

football firsts



Wycombe Wanderers manager Gareth Ainsworth talks us through his football memories

First game you watched live?

I remember it clearly – it was Blackburn Rovers against Wrexham at Ewood Park when I was about six. I remember Simon Garner and Tony Parkes both playing for Blackburn. I fell in love with Garner there and then.

First football hero?

Unsurprisingly, it's Simon Garner – he's Blackburn's leading all-time goal scorer. I based a lot of my game on him: pace, power and plenty of goals. The great thing was that, when I signed for Blackburn as an apprentice, he was still there and I saw him having a crafty cigarette around the corner, which destroyed a few illusions! But I'll let him off.

First pair of boots?

I remember owning a pair of orange Diadora Marco van Basten boots. They were my first professional boots, but as a kid Mum and Dad bought me a pair of the old faithful Patricks. They worked because they helped me get where I was and they're probably still in my parents' garage.

First kit?

This is unbelievable – the first I was actually bought was Crystal Palace, but I have no idea why. I think Dad must have got it cheap from somewhere, despite the fact I was a huge Blackburn fan. It was soon replaced by a Rovers kit!

First professional game?

I didn't have a club or a job, but I had been

on trial at Preston North End. I got a phone call on the Friday and Walter Joyce, who is now no longer with us, asked if I wanted to play for Preston at Shrewsbury the next day. So I played, without a contract, for free and I remember playing the full 90 minutes and on the Monday I was offered a contract. We lost 2-1 but I must have done OK. I'll never forget that game back in 1991.

First professional goal?

It was in my second game, at home to Hull City in what is now the EFL Trophy. I actually kicked it out of the Hull keeper's hands, put it in the back of the net, turned around, looked straight at the referee and he let it stand. It was the good old days of being able to tackle the goalkeeper!

First red card?

I've had a few but my first was when I was on loan from Wimbledon at Walsall. It was my second appearance and I came on as a substitute against Norwich in the Championship in the 70th minute. I was on for one minute and got sent off for a touch and a tackle, which I did quite a few times in my career. It wasn't a very good tackle, but I was that eager to impress all my pent-up energy went into that tackle and that was it, the referee sent me off.



HERO: Simon Garner

PICTURE: Action Images