



**Chris Perry**

Many clubs fans sing “He’s one of our own” to a homegrown youngster who has made it to the first-team, but if there’s been one Wimbledon player who surely deserves that more than most, it’s Chris Perry. Born just a few hundred yards from Plough Lane, Chris discovered his passion for the Dons from an early age. “My grandfather and then my father used to take me to some of the games when I was four or five – we’d just got in the Football League and I loved every minute.”

But Perry’s love of football wasn’t just confined to watching and he was a useful enough player to get scouted aged 12 and join the WFC Centre of Excellence, then run by John Phillips and Clive Staines. “I played for Surrey all the way through the ranks and became youth team captain a few times, although Justin

Skinner was usually the skipper. We reached the FA Youth Cup quarter finals and won the South East Counties League under Terry Burton. Justin, Neal Ardley and Stewart Castledine were in the same side and that team spirit remained when we moved up to the reserves”.

Originally a right-back, some had reservations when the five foot, eight inch defender moved into a central role, but his man marking and spring-heeled jumps more than made up for his relatively slight frame. With a number of good centre halves at the club, Chris had to be patient for his first team bow until a substitute appearance against Liverpool in 1994 and then a full debut at Anfield the following year, where he quickly established himself as a regular pick often alongside the towering Dean Blackwell, where

the pair were probably the most underrated duo in their positions in the Premier League.

It was the 1996/97 campaign where Perry really shone however. Wimbledon chased major honours, reaching the semi-finals of both domestic cup competitions and for Chris personally there was recognition from his peers by being shortlisted for PFA Young Player of the Year and being chosen in the Football Writers Association Team of the Season. He also caught the eye of Sir Alex Ferguson at Manchester United, after Perry bagged a late (and rare!) Dons goal at Old Trafford and the influential Scot tipped him for international honours. “One piece of defending when he tracked Andy Cole was absolutely brilliant,” adding “I think he could play for England.” Nicknamed ‘The Rash’ (for being

all over his opponent) Perry also embedded his defensive ability in the minds of Wimbledon fans with a superbly-executed tackle on Arsenal’s Dennis Bergkamp that sent appreciative purrs all around Selhurst Park.

But after six seasons and 212 games in his beloved yellow and blue and harbouring that elusive England call (that inexplicably never came) he agreed a £4 million move to Tottenham in July 1999, becoming Spurs’ record signing, playing with Sol Campbell and then Ledley King. A back injury cost him his place in 2003 and he left White Hart Lane after 120 appearances to turn out for Charlton, West Bromwich Albion, Luton and Southampton. Taking

his coaching badges, he worked with Dagenham & Redbridge Under-16s before moving to Millwall in 2015/16 where he is currently the Lions U18 joint-manager and has also worked extensively in the media for Talksport and BT Sport, doing co-commentator duties covering top flight leagues throughout Europe.

Perry was also quick to pledge his support to the reformed Dons during our inaugural season. “I’m an AFC Wimbledon supporter now. And I’ll continue to support the team where the fans are.” It’s always a pleasure to see you here tonight Chris. Welcome back to Plough Lane!