



Leeds By Example

**MARTIN McCONACHIE
SPEAKS TO ACTOR AND
LEEDS FAN RALPH INESON**

Ralph Ineson means different things to different people.

Those who like their fantasy drama will know him from the HBO series 'Game of Thrones' while film buffs will recognise him from playing Amycus Carrow in 'Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince' and both parts of 'Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows.' Add into the pot a plethora of acting credits along with dozens of voiceover jobs and you can see why he is worthy of the 'Big Interview' treatment. He was most notably in one of the best British sitcoms of all time, playing Chris 'Finchy' Finch in 'The Office'. He's a massive Leeds United fan too!

"I played a lot of sport as a kid so didn't really watch Leeds that often to start with," Ralph confesses. "My first game was a cup tie against West Brom when I was eight; we drew 0-0 but I went more regularly when I was in my teens."

Growing up in Leeds, he continued his education to do Theatre Studies at Lancaster University which led him to become a drama teacher at York Sixth Form College. His big break into acting came in 1992 and was aided by another familiar face from the acting world. "I did a show in the York Theatre Royal as part of the York Mystery Plays, a series of Biblical stories.

"That year, Robson Green played Christ and we became friends, sharing a dressing room. He told me I was a natural and could do this professionally and even lent me some money!"

Initially, the young Ralph stayed



WE ARE LEEDS: Ralph Ineson with Leeds hero Peter Lorimer during a Celegs v Legends match **PICTURE:** James Varley

rooted in London but practicality took over and he moved to London. "You need to get your face around, get yourself known. I had to meet casting directors all the time and ended up spending more money commuting to London from Yorkshire than I would if I'd lived there. So I moved down."

His acting career took off and the deep-voiced Yorkshireman was soon mixing with the A-listers in his first film role, 'First Night.' "I had to pinch myself, three months earlier I'd been a teacher and here I was stood up acting with Richard Gere watching me. It was amazing."

More film and TV roles followed then came the big break, getting a role in 'The Office'. "They'd been casting for the role of Finchy for a while and I'd met a few people that had read for the role. I met up with Ricky Gervais and Stephen

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Merchant and spoke to Ash Atalla (the producer) and auditioned for the part.

"I asked Ash what he saw the show as. He said he wanted it to be the new 'Royle Family' which at the time was getting nine million viewers. I couldn't believe a sitcom about office life filmed by a wobbly camera would do that well. I got the part and the rest is history.

"No one could have predicted how well it did. When I read for the part, I could see it was really good with the interplay between characters."

United were a roaring success by now too as Ralph recalls. "George Graham had the youth there but he would rather use the older guys in the team. David O'Leary came in and gave the youth a chance with the likes of Alan Smith, Harry Kewell, Jonathan Woodgate, David Batty and the rest. Probably my best memory was going with 10,000 Leeds fans to the San Siro stadium to see us get a point against AC Milan and qualify for the Champions League second phase.

"Even with all the success, I'm not sure many Leeds fans really liked David O'Leary. It always seemed about him rather than the club or the fans. That's why I think Brian McDermott is so important to Leeds United at the moment, he gets us.

"He is a calm, honourable, decent fella. He understands us and is the rock at the centre of our club. Last Saturday's events (where 31,000 turned up to support the club's 5-1 win) tells you everything about him."

And for today? "With all due respect, Yeovil are one of the weaker sides in the division. I just have to hope we come out like against Huddersfield last weekend. If we don't, things might go the other way and we could be tonked." ■