

LEON BEST INTERVIEW



Some positions at clubs are difficult to fill, aren't they? A defender at Arsenal has a lot to live up to as has the number 7 at Liverpool or the manager's job at Manchester United when Sir Alex leaves. Up there also is the centre forward's role at Newcastle though an ex-Yeovil Town loanee is doing a great job at the moment filling it.

Leon Best, now 25, is enjoying the high life at St James' Park but he is quick to pay tribute to the Glovers, and their supporters, for that three month loan spell four seasons ago. **"The recognition I received from that loan spell gave me confidence and the belief that the team needed me to score goals and I enjoyed the responsibility"** he confessed.

Best's loan spell began in November 2006 after he had completed a seventeen game, three month period at Bournemouth. But after a similar length deal with Yeovil, the Nottingham-born striker had added another ten goals to his account and seemed destined for bigger and better things when he returned to parent club Southampton. His goals gave the Glovers a huge mid-season boost as they picked up 26 points during his Huish Park stay. So how did he come to Somerset? **"I'd been on loan at Bournemouth and done well so when I went back, George Burley said I could go out again on loan. A number of teams came in for me but I chose Yeovil because I could stay with Martin Cranie, a good friend and a team mate, and not on my own."**

The frontman can reel off his Yeovil stats with ease as can most Yeovil fans. Fifteen games saw ten goals; after a blank on his debut v Scunthorpe, he then hit seven in his next nine games including goals in memorable 3-1 victories at Brighton and at home to Huddersfield live on Sky Sports. He then finished off with a double in a 4-1 win at Carlisle and signed off with the second in a 2-0 victory over Bournemouth. **"The spell at Yeovil helped me to understand how important goals are for the team. They gave me confidence as did going on a great run while I was there; it did loads for my future."**

That future saw a move to Championship side Coventry City at the end of the season, a move he welcomed. **"Several teams came in for me but I chose City because I wanted to work for Iain Dowie who I thought I could learn from as he was another striker. I had a good time, close to my home town of Nottingham, but the first couple of seasons were a bit slow as I was in and out of the team with injuries. The third season though, I was number one striker and fit so I scored ten goals by halfway through the season from just twenty starts."**

From our conversation, you can tell how much scoring means to the quietly spoken Eire international. Strikers are always likely to be judged by the number of goals scored, just look at the likes of Fernando Torres and Andy Carroll for examples of that. His heroes from his youth were Stan Collymore and the Brazilian Ronaldo, both prolific strikers while the modern day strikers he admires are Wayne Rooney and Sergio Aguero, ironically two of only three strikers who've scored more Premier League goals this season than Best at the time of writing.

The Coventry goals got him his big move to Newcastle United in February 2010. A quiet start saw him take thirteen appearances to break his duck, though many were outings from the bench as the Geordies returned to the Premier League. But since then, Chris Hughton's buy has proved to be a huge hit with the Toon Army and no wonder. Six goals in twelve games last season played no small part in lifting United to mid-table safety and this campaign has seen three goals in four games as Alan Pardew's charges sit in the top six. Glovers devotees can see their hero on TV each week which pleases the man himself. **"It's great nowadays; I used to have to wait until after "Match of the Day" to watch myself but now I get an earlier night!"**

So has he any message for those fans he left behind at Huish Park. **"Yes" he says. "Keep up the support. When I was there, the fans loved me and it gave me confidence. I'll always have a little bit of love in my heart for the Yeovil fans; they got behind me in every game. I'd love to come back and see them one day, play against them in the Cup or something. That would be lovely!**

Leon. Simply the Best!