

Interview

Rolando Aarons: 'I'm not in this for money ... I want to be a top player'

[Ben Fisher](#)

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Wycombe winger on loan from Newcastle discusses battling negative perceptions and using Wyscout to help him improve

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Rolando Aarons, on the ball for Wycombe against Sunderland, says: 'I've heard that clubs have said no [to signing me] because they have heard this and that.' Photograph: Simon Dael/BPI/Shutterstock

Rolando Aarons is rowing back to his Newcastle debut five years ago, smiling as he tells a story that is largely immaterial, a footnote from that day at St James' Park against

Manchester City, but one that speaks volumes of his understated character nevertheless. “I tried to get [Sergio] Agüero’s shirt but [Massadio] Haïdara had already asked him,” Aarons says, a little sheepishly. “I was scared to ask players for their shirt. Unless I knew them, I wouldn’t ask, so all of the shirts I have now are players that I know.”

As a result Aarons, who joined the [League One](#) high flyers Wycombe Wanderers on loan in September after being left out of Newcastle’s 25-man Premier League squad, has only a handful of swapped shirts: jerseys worn by Bobby Reid, who also grew up in Easton, in inner-city Bristol, Yannick Bolasie, his former teammates Ivan Toney and Adam Armstrong, and Raheem Sterling, who was also born in Kingston and acts as a source of inspiration. “He is like superman right now,” Aarons says. “He’s matured and found his mojo. I’ve spoken to him about that [his form]. He said he’s learnt to ignore everyone else and focus on himself and that’s what I’ve been trying to do. He is a massive, massive sort of role model to every kid like me. Raheem has been there and done it. Even though he is only a year older than me, which is crazy; it seems like he has been around for at least 10 years.”

Aarons is courteous and compelling company in modest surroundings at Wycombe’s training ground, a world away from the bells and whistles of the Premier League. He acknowledges his career has not gone as projected but he is relaxed, happy to be playing and confident he can get back to the top flight. He uses Wyscout, the analysis platform, to glean bits and pieces from Sterling, as well as perfecting his own game. “I watch Raheem, Douglas Costa, [Kylia] Mbappé – I watch loads of players that play wide and score goals. I’ll watch clips at home or after training and I’ve got a match analyst that sends me my clips and shows me what I need to do. I might draw a clip in from Cristiano Ronaldo and put it in and be like: ‘This is what I need to do.’ I love football so I have to watch it, try and learn and master the trade.”

As a five-year-old Aarons moved from Jamaica to England, and he spent three years at Bristol City before being released at 16. Trials at Arsenal, West Ham, Crystal Palace and Birmingham followed before Leeds offered him a professional contract. But then Newcastle came calling and Aarons signed on the dotted line after an hour of training. Everything happened pretty quickly, perhaps too quickly. Initially, he says, the move was a culture shock. He was living alone at 18 when he made his debut and first met his cousin [Max, the Norwich defender](#). Aarons smiles but his words are genuine, and telling. “I wish I had me now when I was his age,” he says. “I try to make sure he doesn’t make the same misjudgments or errors that I made when I was that age – your personal life, making sure you are living right.”

“Everything was trial and error and, at that age, I don’t feel like you can afford to make those mistakes. You are a little blinded by [the lights]. I grew up really, really poor and overnight everyone loves you and you have a bit more money, you have freedom and, if you don’t know how to handle it, it can make or break you. Luckily, it didn’t break me that bad. It was difficult to deal with that limelight. I’m thankful I came through that. It was a very difficult time.”



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Rolando Aarons scores for Newcastle in a League Cup tie at Manchester City in 2014.
Photograph: AFP/Getty Images

Aarons turns 24 next week and although there have been bumps in the road since his debut, notably being charged with affray for his part in a bar brawl and rupturing an anterior cruciate ligament, the winger is focused on the bigger picture, acutely aware of how things can change overnight. “I played against Daniel James in my first start for Sheffield Wednesday [on loan against Swansea] and now he’s at Manchester United. It would have been difficult to try and guess that that would have happened at that time. You just have to keep going because you really don’t know what’s going to happen around the corner.”

Aarons recognises his arrest in Newcastle three years ago did not help his image and says there is an unfair perception of him. “I’ve heard that clubs have said ‘no’ [to signing me] because they have heard this and that. Because of those reasons, I had to go on loan to other places to try and get games and do what I needed to do. It’s been a tough-ish 18 months or two years since my first loan but I have learnt a lot. It’s weird because I don’t think I’ve done anything that deserves the reputation or words people say about me but the only way I can correct it is by playing well and scoring goals.”

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He is doing just that at [Wycombe](#), for whom Aarons has scored in each of his past two games. The switch to Adams Park, where he will stay until at least January, represented another courageous step after Serie A loans with Hellas Verona, where he was reunited with Fabio Pecchia, first-team coach at Newcastle under Rafael Benítez, playing against Juventus and against Internazionale and Milan at San Siro, and then Slovan Liberec. “I’m not afraid to take a risk,” he says. “I could think: ‘Do you know what, I can’t be bothered with this, I’ll stay with the under-23s, just chill and earn money.’ But that’s not the sort of person I am. I’m not in this for money; I want to actually be a top player. In the long term I want to be a Premier League player and if that happens at Newcastle that would be perfect for me because I’ve come through there. It’s a great club, I love the club and the fans are great there.”

As for Benítez, Aarons says the Spaniard was “very hard to read” but he accepts responsibility for his ups and downs on Tyneside, though being left out of Steve Bruce’s squad hurt, having spent the second half of last season at Wednesday. “I was massively surprised and disappointed, because the week before I had started the preseason game and I had played every game in the summer so the minimum I thought was I was going to be in the squad. It was a tough time and frustrating but the gaffer here [Gareth Ainsworth] rang my agent. My agent told me to speak to him [Ainsworth] and hear him out. I need to do

well here – it's a massive loan. Hopefully when it gets to January I'll look back at this loan and be very, very happy about it."