells with Cardiff and Spurs.

The closest he came to a first team game was an appearance for Cardiff City in the Welsh Cup.

But Wanderers plucked him from obscurity and made him their only summer signing, rescuing him from a career as a delivery driver for the Evening Standard.

And the 21-year-old hasn't looked back. He made his debut against Tottenham, the club he joined as a schoolboy, in Blues' opening pre-season match and has kept experienced pros like Steve Brown and Dannie Bulman out of the side

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ever since.

Mapes said: "It has come a lot quicker than I expected. It is beyond my wildest dreams what has happened at Wycombe.

"I have trained hard and worked hard for it but I didn't expect to be in the first team so quickly.

"When I played in the first game against Spurs I thought that would be it and that other people would soon be back in. But I've held my place and stayed there all the way through pre-season.

"But I won't get carried away. I know how quickly things can go wrong in football. I've been out of the game and I don't want to go back to that again."

And the midfield worker hasn't just won admirers at Wycombe. After the game against Cole's West Ham, former Hammers and England legend Trevor Brooking picked him out for praise alongside Blues' Michael Simpson and Roger Johnson.

Mapes said: "I couldn't believe that when I read it in the paper. Just being on the same pitch as some of the people we've played against in pre-season was enough."



Same place, different route: Charlie Mapes caught up with schoolboy team-mate Joe Cole during Blues' win over West Ham