

# Q & A session with Martin Taylor

July 2011

Q. Before you moved to Watford, was there the opportunity to go to any other clubs and, if so, what was the deciding factor which made you choose Watford?

A. There were rumours of other clubs being interested but it was only Watford who came in with a firm offer. After I'd spoken to Malky Mackay and some of his staff, I was certain what I wanted to do.

Q. What attracted you to Watford, as opposed to staying at Birmingham or going elsewhere?

A. My contract was running out that summer so I didn't really have a chance to say. The opportunity to play regular football that I hadn't had in previous seasons was a big draw. And not only that, the chance to play in a good squad and for a good set of staff who shared my beliefs was very important.

Q. What do you like most and least about our club?

A. The thing I like most is the atmosphere. I've enjoyed that all the time I've been here - right through from training ground to match days. When you enjoy it, like I have, you get the best out of yourself. As for like least, there's nothing I don't enjoy, honestly.

Q. Who have you found to be the most difficult opponent to mark?

A. Across my whole career, it would have to be Dennis Bergkamp. His speed around the box was incredible - both physically and in terms of thought. As for last season in the Championship, the person who impressed me most was Jay Rodriguez at Burnley. I'd heard about him from a few Burnley fans that I'd met over my time up in Blackburn. He's turned out to be more than just a goal scorer.

Q. You seem very much happier on the ball last season. Is that a part of your game that you've consciously developed while at Watford, or was it always part of your repertoire?

A. No, I've always enjoyed having the ball at my feet. I think playing in a number of different positions at Blackburn Rovers probably helped with that. I tended to play full-back at Rovers, and had a spell both on the right of midfield and up front. I've always enjoyed bringing the ball out, but it depends how much importance the manager at the time places on that. As a young player I got about but at Birmingham I was only used at centre-half.

Q. How did you get on with Graeme Souness?

A. Very well, in fact. He gave me a lot of opportunities as a young professional working there under him. I know not every player would have the same opinion, but that's mine.

Q. Is it true that Aidy Mariappa can outjump you?

A. Ah now, that's not strictly true. Let's just say he can jump higher off the ground than me - but it's all relative!

Q. Of the young players coming through the Academy, Reserves and those already at the club but on loan, who do you see coming through with a real chance to challenge yourself and Aidy Mariappa in the centre of defence next season?

A. I thought Tommie Hoban, for a first-year scholar, did exceptionally well last season. Not only to come through youth and reserve team football and make a first team debut, but also to look so accomplished when he did, bodes well for the future. We didn't see too much of him earlier in the season, but he acquitted himself very well when he joined in with first-team training towards the end.

Q. Do you plan to move into coaching/management - given the history of Malky & Dyche and the thin management team at WFC, would you fancy finishing your career at Watford and then staying to get your coaching badges, eg work with the youth team?

A. I've honestly not decided yet. As a younger player, I remember thinking that I never really wanted to get into it. But as you get older you gain more confidence and I could see myself doing it. But I've got an eye on things outside of the game too. Becoming a teacher is something that really appeals to me, so I'm keeping my options open right now. If I get to 35, 36, say, that'll have been 20 years in the one industry. It might be nice to look beyond there and broaden my horizons a little bit.

Q. Why did Andrew Taylor fit in so well and even though there are fewer left footed players than right footed players, to what do you attribute the apparent shortage of left backs (other clubs seem to struggle here too), and was it the same earlier in your career?

A. There are fewer left-backs because there are fewer left-footed people around - that's demographics for you! Andy Taylor fitted in so well. He was a really nice lad so there was never going to be an issue. He was a good defender, but great on the ball as well which really suited how we play.

Q. Have you ever had the chance to move overseas as a footballer – if not, do you regret that; if the chance came about to leave Watford for an overseas club to finish your career, would you jump at that?

A. I would actually love to have a chance to play overseas. It did come up once, at Blackburn, but I never got to know about it until a year later. Roy Hodgson, who was managing FC Copenhagen, told me about a year after he'd bid for me that he came in for me. He'd left Blackburn not long before that, so obviously thought I could do a job for him.

Q. How many more seasons do you reckon you can perform at current level? Percentage-wise, there's not many outfield players get past 35 years of age now. But as a defender, and a centre-half

in particular, the physical demands placed on you are more related to strength and power than running long distances during matches.

A. I think any years after 35 would be a bonus - and I'm sure a little bit relies on your genes in terms of whether you can keep going and going.

Q. When you joined WFC, did you have to sing in front of the lads, as is customary? If so, what did you sing, and how good were you? Be honest, now!

A. I did have to sing, yes, of course. I did "Mr Bright Side" by The Killers and, in my own head at least, I was fine! It's only really got one tone, so I thought that was a shrewd choice. Some of the other lads have tried harder ones and I applaud them for doing so.

Q. What are the best and worst things about being a professional footballer?

A. The best bit is the high you get from winning and doing well. There's no better feeling than being on a good run. Probably not being in or around the team is the worst thing, perhaps even worse than playing regularly and losing - because at least you can do something about that. Touch wood I've not been injured for more than five months at a time, and I would think that's probably the worst situation of all to be in.

Q. Who do you get on best with at WFC?

A. John Eustace, probably. We room together and, as two of the older lads - although not the oldest I might point out, thanks to big Chris - we've got a lot in common. There's a little bit of a generation gap between the older and younger boys, which you do see sometimes with music and clothes! But we all get on very well, that's the main thing.

Q. I believe that you have won every game that you've played in against Sheffield United since September 2000. Are there any other teams that you always seem to beat?

A. I seem to recall I've always done very well against Millwall, with last season being an obvious example of course. And Palace, I know I've always done well against them - before I came to Watford at least.

Q. How easy was it to balance the time requirements of an Open University course with the demands of being a professional footballer? And why do you think more players don't do OU degrees?

A. I found it okay for the most part. You do get plenty of free time as a professional footballer, what with travelling to away matches. At other times it's tougher because you can't pick and choose your coursework deadlines if they land in the middle of a run of games. I was lucky as I had great support from my family - they lose you for a bit while you're doing it, to be honest so I was lucky in that respect. In terms of other lads, I can't speak for them directly but perhaps it's not something they get ready information about or possibly don't look into it themselves.

Q. Do you feel you get penalized more by refs when, in your opinion, you are challenging fairly for a header against shorter opposition?

A. Not so much that way round, I think it's more the fact that I never ever get fouls given in my favour in the opposition penalty area. I've had a combination of outright manhandling and rugby tackling last season but the ref never seems interested!

Q. Who has been the best player you have played against, and the best player you have played alongside?

A. Bergkamp from earlier. Tugay at Blackburn for his ability, he was unbelievable. Talking as a centre-half partner, then Kenny Cunningham. He was just a great player and a really good guy as well, which makes it easier to appreciate what he does.

Q. What do you realistically expect Watford to achieve once all of the current excellent youth players that we have coming through mature?

A. That's an on-going process really, rather than a project that has a specific end date. I've been hugely impressed by the Academy structure here. Harefield is obviously superb in itself, but the way Watford set up their Academy is geared towards the end-product i.e. producing first-team ready players.

It's fantastic to have such a strong set-up, and that the team seem to do so well in the FA Youth Cup backs that up. I guess if the players keep on coming through at a high standard, then who knows where they could take Watford.

Q. Your performances have been one of the highlights of the year – what do you put this down to?

A. A little bit of age and experience goes a long way at centre-half. I suppose if a player performs consistently over a long period, as I feel I did in the main, then I suppose fans will probably say they've had a good season - which is a nice compliment.

Q. Some players can maintain a high performance in spite of getting older (no offence) - what do you do to fend of the years and stay ahead of the rest? And following on from that, how much influence has sports science had on today's players?

A. All you have to do is look after your body properly. Well, I say all you have to do, but you have to be lucky to stay away from injuries. How you train, what you eat, what you drink - it's all of massive importance. Sports science has definitely had a positive effect during the years of my career. But the one big factor above all is the prehabilitation work; preventing injuries before they occur. The staff at Watford have been superb at this over a few years, I understand. I think players were a bit more susceptible to knocks and strains before this came along. It's really helped me here; you get looked after on a very individual basis.

Q. Is it true you have a degree in politics? How did this affect your route into football? Who is the brightest/most challenged of your current colleagues?

A. I've got an Open Degree in Political Science, which I did while I was playing so it didn't affect my education. The brightest in the squad would probably have to be Rene Gilmartin. And there's a few laying claim to the other accolade with some debatable comments from time to time!

Q. Does the fact that you are surrounded by an increasingly youthful, inexperienced group of colleagues at Watford place a heavier burden on you to perform than you have felt at his other clubs?

A. Not really, it helps in actual fact. I go into games thinking about having an extra responsibility which sharpens the mind. A bit of a challenge for me is good, it probably makes me perform better. And it's slightly different here at Watford. At other clubs, you'd have two or three youngsters in the main group and they'd be "the young boys". Here, there are so many players of a younger age that have been disciplined into the ways of senior football that they're just regarded as men alongside us. There's no special treatment or leniency, here you're in the first-team so you've got to get on and cope with the demands of that. For me, it makes for better players quicker. Look at Lee Hodson and Ross Jenkins. They're knocking on 70 or 80 first-team games and they're only 19 or 20. You don't see that much at all elsewhere.

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