

WATFORD FC

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Why I was very grateful for Ron when I started out



OLIVER PHILLIPS

A NAME from the past came back to me the other week after talking to another old Watford fan. Whatever had become of former secretary Ron Rollitt, who was the one-man administrative staff at Vicarage Road for 24 years or so?

Ron, who worked at the Watford Observer after parting company with Watford FC, had gone off the radar it seemed.

I called him the other evening and not surprisingly he did not recognise my voice. I strung him out a bit but he did chuckle when I re-quoted his famous Tannoy announcement about pick-pockets at Vicarage Road: "Make sure the hand in your pocket is your own."

He acknowledged that I must be someone who goes back a long way as he attempted to guess my identity and so I ended his quandary and introduced myself. It was good to hear him.

Ron enjoyed a testimonial before he was eased out of Vicarage Road as the new era with Graham Taylor, Bertie Mee and Eddie Plumley got underway. Yet I have fond memories of Ron when I started covering Watford Reserves/Juniors and then the first team. For a man who had so much to do, so many facets to his job, he always seemed to have time to be polite and helpful.

I recalled sitting in his long office as he fielded the morning call from chairman Jim Bonser, then received an update on the drains from groundsman Les Simmons before fielding a succession of ticket enquiries. Just when he had turned his attention back on me, a player would drop in to report a leaky bath-tap in one of the club houses. "The missus keeps on reminding me and I keep forgetting to tell you..." says the player.

It was a wonder Ron got any work done, but he would sigh resignedly and then ask: "Now, where were we?" as he sat genially behind his desk. The sign "You don't have to be mad to work here but it certainly helps" seemed appropriate.

His patience was amazing, as far as I was concerned, although he did get a little stressed if the tone of his loud-speaker instructions were anything to go by, when he stopped a few pitch invasions at birth with a stentorian: "Get off the pitch! Get off that pitch!"

He was extremely reliable in my book and I recall when he warned me that one day Jim Bonser would turn on me, and so it came to pass. We all had our turns when we found ourselves in the full glare of the Bonser spotlight. It seemed the chairman always had to have a vendetta against someone.

I recall, before we fell out, Bonser was thinking of recruiting a new director. I

had asked him repeatedly about the person who I knew by name and Bonser pleaded with me to hold back on the story, saying I would be the first to break it, if I co-operated.

Then one day, he summoned me and my opposite number on the Evening Echo and announced that the following week, we could print the fact. I was stunned and tackled Bonser afterwards saying he had reneged on our deal. He smiled and said that he did not mind if I speculated on the identity of the new director before the press release.

This I did, which resulted in Bonser railing against me breaking an agreement and apologising to the Evening Echo. I phoned Ron Rollitt and pointed out it was a case of Bonser acting: the chairman had been in on it from the start.

Speaking to the manager George Kirby later that day, he told me: "You shocked Ron Rollitt with that revelation about the chairman."

Indeed, that was not surprising for Ron played it straight and I rated him an ace man to deal with, and if this sounds like an obituary, it isn't. I just thought it pertinent to express appreciation of the living and not wait until they have moved on.

A point has often struck me, particularly more recently for I have found myself a regular funeral attendee. People would be quite touched if they heard what was said at their funerals and many would not have a clue they meant that much. They could have done with those tributes during their lifetime.

I remember when Ron passed me a cartoon. "This man has dropped in another. We used one in the programme but we can't make it a habit. Perhaps you could use it," said Ron.

I didn't much value football cartoons as a genre but I read it and smiled. Perhaps I would

use it... just this once. The following week I received another and then another. It became a habit and eventually I got to know the cartoonists and we became close friends. When Terry Challa brought out his book of past cartoons "Drawn Game" he thanked two people in the credits, "I did" not need to be named, because they know who they are".

Well, Ron Rollitt was the other one.

Ron is alive and well and happened to phone him on what was his 90th birthday had a celebration the following Saturday and is in good health apart from suffering from the same problems that seem to have beset the Duke of Edinburgh of late.

After his time at Vicarage Road, he came and worked the Watford Observer, but I was sad that the way in which his term at the club ended, caused him to erase Watford FC from his considerations. Understandable but regrettable nevertheless for a man who was a Watford fan from an early age, but I for one was very grateful Ron Rollitt was secretary at Vicarage Road, when I was cutting my teeth.

Not only that, I know that both my predecessors at the West Herts Post and at the Watford Observer were of a similar mind.



...ple the pressure on the Hammers goal.

Picture: JULIA WALLER

Ladies battle back for point

...DLADIES came from behind to snatch a 3-3 draw in the final minute opening Premier League Cup game to West Ham United Ladies

...for a topsy-turvy afternoon was antic first ten minutes in which all behind and then took the lead. Only five minutes on the clock, the took an early advantage. As led to clear the danger of a ball box, it was Becky Merritt who kicked and slotted past keeper

...was shortlived though, as from Watford hassled and harried went back into their own box led header by debutant Fllias and Sarah Wiltshire. Her cross pushed out to Irene Martin e kicked the ball home to level

...l on the front foot, Wiltshire as dogged play to break up the Jo Wilson free to make it two e home side in a matter of min-

...en Girls had numerous opportu- take the game safe before the Garcia, Wilson and Georgia those who were unable to take

...Ham starting to look danger- e break, Watford switched off Merritt the chance to turn and eix and she put a powerful shot o make it 2-2.

The Hammers sniffed blood as the momentum began to swing in their favour and Merritt struck a superb long-range effort that Davey expertly pushed round the post.

From the resulting corner, the visitors were in front as they punished Watford for not clearing their lines. After initially scrambling the ball away to the edge of the box, a second ball into the 18-yard area left the Hornets watching Lindsey Morgan as she powered her header into the back of the net.

Watford threw everything at their East London opponents and in the dying minutes Romeo Hector strode up from defence to tuck away a Wiltshire free-kick as the Golden Girls levelled the score line.

Both sides pushed for a winner but with the rain finally relenting, a draw proved to be a fair result as they battled hard to make sure they took something positive from the game.

Manager John Salomon said: "Obviously we're disappointed not to come away with the win today, but despite being disappointed with the result, I am pleased with the perseverance shown by our players to come from behind twice and level the game so late on."

"Credit to West Ham, they were physical and took their chances."

"A point gives us a good platform to build from in the League Cup and we'll take the positives and learning curves from today in preparation for our trip to Coventry next weekend."



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