

## An Oral History of Brentford FC

Interviewee: Marcus Gayle  
Year born: 1970  
Place born: Shepherd's Green, London W4  
Parents' Occupations: Father – odd jobs throughout his life  
Mother – secretary

At 12 years old Marcus joined the local youth football training sessions on Friday evenings playing central midfield and then left wing. A couple of years later he successfully attended a trial for Brentford and was immediately selected for the Under 16 team. This team reached the semi-finals of the FA Youth Cup which was an excellent achievement for a Division 1 side.

Marcus left school at 16 without any qualifications, his dreams set on becoming a professional footballer.

At 18 years old Marcus made his debut for the senior team. His first loan was to Dartford “to see if he could play against men”. In 1990 he was asked what his summer plans were – “nil” – and then “how do you feel about going to Finland”, which became his second loan. Even though he could not speak a word of the language he gained a lot of confidence in his time there where he also experience playing in front of a crowd of 30,000.

On his return he went straight into the first team. Marcus talks of the Brentford characteristics at this time as “vibrant with passionate and vocal fans”. The club boasted a really successful youth development programme and says Brentford should be proud of its commitment to developing young players both on and off the pitch as it was whilst here that he also learned a lot of life skills too.

He says it was a tough environment but his focus was entirely on becoming a better footballer. He talks of coach, Phil Holden, who was a bridge between the older and younger players but who shouted at everyone, kicked objects in the dressing room at half time and tested the players' physicality by standing on their stomachs. “You couldn't do that today but at that time there was a strong culture of not complaining and to keep quiet.” In a similar vein he talks of racism at matches, mainly noises from the crowd, but says he never took it personally and was able to “blinker it out”. He knew to concentrate on his career he had to “keep his head down”.

Then Wimbledon came knocking, which was a great move for Marcus professionally as he was now playing against the best teams in England in front of crowds of 50,00+. Marcus then enjoyed spells as a player at Glasgow Rangers and Watford before returning to Brentford in 2005 where he made a further 37 appearances helping them to two consecutive play-off semi-finals. He comments that little had changed since his first spell there and the club had maintained its outlook and community values. One aspect that had changed was the football “was better” which he attributes to a far superior playing surface, the boggy sand filled areas of the pitch were gone but the challenges of uneven surfaces and even slanting pitches did mean that players then had to be more adaptable.

Today Marcus actively supports and assists the Brentford FC Community Sports Trust, started during his youth team days, and which has a great impact on local youngsters and schools; “Brentford is one of the best clubs in the community”.

He works with Kick It Out helping youngsters decide “about the right things to do” and while he says racism genuinely did not bother him as a player it does today as he works in education but feels “privileged that fans connect with me and gaining new ones who never saw me play”.

This year Marcus has also started a new role as an Ambassador for Brentford FC and helps out on match days by chatting to hospitality guests.