

## **MY WORKING DAYS AT ST. ANDREWS.**

These are my own experiences to the best of my knowledge. Dates may not be 100% accurate.

I was a contractor to Birmingham City Football Club which developed into a full-time position at the club, heading up their IT and Communications.

Looking through my invoice dates I was associated with the club from 2003 to 2019, although I remember working down there when Trevor Francis was there, so that must have been prior to my company becoming incorporated.

I think in all I was there for over 20 years in total.

I terminated my time at Birmingham City when Karren Brady asked me to go to West Ham with her when she left, to undertake a full assessment of the IT there.

I was there for a few weeks, but it wasn't for me, and I moved back to the Blues.

Karren was a fantastic boss, and I still stay in contact with her today. I will reveal my time working with Karren in another serial.

In the early days at St Andrews each member of staff had a PC, Printer and an individual Freeserve account for e-mails.

To say it was behind the times even in those days was very much true.

IT at the Training ground was non-existent, except for a few members of staff having their own laptops. I was not really involved there too much until the IT development programme started.

I started to develop the IT at the club and when I installed a mail server for all their mails, 'bcfc.com' was born and I was the blue-eyed boy, well sort of .... I will touch on that on another time.

IT was relatively new, and the players had a fascination with it, I think this is why they wanted to talk to me.

I never had a lot to do with TF, perhaps a slight nod of the head, although I remember being in a room with a couple of players talking one day and he came in and promptly told them to get out on the Training Ground pitch.

At that time the Training Ground facilities were Portacabins, a distinct change from today.

The first real manager I worked with was Steve Bruce, he was a nice guy, him and his assistant, John Benson, he later passed away.

The first day he arrived, I remember getting the call from Karren Brady, "Go to the Training Ground and ensure Steve Bruce has all the IT equipment he needs".

I was pretty excited as I got a mark up from any deal, so I thought I can earn a few pounds here.

I remember going in to see him and introducing myself and asking him what computer related equipment he would require.

He looked at me as though I was an alien and in his broad Geordie accent said, "Aye lad! I won't need anything like that thanks".

I turned on my heels and walked out of the door rather sheepish, thinking what could have been.

I later forged a great relationship with Steve, and he would often say let's go for a 'pint and a pie' we more than often went to the Railway in Dorridge.

I later worked at his house and believe it or not installed him a PC.

This is where the fun started. Steve and his lovely wife Janet, both from Newcastle, (childhood sweethearts) wanted me to teach them to use the computer.

They were a lovely couple, as down to Earth as you can get.

He never had a scooby and after a couple of sessions I told him to practice what I had taught him; I never heard another thing about that PC to this day.

Steve used to give me lots of sportswear supplied by the club. I used to wear the bench coats and tops to work and the staff would look at me and snipe, "who do you think you are, a footballer" as I had my initials on my BCFC gear; well, they were not my initials they were Steve's which coincidently were the same as mine, but I couldn't say anything in case I dropped in it.

I remember working at his house one day, he was managing Sunderland at the time, although he still lived local.

Janet was anxious about him managing Sunderland being from Newcastle, as the rivalry up there can be tough. Try calling a Geordie a Macken or visa-versa and you will find out.

One day he drove off to Sunderland in Janet's car as he had no petrol in his own, when she found out she was furious, as her handbag was in the car and she had no money to fill his car with petrol, for her own journey home to Newcastle.

I said to her don't worry Janet I have money, just borrow it and Steve will give it me back when I see him next.

She was reluctant to do this and went off into the house.

A few minutes later she came down looking delighted, she looked around and whispered, "we have a bottle with pound coins in upstairs and I have taken enough to fuel the car".

I asked what about if you want to stop midway to have some refreshments, she said "I don't stop lad."

She jumped in the car, put the window down and said lock up will you Shawn and drove off.

I didn't feel comfortable with this, but that is what they were like, trust you with their life.

Another story of the times, Birmingham signed a player called Olivier Kapo, big French lad. I was working down at the Training Ground and was friendly with Vic Callow, he was the player liaison officer. We were talking about Kapo and he said I have to get him somewhere to live locally.

I said I have a friend who builds luxurious houses just outside Dickens Heath and offered to give him a ring to see if he had any availability.

I rang him and he said I have just finished a 5 bedroom, and it was available to rent and to come up and take a look.

I told Vic, who spoke to Kapo and next thing Kapo was in my car going to do a viewing.

Kapo could not speak very good English, and I remember trying to have a conversation with him en-route to no avail, I remember thinking to myself what on Earth have I got myself into here.

Anyway, we viewed the property, Kapo loved it, Vic spoke to accounts at the club, got the contract signed, they setup a Direct Debit with the owner and Kapo duly moved in, everyone was happy.

The owner of the property was a reserved guy, a lovely man who owned a piece of land on a gated secluded private road, he had built his own house and then built another 2 or 3 homes I think this was the fourth.

The problem now was Kapo could not get any services in his name, he had no credit rating or any history in England. So, this was left to yours truly.

I managed to get the Gas and Electricity sorted with a security deposit of some sort, but the internet was a major problem.

At the time my company supplied internet services, so I managed to get him an internet and phone line using my name. All sorted everyone happy, so I thought.

Steve had now moved to Wigan and came in for Kapo.  
He did no more, picked up sticks and moved to Wigan.

I had the owner of the property calling me asking where he had gone as people were calling at the house looking for him. Don't forget it was a gated complex, so they had to ring the intercom.

I said I would see if I could get hold of him. I phoned Steve at Wigan who said come up and see him. I had to drive to Wigan had a meeting with Kapo and got everything sorted.

Can I add there was no issue with money, he just didn't understand how the English way of life worked.

Kapo was one of the nice guys in the game, very generous. I think someone put on a filming of him giving one of the academy lads his Mercedes, I can confirm this was true, although I remember it being slightly different than explained, but I could be wrong.

I think the lad was an academy goalkeeper and Kapo stayed behind after training and he was in goal working with him. Kapo said that if you save this penalty, you can have my car, he did and the rest is history, Kapo gave him his Merc, keys logbook the lot.

Going back to Steve Bruce, he was a good down to earth man, I have lots of memories with Steve whilst working at the club, you will have to take my word for it he was a top bloke.