

# MARK WATSON

The comedian ponders Roy Hodgson's runny nose, and the night he spotted Cameron Jerome at the services

## First game you ever attended?

Bournemouth vs West Brom, Christmas 1987. My dad supports Bournemouth but he encouraged me to support my local team, Bristol City. I've extended that to my own son, who's growing up near Arsenal. They've got a better deal than me... I was seven for my debut at Dean Court. We stood right at the front, and a boy next to me got hit in the face by a clearance.

## Who was your childhood hero and did you ever meet them?

Bob Taylor, a prolific centre-forward for us in the late-'80s. One of the players had a testimonial at a cricket club and Bob was strolling around the boundary eating an ice cream, so I nervously asked him for an autograph. I couldn't believe that a 30-goal-a-season man would just eat an ice cream like that, like a normal human.

## Finest moment as a player?

I took part in a marathon five-a-side game in Salford – Alan Shearer and Robbie Savage captained the teams (for charity) and kept going for a whole day. I hadn't anticipated lining up with Shearer in my career, but I scored two goals and laid one on for him.

## What do you like most about going to a match?

The feeling of community. That sense of an entire town converging on the ground is one of the greatest feelings you can have in life. There's that LS Lowry picture called 'Going To The Match' with all of these stick figures flocking to the ground, and every time I'm in a crowd, I feel like one of those. Especially because I'm almost as thin as a Lowry drawing.

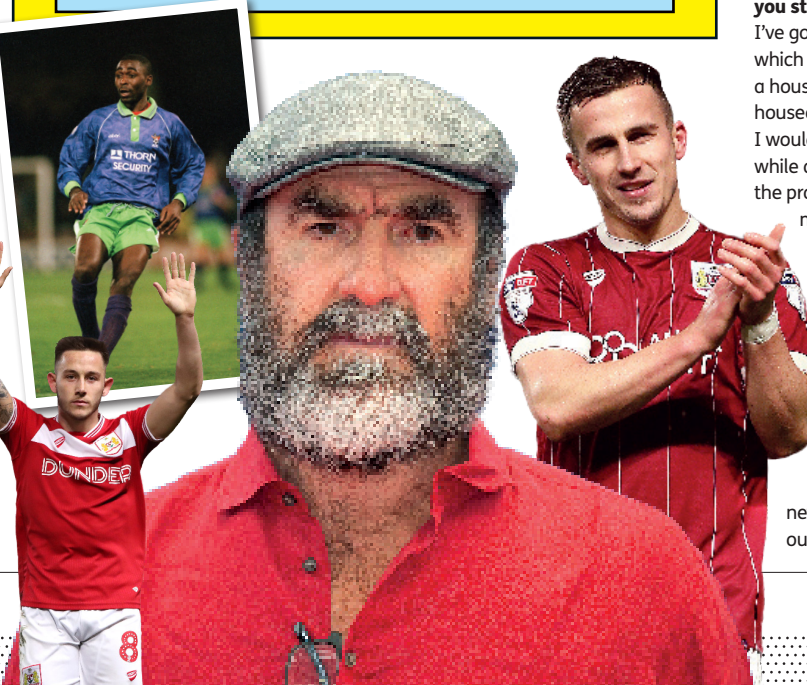
## Who from your club's past would you bring back to play in your current side?

Andy Cole. He was only with us for a short time before heading off for fame in the Premier League. Our attacking options are reasonably good this year, but if we can get a deal nailed down for mid-90s Cole, I think we could make the play-offs.



BRISTOL CITY

MARK WATSON



## Which player do you admire, even though he never played for your club?

Like a lot of people who grew up in the '90s, I've never been particularly fond of Manchester United, but I always had a soft spot for Eric Cantona. The elegance and that streak of old-school madness. I've remained a fan of 21st century Eric, who appears periodically looking like a shipwrecked sea-captain, and does speeches about the human condition. Great stuff.

## What's the funniest/strangest thing you've ever seen or heard at a game?

Around 1994, Sam Allardyce was still a lower-league journeyman and he brought Blackpool to Ashton Gate.

It was a 1-1 draw and they missed various chances. Each time, Allardyce would slam on the roof of the dugout in frustration. The bloke behind me started shouting (you have to imagine the broadest of Bristol accents), "Leave our dugouts alone, Allardyce!" Years later, he came back as boss of Bolton and before the game had even started, a bloke shouted the exact same thing. I've remembered it every time I've seen him on TV since then.

## What's the most important piece of memorabilia that you have or wish you still had?

I've got a large programme collection which is probably what I would save in a house fire, although in practice it's housed in two really heavy boxes so I would definitely die in the fumes while attempting it. But I don't have the programme from that very first match at Bournemouth. If any Cherries fans have one to sell me, please get in touch.

## What's the best piece of advice you've ever heard or read from a player or manager?

There was this guy called Johnny Cochrane who was in charge of Sunderland in the 1930s, a different era, and he never used to even bother finding out who the opposition was. He'd

turn up for the game saying, "Who've we got today?" Whatever the answer was, he'd remark, "Ah, we'll piss on that lot." In this Opta age where there are hundreds of people analysing every kick of every ball, I think about that a lot.

## Where's the strangest place you've ever met a manager or a player?

I don't like to brag about it, but I once spotted Cameron Jerome at a 24-hour service station.

## What's the best food you've ever had at a game?

It's not exactly the 'best', but when you went to matches in the '80s it always stank of Bovril everywhere, and I can still remember the feeling of cradling it in your hands for almost the entire game, because it would just burn your tongue off if you drank it. The smell of Bovril to me now is the most nostalgic thing in the world: one sniff anywhere in the country and I'm watching a 0-0 draw with Port Vale in the rain.

## Who's your current favourite player?

In the current team, Josh Brownhill, who's a gifted playmaker improving every season. Away from my own club, Raheem Sterling is a joy to watch, and has become a really important voice for youngsters coming through. He's done an unbelievable job for my fantasy team too, when you look at all the other stuff he's got on his plate.

## Tell us something about one of your players or managers that we don't already know?

Roy Hodgson had a short stint as our manager early in his career, and one of his players said (much later), "The only thing I remember about him is that he always had a runny nose."

## If you could drop yourself into your all-time Robins team, who would you be playing alongside?

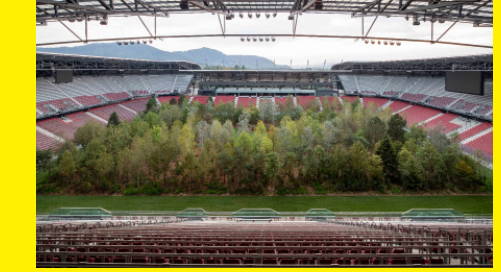
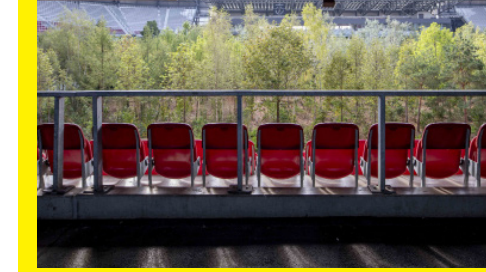
I'd be in the middle of the park looking to release all-time legend Brian Tinnion down the left wing. I'm obviously lacking a bit of quality at that level, but Tinnion played more than 450 games for us, so there'd be a good balance of youth and experience. I'd have Cole Skuse behind me to pick up the pieces, in the unlikely event that I lose the ball.

## Which player would you choose as your room-mate?

Joe Bryan (a homegrown hero, now at Fulham) because apparently he's quite a big reader; I don't want to look weird if I get my book out at bedtime. Also, he went to the same school as my friend Huw, so that could be an icebreaker.

## Which celebrity should we ask these questions to soon?

My mate Tim Key, from *Alan Partridge* and many other things. He's got a great engine on him and covers every single blade of grass.



## FOREST'S BRAND NEW HOME

No, Clough's old club aren't moving: a Euro 2008 venue has had a spruce-up

**SK Austria Klagenfurt, based in the south-east corner of Austria and currently in the second tier, are no one's idea of a European glamour club.**

They do, however, have a swanky home ground – the Worthersee Stadion, a 32,000-seat arena and one of the venues for Euro 2008. Or rather, they *did* have a rather swanky home ground.

For the past couple of months, the club have been playing at the tiny Karawankenblick Stadium in another part of town, while the Worthersee stages a public art installation. 'For Forest – The Unending Attraction of Nature' features 300 trees of varying size planted out on the pitch, to be viewed by visitors from the stadium seats. The installation was created by Swiss artist Klaus Littman, who curated the Faces of Football exhibition in 2008, featuring 30 portraits of star-name players from around the world – and Gerald Asamoah.

At the Worthersee, trees will change appearance as autumn progresses, attracting a whole host of wildlife as opposed to the football club's loyal but small army of supporters rattling around the state-of-the-art stadium.

Having secured the go-ahead of Klagenfurt's owner, Littman then had to persuade the groundsman. But he found a helpful ally, explaining: "The groundsman said, 'I will support For Forest because I am strongly convinced that it's time to defy the exploitation of our planet. For Forest does this in a positive way without soaking up negative energy.'" How eloquent...

Founded in 2007, they didn't officially begin playing as SK Austria Klagenfurt until 2010, although they can trace their roots back to an identically named outfit from the 1920s. That side, later renamed FC Karnten, appeared in the UEFA Cup a couple of decades ago before going bust in 2009, with most of their support base migrating to Klagenfurt (5,000 turned up for their first ever game, a pre-season friendly).

The club were early league leaders this season, and should they win promotion to the Austrian Bundesliga, they're going to want their home back pretty sharpish. Hopefully environmentalists won't have broken in and chained themselves to the trees by then.

**Matt Barker**