

Barnsley F.C. Website

BIG INTERVIEW | Martin Bullock



Ahead of this weekend's Sky Bet League One clash with Wycombe Wanderers, we spoke with Martin Bullock, who was at Oakwell for eight years from 1993 and also had a short stint with the Chairboys towards the end of his career.

He joined Barnsley from Eastwood Town – one of several players back then to make a seamless transition from non-league to the Football League. Darren Barnard is another example, after he made the step from Wokingham Town to Premier League Chelsea, before eventually signing for the Reds.

"Darren Sheridan had also just signed for Barnsley from non-league a month or so before me," reminisced Bullock. *"Maybe it did used to happen more often years ago."*

"I'm sure academies these days are more aware of late developing players and show more patience with them. I'm a great believer that if you're good enough you'll get there in the end and there's more than enough scouts out there to make sure nobody slips through the net."

"I made my debut against Middlesbrough almost immediately after signing but that turned out to be my only appearance that season. I spent that first year playing in the youth team and reserves."

"As soon as Danny [Wilson] took over from Viv [Anderson], he said to me early in pre-season that he wanted me to be part of the first team which was a great boost for my confidence."

"I obviously spent time as a sub and trying to make an impact and then got a run of games when Reddo [Neil Redfearn], I think it was, was injured. It helped me enormously that Danny was player-manager and he was out on the pitch with me."

Bullock was also part of the famous Reds' side that won promotion to the Premier League in 1997, making 32 appearances in all competitions in that remarkable campaign.

As Club achievements go, the former midfielder believes that this is certainly one of the greatest successes in Barnsley's history, but insists there was no fixture that stands out as the catalyst for promotion.

"I'm not sure there was a particular game when I thought 'this is it' – apart from Bradford, of course – but I can remember Wolves not winning their game in hand against Grimsby during the midweek, which was quite a surprise," continued Bullock. "Then knowing it was in our own hands against Bradford at home and we were never going to lose that."



"It was a massive achievement that has been highlighted again recently with the excellent Daydream Believers film. We are still the only Barnsley team to have played in the top flight and the club has been in existence for a long, long time."

"Playing in the Premier League is with you forever, still now whenever I get introduced to people it's always 'this is Martin, he played in the Premier League'."

As well as playing top flight football, Bullock also represented England at international level – making one appearance for the U21s in 1996.

The ex-Red played alongside the likes of Michael Owen, Rio Ferdinand and Frank Lampard, but was unable to help the Three Lions qualify for the European Championships.

"Adi Moses had already been in a few squads that year before I got my call-up, so it was good to have a teammate around," said Bullock. "I made both squads against Greece in the play-off games and came on in the second leg at Carrow Road, but we lost on away goals and didn't make the Euros."

After just one season in the Premier League, Barnsley were relegated alongside Bolton Wanderers and Crystal Palace – the same two teams that had won promotion from Division One the previous campaign.

However, Bullock insists that the Reds gave an excellent account of themselves against England's elite and thoroughly enjoyed the journey while it lasted.

"It was an incredible experience which I'd have loved to have continued but it wasn't to be," he said. "We had some great experiences like winning at Anfield and Villa Park. Our points tally in other seasons may have been enough to keep us up so we didn't do too badly and probably better than most people thought before the season started."

Bullock spent a further three years at Oakwell before calling time on his Barnsley career, when he then moved to Division Two side Blackpool.

The Tangerines were managed by legendary former Liverpool and England midfielder Steve McMahon, and had just won promotion from the fourth tier via the play-offs.

“Steve was very much from the old Liverpool mould where we’d only play five-a-side in training every day and never talk about tactics or the opposition,” continued Bullock. “He had the mindset of that we had better players than the opposition so just go out and play.”

“I enjoyed the freedom and he encouraged me to attack defenders and make things happen. I enjoyed my time playing under Steve, but we were always just short of challenging for promotion.”



It was, however, a very successful period for Bullock during his time at Bloomfield Road as he won the Football League Trophy twice.

The Seasiders beat Cambridge United 4-1 in 2002 before overcoming Southend United 2-0 two years later – the only occasions Blackpool have won that particular competition.

Bullock even scored the Golden Goal against Huddersfield Town in the 2002 semi-final, with a 103rd minute strike enough to seal victory at what was then known as the McAlpine Stadium.

“It was a strange feeling in that the game finished immediately and you didn’t have to worry about defending to hold on to the lead,” admitted Bullock.

“Personally, as a team we were poor in the game and maybe fortunate to still be in with a chance of winning in extra time. Having said that we dominated the first leg and should have had a bigger advantage going into the second leg.”

“Both finals were really enjoyable days and the club did well to be as professional as possible in the build ups. Steve had obviously been to big finals as a player so knew how to do things properly.”

“We went down to Cardiff a couple of days before the game and stayed in very nice hotels which added to the experience. Even though it’s not the biggest cup competition in the world it meant a lot to the players and everyone at the club.”

From Blackpool, he moved onto Macclesfield Town in League Two where he had an opportunity to work with Brian Horton.

The Port Vale legend had managed at a high level with Oxford United and Manchester City, before spells with Huddersfield and Brighton and Hove Albion.

“Brian was very old school,” said Bullock. “I thought I was joining a club that had a real chance of getting promoted, having finished in or just outside the play offs the previous season. But, as it turned out, I couldn’t have been more wrong in that we just avoided relegation in both my seasons there.”

“Things did improve during my second season once Paul Ince took over and it was an enjoyable time playing. We suddenly went from being ‘tin pot’ to incredibly professional. We had full time masseurs, a fitness coach, meal after training, renovated dressing rooms and staying in nice hotels the night before games. This is all standard nowadays, but it wasn’t back then in League Two until Paul came in.”



Eventually, Bullock left Moss Rose and made the move south to Wycombe in 2007 where he would link up with Paul Lambert.

However, he spent less than a year at Adams Park before retiring in the March with his last appearance coming from the bench in a 2-0 victory over Darlington.

“I left Wycombe just before the end of the first season; I’d lost my interest and desire to play,” he admitted. “I had signed a two-year deal and came to an agreement with the club and retired.”

“If I wasn’t in the starting line-up it didn’t hurt me anymore which it should have done and that’s when I knew I’d had enough and it was time for something else. Wycombe was a really good club with great facilities and somewhere I’m sure I’d have enjoyed being slightly earlier in my career.”

“We moved to Dubai immediately after retiring which was a great experience and was like being on holiday for a year. Things didn’t work out in the end, so we were on the move again – we had friends who were in New Zealand, who helped us get a family visa through Waitakere United.”

“They play in the New Zealand National League, so I started playing again and really enjoyed it for three years. Neil Emblen was player-manager and Darren Bazeley was the assistant which helped us be as professional as possible and we won the league three years in a row.”

“The league in New Zealand ran through the summer months and it was really nice to play in warm weather and encouraged my family to come and watch the games in a pleasant environment, which added to the experience.”

“We also played in the OFC Champions League and got to play against teams from Fiji, New Caledonia, Tahiti and Papua New Guinea which were fantastic places to visit.”

While out in Dubai, after retiring for the first time, Bullock worked as a pundit where he provided analysis on Premier League and Champions League football.

After a year, he moved to New Zealand and, as aforementioned, enjoyed success with Waitakere, while also running his own lawn mowing franchise that allowed him to work flexibly and play part-time.

Since retiring for a second time, Bullock has done junior coaching and was able to advance quite quickly due to the lack of ex-pros in New Zealand. From there, he worked at the Northern Football Federation before moving to Australia with Brisbane Roar.



“My job at the Northern Football Federation was a very varied role from going into schools to try to grow the game right through to coaching the leading players in the north of Auckland city,” said the 43-year-old.

“Add into that coach education and helping and advising local clubs shows how varied the role was. There’s only one pro club in New Zealand so the Federations have to try and fill that gap as well.

"I'm currently a full-time academy age group coach, which I started just over a year ago when the academy also started, so it's still a very new project not only for Brisbane Roar but Australia as a whole.

"Unlike Europe, not all clubs have academies and even if they do, they charge players an annual fee. This is our point of difference in Australia, we're completely free as we don't want finances to be a barrier to any player who we deem good enough to be in our academy.

"I'm also currently helping with first team training every day as the club wait to appoint a new Head Coach and coaching staff, so I'm in the fortunate position to be dealing with senior players as well as junior players."

However, despite being more than 10,000 miles away, Bullock still keeps an eye out for Barnsley's results and believes Daniel Stendel's side can win promotion this season.

The Reds, second in League One heading into Saturday's game against Wycombe, have hit a rich vein of form and will be looking to make it 12 games unbeaten.

"Undoubtedly [Barnsley can win promotion], but there's still many twists and turns to come," insisted Bullock. "The current form is incredible but it's impossible to expect to win every game through until May – although I hope I'm wrong.

"Even if a few results don't go well it's important to keep believing and trust the staff and players who have got the club into this position to get the job done."

And his prediction for the visit of the Chairboys?

"Barnsley must be huge favourites on current form and playing at home, 3-0?"

We certainly hope so, Martin!