

GARETH AINSWORTH: Managing at QPR was madness and mayhem... but it gave me the hunger to come back for more

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Gareth Ainsworth is starting his first full season as manager of League Two Wycombe Wanderers. The former QPR, Wimbledon and Preston midfielder looks ahead to his new career in management in his debut Footballers' Football Column and discusses a number of high profile football personalities he has come across during his career. Before you read his column, watch his video below in which he reveals which rock star he would invite to his ultimate dinner party.

Gareth Ainsworth: I got recognized in Ibiza



It is a nice feeling to be starting a season as manager. It is a new chapter in my career and it is something I am enjoying and looking forward to the season ahead. I'm not totally new to this, I took over Wycombe midway through last season – and of course I had a few caretaker roles at QPR.

When I took over at Wycombe I knew what players I had and I knew what my job was and that I had to keep the club in the league.

In the early games we did OK and looked as if it was turning around. Then we fell to bottom of the league. It was a really low point in my career. I was so down.



Winning start: Gareth Ainsworth celebrates winning the first game of the season against Morecambe with goalscorer Paris Cowan-Hall



© Paul Dennis/TGSPHOTO

Perfect start: Wycombe players celebrate their win on the first day

My dad saw my interview on TV after a game we lost and rang me to tell me I sounded like someone had died and I had to be more positive.

So from that moment on I have tried to be far more positive. I will never do an interview like that again as it looked like I had accepted our fate.

After that I went super positive and it rubbed off on everyone around me and we did turn things around.

When we knew we were clear of relegation it felt brilliant. Last season was all about stopping the rot, now this season it is about putting my mark on the team.

I believe my strength as a manager is out on the training pitch a getting the best out of a group of players. I knew the potential was there both mentally and physically. But now it is a bit different as I have had longer to work with the squad.

One thing I have had to deal with this summer is the transfer window. I have to say I like the transfer windows, it is a month of mayhem but at least you know it is only a month.

I can understand why directors of football have been brought into clubs, because the recruitment process is so intense and so vast that it is difficult for one man to do it on his own and I think you need help.

There are agents on the phone the whole time and there are players from all around the world being pushed to you, so it takes up a lot of time and can take away from the coaching side of the job and I never want to sacrifice that – coaching is my priority.

I believe my talent is coaching. It is not going out and picking the best players and spending money on them. I will learn that. I made a couple of signings last year and I was very happy with them.

But I believe my talent is also getting the best out of a player who is not playing at his full potential. I believe I can bring a team together and make them fight harder, run harder and be more together than they have been before.



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Team bonding: Ainsworth took his side rowing on the Thames



Something different: Ainsworth took the Wycombe players rowing as part of a team bonding exercise



Head first: Ainsworth dives into The Thames after the final race

As a manager I have taken bits from managers I have worked with and then added my own ideas. We are a League Two club and cannot afford to go on a five-day training camp to Portugal, so to mix things up a bit we took the players rowing on the Thames.

It was totally different and it brought them together. We went racing on the river and it was fantastic.

Being together as team was great and hopefully at the end of the season we will look back on that day and think it helped us.

By the end of last season we were bang in the middle of the table, we were nine points off the play-offs and nine points clear of relegation. So if you are prepared to work and put the hard work in then you will get the rewards.

I chip in and help with everything here, I'm out putting the sprinklers out to make the training ground seem a bit nicer because we cannot afford a full time member of staff to do that.

I buy five bottles of Lucozade every Friday on the way into training so that the winners of the five-a-side can have a prize. It costs me £3 every Friday but it pays me back a million times over on the pitch. But I love all that.



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Putting the players through their paces: Ainsworth takes training



© Wycombe Wanderers FC

Mixing things up: Ainsworth took his squad swimming



© Javier Garcia / BPI

Doing it his way: Ainsworth says his strengths are on the training ground working with the players

If it is wrong then I will fail, but if it is right then I will get the rewards, but that is the way I want to be.

My first taste of management came at QPR during the time when Flavio Briatore and Bernie Ecclestone were in charge.

It was a mad time and that was represented in the documentary *The Four Year Plan* which came out a while ago. But there was some artistic licence in that documentary. It was chaotic, but there was some stuff in there that I cannot remember happening.

The documentary opened the eyes of a lot of people. But for all the chaos and disorder that was at QPR at the time the one positive that came out of it for me was that I wanted to have another go at management.

The team was not being picked for me, which was reported in some places, but I had to explain my decisions.



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Passionate: Ainsworth worked as caretaker manager at QPR under Flavio Briatore



© PA Archive/Press Association Images

Baptism of fire: Ainsworth had two spells as caretaker manager at QPR

It was tough at the start and I would not want to go through that sort of thing again and in the future I would stand up and say something.

I know a lot of European teams are going that way where the president picks the team and the coach coaches but in England it has always been the manager that has the final say on things that go on on the pitch and that is the case at Wycombe.

I had meetings with Flavio and he would say, 'I am paying this much money for this player, why is he not playing.' So there was a lot of pressure put on. But looking back, I had a great time. It was mayhem and madness, but it was QPR and I love QPR. We had some great results on the pitch.



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Rangers boy: Ainsworth enjoyed his time playing for QPR



Premier chance: Ainsworth played in the top flight with Wimbledon

One day somewhere down the line I would love to have another go at the QPR job. I'd be stupid to say otherwise. I am fully focused on Wycombe, but I want to progress, hopefully with Wycombe, but I want to manage as high as I can. I will always have an affinity with my old clubs and I like to see them do well.

I will do the best I possibly can, just as I did as a player, and the path will be drawn for me.

During my 25 years in football I have met a lot of people and it seems many of them have ended up as managers. I played with David Moyes for two-and-a-half years at Preston. I always had a huge respect for him, and he was a great leader on the pitch.



Top job: Ainsworth says Moyes deserves his chance to be Manchester United manager



Learning his trade: David Moyes and Ainsworth played together at Preston in the 1990s

You would not cross him, he spoke sense but had that harsh streak in him that would stop you in your tracks if you were out of line. He would never bully anyone for the sake of it but if you were in the wrong then you would know about it. I never saw Dave going on to do what he has done. But you don't see that when you are an 18-year-old. But I am so pleased to have played with him and learnt from him.

When I heard the news that Sir Alex Ferguson was retiring I did believe that he was the right man to replace him. I can see that now I am a lot older. I think it is a great opportunity for him. He is a workaholic. I know it is a tough job to follow Sir Alex, but Dave has earned his right to have that chance.



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Winner: Ainsworth says he enjoyed his time playing under Joe Kinnear at Wimbledon

Another person I have worked with is Joe Kinnear. He was my manager at Wimbledon and he was fantastic. I have taken a lot from him. He knew how to get the best out of individuals. I don't think I've seen anyone get players going as much as he did before a game or at half time like he did.

He knew what to do with each player and to finish seventh in the Premier League with Wimbledon is a phenomenal achievement. That would not happen today.

I have never known him as a director of football, so I don't know what he will be like at Newcastle. But the bottom line is he is a winner.

He will not go to Newcastle and just take the money and not work, Joe will work really hard. If Joe and Alan Pardew can work together then I see no reason why it cannot be a success.