

BUSY BEE!

BY MARTIN McCONACHIE

AS one of the top presenters on the flagship sports channel *Sky Sports News*, Natalie Sawyer is one of the most recognisable female faces in the world of football. Often seen alongside the likes of Jim White, Rob Wotton or Simon Thomas, the 32-year-old is also a big fan of Bees. Brentford Football Club, that is!

The story with Natalie and Griffin Park goes back almost 25 years to a home game against Bristol Rovers as Natalie explains. "I grew up with my family near Kew Bridge so Brentford was always my local club but they also used to do a lot with the community and still do; handing out tickets to schools. My brother had a birthday party at Griffin Park one day and I had great fun even though I was the only girl there. I loved it and when my dad got involved hosting corporate guests there, I continued to go to the games."

That commitment has lasted through some turbulent times following her club. Two promotions, two relegations and several finals have come and gone but, like a lot of Yeovil fans, a particular lowlight is a third tier play-off final. For the Bees, it was a Millennium Stadium defeat to Stoke City which hit hard in season 2001-02. "I think that losing a play-off final like that is sometimes harder to take than relegation where often you can see the bad times coming. It was a huge emotional change from where we were three years before when we became League 2 champions by beating Cambridge United. I was at University in Leeds then and came down to watch it; the game had extra spice as I had Cambridge-supporting friends and their side were still in the running. A wonderful day!"

The relationship between fan and

club developed through her teens and twenties and now extends to putting back into the club via her ambassadorial role with the Brentford FC Community Sports Trust. One particular project that interests Natalie is 'Sport for Change' which works to steer young girls in the right direction. "I've brought a group of girls into Sky and shown them around and one of them took a shine to learning more about the makeup side of things; it showed them all that there's more to Sky than just what they see on TV."

Of course our celebrity Brentford fan had already known that even before starting full time as a presenter. Seconded to two six-week placements in the Rugby Union department, it offered a path into the industry for a sport-mad Natalie though there was still the need to fulfil the menial jobs like running and making teas and coffees for the guests before she appeared on our television screens. "It's a great job for anyone who loves sport and everyone there really is like a family."

More so still for Natalie who met her husband Sam Matherface (*talkSPORT's* football commentator) as the pair presented programmes on *Sky Sports News* together.

"There was a group of us who went out regularly such as Sam, Tony Wrighton, Julian Warren, Millie Clode and I who used to go out socially but Sam and I would often meet beforehand and things developed from there." After three years together, the pair got married and also have a little 16-month-old treasure called Sawyer who blissfully takes up a lot of Natalie's spare time off screen.

That spare time includes Saturday afternoons now and the *Sky Sports News* star can nearly always be found at Griffin Park for a home match, missing just three all season. This included the season's opener against the Glovers in August and also seeing our very own Gary Johnson and Terry Skiverton at the recent 4-0 drubbing of Carlisle United.

Life seems good for Natalie right now. A blossoming career, a lovely family and a good circle of friends make for a happy combination. All that's needed now for the icing on the cake would be promotion back to the Championship for her beloved Bees. If they do make it back to the division they were last in almost two decades ago, there won't be many fans jumping higher and singing longer than Natalie, you can be sure of that.



BRIGHT: Natalie on *Sky Sports News*

**BIG
INTERVIEW**
NATALIE
SAWYER

