



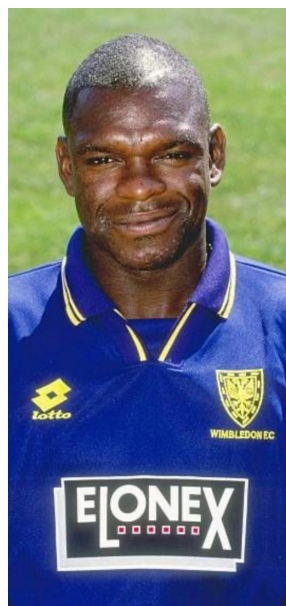
WOPA

ANDY CLARKE

Little did Andrew Weston Clarke realise when he popped into the world on 22 July 1967 that for almost 16 years he would one day hold the transfer record paid by a Football League club for a non-league player. But when he left Conference side Barnet to join Wimbledon in February 1991, the fee was a down-payment of £150,000, rising to a potential £350,000. It eventually topped out at a quarter of a million pounds, only beaten in January 2007 when Peterborough United splashed out £260,000 on Stevenage Borough forward George Boyd.

Andy began in junior football around his native Islington and later playing in the London Hotels League, a sharp-eyed official spotted something in him and alerted

Barnet. Barry Fry also liked what he saw and threw him into the Bees first team after a couple of training sessions, where Clarke scored on his debut against Sutton United. It was a first of 56 in just a season-and-a-half and it got the scouts flocking to Underhill. Manchester United gave him a trial and Sir Alex Ferguson was close to offering him an opportunity of a lifetime. The canny Fry, himself a former player at Old Trafford, knew his worth though. "The kid is electric, a natural and we weren't ready to let him go cheaply." Dons boss Ray Harford blinked first. "Andy's got something that gets crowds going. I watched him dozens of times before deciding to spend that sort of money."



Clarke, quickly nicknamed 'Sonic the Hedgehog' for his pace and directness, got off to a good start in SW19 - a goal with his first touch in a reserve game - and after a couple of substitute appearances, one of which saw him find the net in a 3-1 win over Nottingham Forest - he made his full debut at Old Trafford and once again got on the scoresheet against the club that rejected him. A left-footed attacker who could operate both as a central striker and an out-and-out winger, Andy was later regarded by Joe Kinnear as a player who could change a game. Although he neared a century of starts for Wimbledon in eight years with the Club, he also came off the bench an amazing 116 times.



It was no surprise when he left Wimbledon in 1999, that he was reunited with Barry Fry, now in charge of Peterborough, where he will always be fondly remembered by Posh fans for scoring the only goal of the game against Darlington at Wembley as they won the Division Three Play-Off Final, after earlier helping to knock out Barnet in the semi-finals and finished the season with 18 goals. He went on to score 71 times in 264 games for Peterborough, remaining with them until being released in 2005. After hanging up his boots, Clarke became a market stall trader in Barnet High Street and a community football coach in North London.

We're delighted to welcome Andy back to Plough Lane this afternoon.

