



Alan lets himself go!

You snatched Manchester United to join Blackburn in 1992—why?

Blackburn had a hugely successful owner and a hugely successful manager. The first season I went there we finished fourth, the second season we finished runners-up and the third season we went on and won the championship, so I think it was the right decision.

Legend has it you "celebrated" winning the Championship by going home and working in your garden...

It's rumored, yeah. It's incorrect. I think someone mischievously put it in an article and someone else decided to take it to full length, but it was never the case. I did something rather different, I can promise you.

Anything you want to elaborate on?

No.

Do you like gardening?

No. It's awful!

How difficult a decision was it to move to Newcastle United?

It was a difficult decision. I had Barcelona, Italian clubs,

Manchester United and Newcastle interested. But I had the opportunity to go home to the club I'd always supported. It was my dream to go there and wear the No. 9 shirt. That's why I went there in the end.

How did you know when it was time to walk away from Newcastle and the game?

Classic Shearer



I always promised myself I would get out at the top. It's always right to get off stage when people want more, not when they're telling you to get off. I didn't want someone else making the decision for me. I wanted to make it for myself.

How were known for your rather subdued goal celebrations—ever tempted to do a backflip?

I never really planned the celebrations, they just sort of happened. On one occasion at Blackburn I did something rather stupid. It was when I was playing for Newcastle. I think I went down on my knees, or something like that. I had been getting a bit of criticism. It was a one off. I never did anything like that again. I think prefer the one-arm salute and you away.

Do you regret missing out on trophies you might have won if you'd gone elsewhere?

I have no regrets. I would have won trophies at other clubs, but I've been so happy in the last ten years at Newcastle. It's been everything I hoped it would be and a hell of a lot more. I think anyone in my position would find it very difficult not to go home.

Who's been your favorite strike partner over the years?

At club level, it's Les Ferdinand. We played one season together and scored forty-nine goals. He missed a bit of the season and I missed a bit, so to score that many goals

together was great. At international level, it was Teddy Sheringham—I've had such a good understanding with him.

Who's the best player you've come up against?

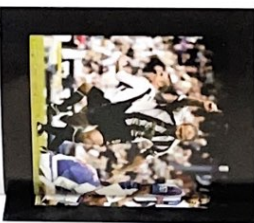
Defensively, Tony Adams. I've got tremendous respect for him. He was a great leader, a great captain, and a very very good player. For ninety minutes we were enemies—we kicked each other and fought like hell. At the end of the game we shook hands, then went for a drink afterwards. That's the way it should be. The best player overall, was Zidane. I played against him a few times, and he was pretty special.

You succeeded as an England captain—what was that like?

I was just absolutely delighted. Glenn Hoddle said, "We'll review it after the three games." He didn't want it detracting from my scoring goals. Thankfully I scored goals and was kept on a permanent basis. It's not something you can turn down.

What pressures will new England skipper John Terry have on his shoulders?

You have to deliver. You have to be seen as doing things right. You have to deal with the media a lot more. Plus, there are certain responsibilities outside the game, like honoring your country.



tions you have to attend. But it doesn't get any bigger or any better than being captain of England. It's about the biggest honor in football.

Why did you retire from international football when you did?

I didn't want my club form and my international form to suffer. Because of the injuries, bad, and the number of games you have to play, one or both of them would have suffered. Obviously, I couldn't retire from Newcastle, so it had to be England. Also, people don't realize the traveling you do and the time you spend away from your family when you play international football. It's a hell of a lot.

Did you ever consider going back?

No. There were rumors that I had opportunities to go back, but I made the right decision. I got another very good six years out of it, which is why I did it in the first place.

Which direction is England heading in these days?

Hopefully upwards. They had a pretty dismal World Cup

They were heavily criticized and rightfully so. They have a new manager now, who will have new ideas. They've had a pretty tough time over the last couple of months, but I think they'll qualify for the European Championships.

When will they win another World Cup?

Your guess is as good as mine!

"It's always right to get off stage when people want more, not when they're telling you to get off"

How big is the gap between Premiership and international football?

The defenders are better! It's a big step up. You're playing against the best players in the world when you're playing for your country. You're testing your wits and seeing how good you are.

What do you make of U.S. Soccer?

In the U.S., it's always going to be tough because of the other options kids have. When they're growing up in England, they don't have as many options. It's great to see American players playing in the EPL. The more success the National team has, the more American players you'll see in the EPL.

How far does U.S. Soccer have to go before they win a World Cup?

There is quite a long way to go. You look at the rest of the world and you can see how difficult it is, even for a well-established country like England. You are going to have to get the best players playing soccer and not the other sports.

What do you think of MLS?

I think it's probably needs a big star to come over while he's still playing at the highest level. I've heard the rumors about Beckham—I think that would be great. Once one comes over, the others will follow. The bigger and better players you have, the better it is for everyone.

What's the best league in the world?

The direction towards the EPL. Technically, I don't think it's as good as Spain's La Liga or Italy's Serie A, but as a whole package—the pitches, stadiums, atmosphere, the passion for the game—I think it's the EPL.

Who are your favorites among the current crop of EPL players?

I like strikers. Rooney, Thierry Henry, Michael Owen, and Alex EFL is lucky to have them because they are all great players.

SHEARER ON STRIKING

Tips from the master himself

ON MAKING IT AS A TOP STRIKER
Don't call corners. Give it your all. If your all isn't good enough, no one can complain. You go to bed at night knowing you've given it your all to try to achieve all that you want to achieve. You can walk away with your head held high. If you give it your best shot.

ON FORMING STRIKE PARTNERSHIPS
With some partnerships you just have to work at them. Others just happen, like with Les and Teddy. They were two very different players, but two very excellent players.

ON TAKING PENALTIES
Don't miss! I think the worst thing you can do is change your mind at the last second. I've done that on a couple of occasions and missed. So you pick your spot and get it there as hard as possible and you have a chance. Just don't miss the target. I've never understood a goal scorer who doesn't want to take a penalty. I don't understand it.

ON BEING IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME
I think you're born with it. You can improve someone's technique—their heading, their touch, their positional play—but you can't actually tell anyone to be in the right place at the right time. I think you're just born with that. If you ask any goal scorer, "them did you end up there?" I think he'll tell you, "I don't know." I think I was just one of the lucky ones. **90second**

What do you think of Wayne Rooney?

I think the word "great" is used too many times for players that I think he is a great player, and at such an early age. I think the scary thing, particularly for defenders, is that he's going to get better.

Does he have what it takes to be a consistent world-class goal scorer?

I think he's at the right club, with the right manager who will guide him in the right direction. Ferguson will do with Wayne Rooney what he did with Fran Criggs and other young talents. I think he'll be fine.

Who is the best player in the world?

I don't think Henry is far off, but I think the best right now is Ronaldinho. Some of the tricks and skills that he has are just amazing.

Do you miss playing?

I haven't had time to miss it, really. I'm enjoying waking up on a Sunday morning and not limping off to the toilet, not having bruises and bumps all over me. For twenty-odd years I've had someone telling me where to be and at what time, so it's nice to have a bit of freedom!

How's your golf coming along?

Golf's good, yeah! I'm playing off six at the moment, so I'm trying to get that down. It's very difficult. It's a great game—I love it.

What about your much talked about move into coaching—will that happen?

Yeah—I'm getting my coaching badges presently—but I don't know when. I think I'll give it a go one day.