

The Fox on the box

MARTIN McCONACHIE
SPEAKS TO SKY SPORTS
COMMENTATOR AND
FORMER LEICESTER CITY
STRIKER **ALAN SMITH**

Tonight's visitors have just one aim this season. They will be looking to win promotion to the Premier League, relying on the likes of David Nugent and Jamie Vardy to fire them there. But when they were promoted to the First Division (now the Premier League) in 1982-83, they did so with two of the country's leading strikers, Gary Lineker and Alan Smith. For the latter, it was a rags to riches story as he had playing Non-League football just a year earlier for Alvechurch.

"I'd got to 16 and was still keen on schoolwork," Alan recalls. "I didn't get a football apprenticeship or anything so carried on studying and joined Alvechurch at 18." A prolific striker hitting more than 20 goals, his first season in senior football secured him a move to Leicester City, a deal done by manager Jock Wallace in 1982. But the Scot left shortly afterwards and the new boss was Gordon Milne,

a good move for Alan as it turned out. "Jock had told me I'd have to wait for my chance in the first team but when Gordon came in, he cleared out a lot of the Scottish players and I was in the first team straight away."

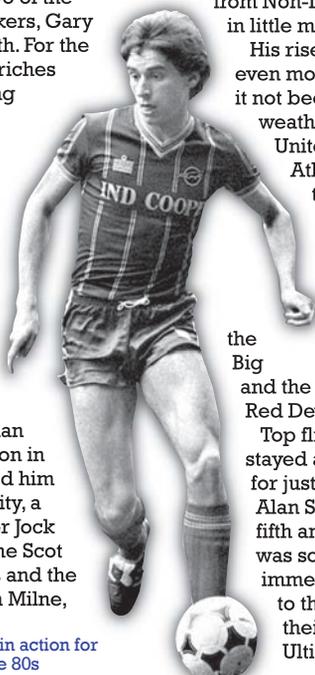
That first season was a triumph for both Alan and the team and the new partnership with Gary Lineker was formed. "Gary and I worked well together. I played with my back to goal and he fed off me." The team won promotion to the top flight, finishing third behind QPR and Wolves, and Alan reached double figures of goals. He'd gone from Non-League to top flight in little more than 12 months!

His rise could have been even more meteoric had it not been for the British weather. Manchester United manager Ron

Atkinson came down to watch him in a Cup tie against Billericay but left before the end. The subsequent snow that blanketed the country delayed

the Big Ron's return visit and the chance to join the Red Devils had gone.

Top flight football stayed at Leicester City for just about as long as Alan Smith did. In his fifth and final season, he was sold to Arsenal and immediately loaned back to the Foxes to help in their relegation scrap. Ultimately the move



FLASHBACK: Alan Smith in action for Leicester City back in the 80s



failed as Leicester, by now under the tutelage of Irishman Bryan Hamilton, were relegated back to the second tier. "It was never mid table safety with Leicester but my final season with them ended in a horrible way with relegation at Oxford. I had to say goodbye to all my mates knowing they were



“Yes, I remember coming down for the game and it was really misty if I recall. The first thing as a pro that you look at was the pitch and it was good. I think I had a couple of chances to score but Wrighty (Ian Wright) scored a hat-trick and we won comfortably in the end.”

After disposing of the Glovers, Arsenal went on to lift the FA Cup that year along with the League Cup. In the former, Alan received the only booking of his 571-game career, a yellow for ungentlemanly conduct after he delayed the taking of a free kick. Having played at Leicester City with card-free angel Gary Lineker, the pair were candidates for being named the nicest front men in football!

Two seasons later and Alan retired from injury prematurely at the age of 32 in 1995. Nowadays, he’s kept really busy by his media commitments including a role as co-commentator to Martin Tyler on Sky Sports. “I got the job after Andy Gray’s misfortune when he was fired from Sky. It’s a great job and the highlight was the 2011 Champions League Final between Barcelona and Manchester United. It was an incredible spectacle and one I’ll never forget.”

Kids all over the world will also tell you Alan is the voice of EA Sports FIFA commentaries too, having just completed his third stint with them on FIFA14. “I did a little audition and got the job. It took us eight solid days to record all the phrases this year and that’s just the add-ons to what we’ve recorded before.”

He doesn’t get much chance to go and see Leicester nowadays but promises he looks for their results each week. And no one will be happier than Alan if the Foxes outrun the chasing pack and reach the top flight three decades after he did it. ■

all going down and I was off to Arsenal.”

A scoring record of 84 goals in 217 games was impressive and once at Arsenal, continued to make the headlines. In eight years at the club, he won the old Division One twice, the FA Cup and League Cup once each and also scored the winner in the Cup Winners Cup

Final against Parma. Also included there was a trip to Huish Park as Yeovil hosted the Gunners in the FA Cup third round of 1992-93.

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