

Q & A session with Sean Dyche

December 2011

Q. Sean, you explained in the Fans' Forum that you felt that kids had been rushed in too quickly last season when they weren't perhaps ready. Do you not feel that there's a longer term advantage to having kids involved in the first team (even at the risk of exposing ourselves to the inconsistency that comes with it)... consistent with the investment in Harefield, if talented kids see that there's a route to the first team at Watford that gives them an incentive to join/stick with us, if bigger clubs come knocking (esp given EPPP). The change in tack that you have adopted MIGHT yield short term benefits, but at a longer term cost to the viability of the club. Whilst there are still young players in the team we no longer stand out in this regard.

A. The reality of the club still suggests that developing and selling players at the right time will always be with us. Currently Lee Hodson and Marvin Sordell are two obvious young players to have come out of the Academy more recently. Backed by Adrian Mariappa, Scott Loach and Lloyd Doyley, who've also come through the youth ranks, it's an ongoing process, but has to be balanced against results for the team.

The last 20 games of last season when the team were, on paper, younger, and more inexperienced, saw us take 16 points from 60 available. You will be aware that is relegation form.

I'm happy with the development programme currently in place; young players out getting valuable first-team football and, whilst there's no guarantee come back and immediately go into the first-team, they are more physically and mentally ready and capable to do so in my opinion.

Q. Are you able to tell us some of the players you wanted to sign, but they chose to go elsewhere / rejected us.

A. Not really, as I prefer to talk about players we did get and that are here at the club. I like to concentrate on that, and the only time you'll hear me mention others outside the club is when I'm specifically asked about them in interviews.

Q. As I'm sure you've noticed most fans were pretty frustrated with how our season started. Results and performances were below where we expected them to be. They seem to be picking up now which we're all delighted to see. I think the crux of the early season frustration however, revolved around the fact that, apart from 1 or 2 exceptions, our Academy products (who as fans we're all very proud of) were not getting a chance, in spite of the fact that our new signings seemed to be either under-performing or out injured. Firstly would you agree with the fans' analysis on this and second, with the benefit of hindsight would you have managed selection differently during this period?

A. A statistic that will give you a better feel for reality against perception is that up to this game (23 v Cardiff), the average age last season was 24.4 for the starting XI. This season it's been 24.6. I feel the reason the perception has been so powerful is because of the reduced subs' ruling. At least three of those on the bench last year were young players, and they hardly got any game time if you look

back over it. But it gave the feeling they were more involved - which of course they were, to some extent. It's a pity we've been denied that opportunity this season, as it was giving the younger lads a great taste of first-team matchday life.

Q. As a player at Watford you were widely reported to being a bit of a joker in the camp; always up for a laugh with/at fellow team-mates. When you became manager, how hard was it for you to adjust to suddenly being the manager and for the players to treat you as such?or are you still the club joker but with a gaffers jacket on?!?

A. I wouldn't say I was ever the club joker, but I do like an environment that's enjoyable as well as professional. We think we find the right balance because the group of players and staff are very hard-working and know where the line is, when to be serious and when a laugh and a joke is fine.

Q. Are you disappointed that many of the youngsters/academy players don't appear to be able to cut it in the first team and are to some extent struggling even if out on loan? Are those young players disappointed to be sent out on loan?

A. I'm not disappointed the youngsters haven't always found it comfortable. The only way of finding the reality of where they're at is put them in a situation where the answer will become clear. From a common sense point of view, if a player finds it so difficult in one or two divisions below, then the hierarchy of football would suggest that it would be very difficult to expect that player to then deliver at a higher level. The players themselves are not disappointed to go out on loan, they're buzzing about it most of the time in fact. They've all found the experience invaluable - whether it be positive or not so positive. It's all about developing and learning about the realities of being a professional footballer.

Q. What constitutes success this season - simply avoiding relegation or something more?

A. After a slow start, we're building a squad and a team within that with the ability, physicality, tactical understanding and mental strength to challenge in every game and perform with the purpose of winning. If these things are put in place correctly, and are delivered regularly, then you have to be open-minded and flexible about your targets, in my opinion.

Q. What is his long term strategy for sustained football at least in the Championship? This on-going blend of youth, maturing players and loans....or do you hope that the youth start to make a higher grade from the outset?

A. Footballing nirvana, in the mind's eye, would obviously be to have endless streams of youth players who can not only be first-team players, but can actually move the first-team forwards with a low cost-base and high output and achievement level.

The reason I'm saying nirvana is because everyone is searching to do this and it's very hard to deliver. That's why a mixed blend, as suggested by the question, is arguably more relevant to a club like ours.

Q. How would you respond to the criticism that there is at times no plan B?

A. I wasn't aware of any criticism of that. I was aware of the criticism of any my plans lettered A - Z earlier in the season, but in reality I feel that we're capable of producing a mixed and effective style of football, depending on what's right for the situation.

Q. In the early part of the season have we missed Cowie more than Graham?

A. The reality is that 54% of goals and 44% of assists left the building in the summer.

Q. If you could have one of the following players for the next match, which one would you choose, and why? John Barnes, Nigel Callaghan, Ashley Young, or Stuart Scullion

A. Ashley Young I'll go for, mainly because I played alongside him, I like him, I respect him and he's a top-drawer player. That's why he's at Manchester United.

Q. Who should the next England manager be?

A. Graham Taylor, of course!

Q. What was your highlight as a player?

A. Four promotions in general across my career, would be the answer in terms of my time as a player. Relating to Watford specifically, it was a great honour to be club captain, particularly in very difficult circumstances.

Q. Who are the best player(s) that you have played with and against?

A. The best players with would be Tim Cahill and Steven Reid at Millwall, a young Kevin Davies at Chesterfield. Heidar Helguson and Tommy Smith from Watford days, for their attitude to the game. Against would be Juninho, who I admire greatly.

Q. Red shorts or black shorts?

A. Red shorts, because Tony Loughlan loves them!

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