



Nigel Winterburn

Reminiscing about all things SW19 on a visit to Wimbledon earlier in the year, Nigel Winterburn firmly nailed his colours to the Dons mast. "I was initially angry about what happened in 2002 and even now I don't accept it. I'm so pleased AFC Wimbledon is back in what I call our rightful home" adding "I used to go to the Dog & Fox pub and 'people watch' when I lived locally in digs with Dons supporter Margaret Whisker and her family. It was also a brilliant period in the journey of the Club."

The left-back was voted the 32nd greatest-ever Arsenal player in a poll on www.Arsenal.com but of course before he lined up at Highbury, he was pretty handy for the Dons too. Born in Arley, Warwickshire, Winterburn began his football career with Birmingham City and although he earned England youth caps at St. Andrews, he never made the Blues first-team and after



being released in 1982, moved on to Oxford United. A year later Jim Smith let him go and Wimbledon manager Dave Bassett stepped in to offer the teenager terms.

Arguably this was the best bit of business 'Harry' ever did. Nigel was given an immediate Football League debut away to Bolton Wanderers and the defender never looked back as he and the Dons rose together from the Third Division to the top-flight in just four seasons. Winterburn's own contribution – from the number three spot – was immense and he was voted Player of the Year in each of those four campaigns and gained England Under-21 honours in the process. The skilful but tenacious tackler was being enviously watched however and Arsenal boss George Graham earmarked him as a replacement for Kenny Sansom, paying £350,000

to take him to Highbury in 1987. Such was Nigel's potential that Graham even played him at right-back while he was looking long-term for a successor to Viv Anderson, but Winterburn soon ousted Sansom to make the left-back slot his own.

Over the next 13 years, Nigel was a fixture in a famously mean Arsenal back line, along with Tony Adams, Steve Bould/Martin Keown and Lee Dixon. In his second season with them the Gunners clinched their first League championship since their double year of 1971, with a dramatic late winner at Anfield, but only after Wimbledon elbowed their way into Nick Hornby's 'Fever Pitch' book in the previous game in North London, where Winterburn's glorious long-range goal against his old club was cancelled out by Paul McGee steering home an equaliser on his 21st birthday! Full England

honours followed and in the course of his time with the Gunners, Winterburn amassed some serious silverware with an impressive three league titles, two FA Cup wins, a League Cup victory and success in the European Cup Winners Cup. The arrival of Arsene Wenger in 1996 didn't disturb the continuity of the Arsenal defence and it wasn't until the Millennium that he was finally displaced – firstly by the Brazilian Silvinho and then by the emerging Ashley Cole.

At the age of 38, he still commanded a £250,000 fee when he moved across London to join West Ham in June 2000 and enjoyed two more years in the Premier League, making 94 Hammers appearances, the last being against Liverpool in February 2003, after which he finally hung up his boots. Nigel moved back into the game five years later, joining Paul Ince's backroom staff



at Blackburn Rovers as a defensive coach, but this ended after six months when Ince was replaced by Sam Allardyce.

These days, Winterburn works as a pundit in the football media and with Arsenal TV online and we are delighted to welcome him to the Cherry Red Records Stadium, Plough Lane this evening as our special guest.

