



BY MARTIN MCCONACHIE

AS a player, Mark Lawrenson pretty much did it all. A successful career began in the lower leagues and developed into a trophy-laden eight years at Liverpool as well as a decade playing for his international side, the Republic of Ireland. Now he's one of the most familiar football faces in the media, appearing on *Match of the Day* for nearly 15 years alongside Messrs Shearer, Hansen and Lineker but guess what his proudest moment in football is.

"Making my debut for Preston North End, my boyhood team," he says proudly. "I was waiting for it for 11 or 12 years and when it came, all my school mates were in the crowd that day. Counting all the stuff at Liverpool, it was definitely the highlight of my football career. It was a 2-2 draw against Watford and I played right back, marking Bobby Downes, later to be Academy chief at Blackburn Rovers."

His career came along nicely. "I was playing in a team where seven or eight of us were teenagers. Nobby Stiles was there at the time too, it was a real dream come true. I was born a quarter of a mile from the ground and my father Tom played for Preston too and after I played for the local grammar school, I signed schoolboy forms as I was taking my A-levels."

Having begun his career by signing for a World Cup winner in Bobby Charlton (Preston's manager in 1974), it could have been difficult for "Lawro", as he is known affectionately, to go on and flourish from such a starting point. But flourish he did and three years at his beloved Deepdale was followed by four years at Brighton, winning promotion, before he earned a big money move to Liverpool.

His contribution to the Anfield trophy cabinet is huge; in eight seasons with the Reds, he won five Division One titles (now Premier League), three League Cups, two Charity Shields, an FA Cup and of course, 1984's European Cup where his side beat Italian giants Roma on penalties.

That team including the likes of Hansen, Rush, Dalglish and Grobbelaar was one of the best club sides ever.

The following year was as horrid as



PRESTON AND PROUD OF IT

1984 had been triumphant. Say the word "Heysel" to anyone and they'll go quiet as memories of the night that 39 football fans died before the European Cup Final against Juventus in Belgium after a crowd disturbance. Lawro was no different; his night ended early when he dislocated a shoulder and was subbed only a minute and 15 seconds into the game.

A ruptured Achilles tendon ended his career prematurely at 31 and brief spells of management at Tampa (USA), Oxford United and Peterborough United followed before his career took a path into the media side through our own local HTV West before moving to the Beeb after a time working for Kevin Keegan's Newcastle. Yet despite spending most of his time as a pundit talking about life in the top flight, he is extremely knowledgeable about third tier football.

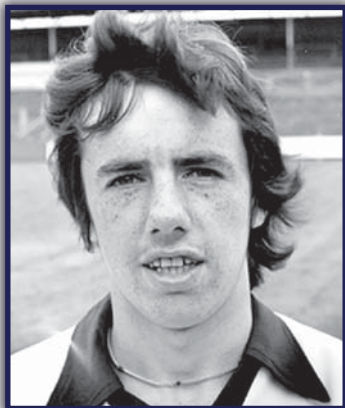
He's had to be since Preston joined that tier in May. "It was a big disappointment having been in two play-off finals previously," he confessed. "The last 18 months have been terrible as we've slipped into League 1. There's a need not to keep changing managers all the time; if we kept Alan Irvine, I believe we'd be mid table in the Championship now."

"I think Graham Westley will bring a completely different style to the club. He'll shake it up and maybe it's what the club needs at this time. He'll come in and sort them out – they're having two training sessions a day now - but you feel that if they'd only spent the money used in paying off managers on the playing squad, they'd be much higher up now!"

Watching Preston became slightly easier recently when the BBC moved the MOTD studios to Salford, Manchester meaning he has an hour to work rather than the four hours to

London. It's a move that benefits Alan Shearer (Newcastle) and the pairing of Lawro with Alan Hansen (both Southport based) although a certain Gary Lineker isn't allowed to grumble about his west London to Salford commute as his colleagues' fine him!

Having seen Yeovil's 4-3 defeat at Deepdale – "it could have been 8-6 that night" - he's tipped Gary Johnson to succeed at Huish Park too. "Gary knows the team, he knows the fans, he knows the area; I remember his side when they played Liverpool in the FA Cup in 2004, they were very decent. With respect, where you finish in this division is governed by the wage bill in a way but if you get a good goalkeeper, a strong ball winning centre half and a goal scorer, you're halfway up the table already! I think the three that go up will come from the top five at the moment."



PROUD: A young Mark at Preston



PUNDIT: Mark on *Match of the Day* with fellow colleague Alan Hansen