



Gary Elkins

Something of a cult figure at Wimbledon with "we all live in a Gary Elkins world" getting a frequent matchday airing, Gary served the Dons for six years, playing in 110 matches.

Oxfordshire-born Gary came through the Fulham youth system and was given a first-team debut by Ray Harford against Middlesbrough in 1984. Making exactly 100 Football League appearances for the SW6 club, his Fulham career was interrupted by a broken leg and then a loan spell at Exeter City, before he was snapped up for a bargain £20,000 by Harford when he became Wimbledon manager in 1990. Elkins had almost joined Brentford, but for a bizarre intervention by Bees chairman Martin Lange which led to the departure of manager Steve Perryman.



Perryman recalled: "I'd done my homework and found out Fulham would let him go on a free. The chairman didn't want to sign him... in one conversation he said one reason he didn't want me to sign Gary was because midfielder Terry Bullivant had told Lange that he thought Elkins had 'shifty eyes'. What Lange was inadvertently telling me was that he'd rather trust the judgement of one of his players than the manager, not based on footballing ability but facial expressions. I eventually resigned..."

Much of Gary's early Dons career was spent as understudy to Terry

Phelan, although he was given an extended run in the 1992/93 season, following Phelan's £2.5 million transfer to Manchester City. But the sturdy defender was challenged for the left-back spot by Brian McAllister and even by right-footed Roger Joseph. Joe Kinnear resolved the dilemma by purchasing Alan Kimble the following year. In November 1995, Gary suffered a serious knee injury that would effectively curtail his Wimbledon days and a good bit of business was done when he was sold to promotion-chasing Swindon Town for £80,000.



Sadly, Gary soon fell out of favour with Robins manager Steve McMahon and his form and fitness suffered to the extent that he retired from the professional game at 31 and returned to his hometown team of AFC Wallingford. Enjoying his football again in the less palatial surroundings of the Combined Counties League, Elkins earned his living by coaching at the Elms Soccer School in Middlesex. Although he didn't play against AFC Wimbledon in 2002, Gary was introduced to the crowd at the Hithercroft to a warm reception from both sets of fans. He continued to play for the 'Wallies' reserves and 'A' sides before joining local rivals Didcot Town as reserve team manager, then first team coach.



Gary ran several business ventures including a sports shop and printing company but for the last 25 years has been a PE and fitness instructor at HMP Huntercombe and also teaches first aid after setting up the Save Yu training company, alongside his partner Gemma, but still finds time to keep in touch with former Wimbledon colleagues. "They were all strong characters, we used to all go on holiday together post and pre-season. We have a WhatsApp group, still meet for a drink at Christmas and have done for the last 15 years, which shows how strong we were as a group. I stay in contact with quite a few Dons fans too, so look forward to catching up with them."

Gary and Gemma came on a Plough Lane stadium tour in February, but wanted to experience a matchday here, so we are pleased to welcome them back as our special guests today.

