

ON THE SPOT

What was your favourite career goal?

That's not actually as hard to answer as you would think. My favourite goal was my first goal, which I suppose sounds bizarre considering I scored 200-odd more after it.

To score on my debut as a 17-year-old against Spurs was just fantastic. I didn't know I was playing until an hour and a half before the match. It was on New Year's Day 1983 and I'll never forget that date. To score after 25 minutes and go on and win the game 3-0 against our great rivals was a dream come true for such a young lad. I was lucky it was shown on television as well that night and it is something I have to keep forever.

What do you think is the most important goal you scored?

That's a much harder question. I would probably move on to the latter stages of my career, because unfortunately at West Ham and Everton I never got to the stage where my goals were going to win us the League, qualify us for Europe or win a cup final.

When I played for Leicester I played in the 1999 League Cup final (the Worthington Cup at the time) which we lost to Spurs.

But in the semi-final first leg against Sunderland I scored two goals at the Stadium of Light when we won 2-1. In the second leg we were losing 1-0 to a Niall Quinn goal, it was 2-2 on aggregate and then I then scored again to make it 1-1 on the night and 3-2 on aggregate. It was the goal that took us to Wembley. I think those three goals and particularly the one in the second leg are those that stick out. To score the goal that took Leicester to Wembley and a cup final was a special moment.

Who were the hardest defenders you played against?

From a toughness point of view I'd have to say Graham Roberts and Paul Miller at Tottenham – they were hard players. I remember playing against them when I was about 18 and had just got in to the first team at West Ham and those two were established senior pros. They gave me a bit of a kicking in one of the first games I played against Spurs.

As well as those, I always thought Stuart Pearce was not only a good footballer but also a very hard and uncompromising full-back. You didn't want to go too near him as he would give you a right good whacking. If you gave him half a chance to tackle you he would do.

I also have to mention my good mate Tony Adams. I had some great battles with him. He was a 6ft 4in defender who was a good footballer as well as a very tough opponent.

Who is the best player you played with?

At a club level it's quite simply Alan Devonshire at West Ham. He was a wonderful player who played on the left side of midfield in the good old days of 4-4-2. I used to play as a left-sided forward, so I used to link up with him a lot. He was a wonderful player who unfortunately got a bad knee injury in 1984.

He came back over a year later and he was still our best player, even though he had a gammy knee. I loved playing with Dev, he was just a fantastic player.

Who is the best player you played against?

Gazza immediately springs to mind – he was just an amazing footballer. I also had the privilege to play against Glenn Hoddle, who was a fantastic player. In the latter days, I played against Thierry Henry and Dennis Bergkamp for Arsenal and they were great forwards who I admired.

What is your favourite memory or best moment from your career?

There are probably three. Firstly, my West Ham debut that I've already mentioned.

Then my Everton debut where I netted after 34 seconds and scored a hat-trick. We won 4-0, so as far as debuts go that was a fantastic day for me.

Thirdly, playing for England and making my debut against Sweden in 1986. I was only 21 years of age and it was a great thrill for me to represent my country. I came on as substitute for John Barnes and it was a special moment. I have some very happy memories.

What is the best game you played in?

That's a tough one, but probably the Everton versus Liverpool FA Cup fifth round reply in 1991 that finished as a 4-4 draw. I didn't actually start the game, but came on as a substitute when we were 3-2 down. I scored an equaliser with one of the last kicks of the 90 minutes to make it 3-3.

Then John Barnes scored in extra-time to make it 4-3 but then I scored again in the 114th minute to make it 4-4. I think if you speak to any Liverpool or Everton fan that was alive at the time they will tell you that it was the best

Merseyside derby there has ever been. It was great to be involved in.

What is your worst memory?

As good as my debuts were, it's my sendings-off that stick out. All three were for retaliation. I'm quite a placid person and I just lost my rag three times and got sent off three times! The first time was playing for England Under-21s against Germany. Then I was sent off for Everton in a pre-season friendly.

I was also sent walking on my second debut for West Ham. It was my first game back at the club and I got sent off at Liverpool for a lunge on Rob Jones. Bear in mind that I had played for Everton, you can imagine how I felt when I got sent off, particularly at Anfield. Those are the three memories that I'd like to wipe out. But I don't have many bad memories so I can't complain.

Who was your hero growing up?

My hero was Bryan "Pop" Robson, not the one who played for Manchester United but the one who played for West Ham, Newcastle and Sunderland back in the 1970s. He was the first West Ham player I followed and he was like me, a small striker who scored over 200 League goals. It was my ambition to try to emulate him and score as many goals as he did, which I eventually did. I sort of emulated my hero. I learnt a lot from watching Pop and the runs he used to make.

My other hero was West Germany's Gerd Muller. He was just a fantastic finisher and I used to try to model myself on players like him.

Do you have any regrets from your playing career?

I mentioned about the times I was sent off; I'd like to be able to change those. But the main regret is that I didn't score for England and it's the only downside of my career. I won seven caps but I never played a full game, they were all coming on as a substitute or I was taken off.

Also, finishing my career at Millwall is a regret, bearing in mind I'm a West Ham boy. It wasn't the most sensible thing I've ever done. It was right in terms for my career, but looking back it would have been nice to have finished at West Ham.

Cottee's book, *West Ham: The Inside Story* is available from www.ex-hammers.com (£14.99)



with
TONY COTTEE

