

[Transcript] Between Two Beers Podcast / Chris Wood: \$50 Million Kiwi in the English Premier League

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It helps this show more than I could say, and the bigger the show gets, the bigger the guests get.

On this episode of Between Two Bears, we talk to Chris Wood.

Chris is one of New Zealand's best football players of all time, with over 200 English Premier League appearances and more than 50 goals.

In 2022, he became the EPL's most expensive 30-year-old in Premier League history when his move from Burnley to Newcastle cost \$50 million in New Zealand dollars.

At the start of this year, he joined Nottingham Forest, where he currently plays, along with the All Whites, where he's captain, leading all-time goal scorer and best player.

In this episode, we talk about his challenging journey to the top, what makes a good coach versus a great coach, what life is like inside a Premier League dressing room, best players he's played with and against, making his EPL debut as a 17-year-old, why he got booed at Leeds and the mental effect it had on him, the art of scoring goals and much, much more. This was Chris' first ever long-form podcast and was such an insightful look behind the scenes of what it takes to get to the top in football.

We loved it and hope you do too.

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This episode was brought to you from the export Bear Garden studio.

Enjoy.

Chris Wood, welcome to Between Two Bears.

Perfection, thank you for having me guys.

We're very excited to have you virtually in the export Bear Garden studio.

Shay, we're buzzing for this one, aren't we?

Yeah, some people are more excited than others, would they?

Steven, since you confirmed we're coming on, has delved right back into his Waikato FC memory bank.

He's been sending me like links to stories that he wrote about you, about when he started ahead of you and the team.

My role on the podcast is quite often to, I don't mean to, but I kind of belittle his football achievements, which we know are actually, he's still Waikato FC's top scorer.

That's a fact.

Thank you, thank you.

But you started way back then.

What are your recollections of Steven Holloway, the footballer?

To be fair, it's actually all good.

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I was only a young pup, so I didn't see the bad sides of Steve.

Well, you wouldn't have seen the good side either.

There was no good side there.

Oh, right, it's early for this.

Yeah, he was the one looking after me, really.

He was the strike, well, I was hoping to be the strike partner, but I was also probably a bit more being mentored by him at a young age, looking up to seeing what it's like to be a footballer, a striker, a big, strong lad at top as well, and an eye for the goal, is what I wanted to learn, and yeah, I wanted to take his place, especially at 15 years old as well, but I knew I had my hands cut out, especially at that early age, especially after a few training sessions with him.

Well, Steven tells a different training session story.

Do you want to delve into that training session at Waikato FC?

It's funny, not funny, but you've gone on to become a sort of multimillion-dollar professional footballer, and I went on to become a journalist, so I tried to sort of latch on to that by writing an article about what it was like to mark you in The Herald.

This was about six or seven years ago, and I referred back to a training session.

I think it was my job to mark you on corners, and I was the starting striker, and you were sort of coming through, and you scored about three times.

I remember Roger Wilkinson was our coach at the time.

He's like, what the fuck in hell's going on?

How come this kid keeps scoring?

I was like, no, he's quite good, eh?

He's like a man child.

He's a big 14-year-old.

Ah, that's brilliant.

I actually do, I think I remember that training, well, not the training session in particular, but the sessions with Roger.

I can't remember where we trained.

It wasn't, it was before the par at days and things like that.

I can't remember the pitch that we're on, but I do remember training for Waikato and things like that.

Stephen does latch onto that, that I played with Woodsy.

We did a watch-along commentary for the Alternative Cometry, collective for the Costa Rican game, and literally within the first two minutes, I think, he's gone, well, yeah, no, I used to play with Chris Wood at Waikato, so it was like, fuck in house, it's going to be a long, yeah, it's going to be a long 90 minutes if you were dropping those out already.

Name-dropping.

Well, we do have quite a rich Hamilton lineage of footballers, because we played with Marco Rojas and Chris and Tyler Boyd and Ryan Thomas.

You think about, who did some others, some others just watched them.

You think about New Zealand football as best players for, I mean, Tyler Boyd is, I don't know if we can name him as, but there was something pretty special happening in Hamilton

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around that time.

I mean, do you credit your, took Roger, was he the main driver for you?

Roger was a huge influence in my career, not only in New Zealand, but in England as well.

I think there's no secret that Roger was one of the big people that got me my breakover in England.

He organized trials for me, he had that belief in me, and he sent me over to the side of the world thinking I was at least half good to do something about it.

So yeah, Roger was a huge influence on my career.

He's an interesting man to play under.

He doesn't like bollocking or anything like that.

Well, I never saw any of that.

Maybe I was too young or maybe Steve got a little, but yeah, I just know him as a good coach.

A guy that really believed in me, which was nice.

And yeah, I think the Waikato days or the Hamilton days were where I came into marines as a footballer.

Yeah, I started in Auckland and things like that, but I moved down to Cambridge when I was 10 years old and that's when football took over my life really.

Yeah, we're going to get moving to the Hamilton stuff soon.

I actually want to start where we are at the moment because as we record this, you've just scored a last minute winner in the English Premier League to lead Forrest to your first win of the season.

You're preparing to play Manchester United this weekend.

Does that sentence seem normal to you now?

I think I'm very lucky to say it is normal to me now, which is nice.

I think after having a 13, 14 year career so far, hopefully a few more years at least ago.

Yeah, playing up against these big clubs, big teams, big names is pretty normal to me, which is nice.

And it's about doing a job and doing the business.

And thankfully the other night I was able to come up with a goal and hopefully by the time all this podcast goes out, there will be a few more goals there to the name.

I think that everybody can be happy and smiling about, especially me and the family.

But yeah, it's nice to know it's pretty normal for me now because at least it means I've done something quite decent in the game.

I'm having a surreal moment at the moment just thinking about that because it is weird to think someone that we know, both know personally, I think you might have played against Narawahia

when I was on the bench for them in a Northern League game as well and probably scored.

I think you scored a last minute one against it, but then to think of those days at John Kirkhoff Park in Cambridge and now you're walking out into Old Trafford to Anfield, to the Etihad, to these stadiums week by week is bizarre, but you're still kind of the same woodsy that I kind of have known for the last 10 years as well, like 11 years.

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It's a surreal thing to kind of think of that you'll finish this Zoom call, go to sleep, wake up the next morning and walk into a training session packed with superstars. Yeah, man, it's completely different to what my dream was like when I was a kid and what I wanted. So to live a dream is fantastic, but I also remember where I come from and that's why I love coming back home when I can as much as I can and playing football for my nation. That's one of the biggest joys in the world. I'm keen to really drill into the detail on this pod and sort of peel back the curtain a little bit. So I want to take care. So you score the winning goal for Nottingham Forest, first win of the season. Like what happens after the game? What what happens in the changing room? You know, is it wild celebrations? Is it kind of calm? Like take us into the sort of the couple of hours after a good win like that? Yeah, I mean, obviously, everybody's very happy, very excited. I think we got 10 wins last year. So we're looking to obviously do a lot better. We want to be the 15 plus wins to make it a bit more safe and and looking up the elite and anything like that. So winning games is huge and you have to take them on merit in every wins of these and wins. So the mood in the dressing rooms pretty damn good after games, especially in this dressing room, there's a lot of culture. So there's a lot of dancing, a lot of songs being played. A lot of dancers I've never seen before from some of the foreign lads, which is decent and don't worry, I do not get involved in the dancing. As a lot of people you've probably spoke to can reiterate, I do not dance. I'll either stand at the bar and drink and not move from the bar, but you'll never see me on the dance floor. So you won't see me at the dance floor in the dressing room. But yeah, there's a lot of good atmosphere. You have to enjoy the wins because sometimes they don't come around for a long time. But everybody was very happy. So the first couple of hours or the hour definitely after the game is just spending the time with the players, getting changed, ready to go again, seeing family in the players lounge. And then it's basically back home and just chilling out. Who's in charge of tunes in the dressing room? Is it a shared Bluetooth speaker or is there a designated team DJ? There was a designated team DJ last year. It was the captain, Joe Warrell. But I think he's been bombed off at this year. Yeah, I think people wanted to step up and upgrade.

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Now we're a Premier League team.
So he was good coming through, but we needed something a little bit more extreme.
I think people wanted to pull their ideas,
and I think that's probably the nicer way of putting it.
But yeah, there's songs that I haven't heard of.
Come on, aftergames, where aftergames, when you win,
you can just pass around the phone to put on whatever song you want to put on.
And yeah, some decent tunes come up.
Tell me, was there a Woodsies on fire?
Your defense is terrified.
Woodsies on fire.
Was there any of that?
I wish there was.
No, really?
Unfortunately, there wasn't.
Oh, mate.
There was some good, happy high fives and things like that,
but nothing major.
Remember, it's still a team effort, isn't it?
If you're the 20-million goal-season striker, then you're on fire.
You're definitely claiming that.
Then you're on fire, and then everybody's happy.
You're quite uniquely placed.
I mean, you made your Premier League debut at 17, which is 14 years ago.
How much change have you seen in what happens post-match across those years?
Like, are the fads that come in?
Is it kind of like ice baths and saunas and stretch it?
Is it a lot different from club to club in over the years?
It's definitely different from club to club.
I think it depends on what the manager believes
and what the sports science believe.
And over the years, it goes from ice baths to the big craze
to all right, some clubs want to do heat after games,
give blood back into the muscles,
and then it changes back to chloride therapy or something like that.
So I think it just changes with the science,
or it depends on what the sports science read and things like that
and what they think works for players.
But I think over the time of my career, you get used to what works for you.
And then you just apply yourself in the right way
when you're an older, more senior player,
because you can get away and do what you need to do to make yourself ready.
But yeah, it's changed over the years,

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the days of when I first came through going out,
having a good time, partying on the weekend has kind of died away.
You have to be very more strategic about when and when you go out.
But yeah, it's changing
whether for the better or the worse, I don't know.
I think players have become a robot in that sense
and in a way sometimes where they can't lay their head down
or they get Scrooge nights falling their hair down and enjoying themselves.
But people need to remember that they were humans
and just want to have a good time sometimes.
Just take it a step further for us, Woodsy.
How does a Premier League dressing room after a win
compare to a Hamilton Wanderer's Northern League dressing room after a win?
With Mark Cozzi in the lead.
Look, it's very different the way trips we had back for Hamilton Wanderers
and things like that coming back down the bus.
Yeah, I wish the bus trips home were like that
because there was a few chilli bins full of beers,
which were probably a bit nicer way to spend a drive home.
A couple of lads asking if you're still undies in the shower, man.
Have you graduated beyond that?
Yeah, luckily I've surpassed that, which is nice.
Well, I don't know if it's nice.
Everybody sees my ass now.
Yeah, yeah, it's well and truly out the window now.
So I think half of my time showing my undies away.
It's a rite of passage in senior football, isn't it?
Graduating from undies in the shower to undies off
and then just showering.
Yeah, that's right.
And when you're a 15-year-old man child, it's an intimidating world, I bet.
Exactly, that's when you become a man.
I think you're exactly right there.
You'll be playing in front of 75,000 at Old Trafford in a few days' time.
Do you still get nervous?
Like, does the occasion still...
Like, when you're preparing for a game in the night before,
is your sleep different?
Do you still...
Is there a feeling of anxiety there at all?
I don't get nervous for, say, playing in front of a 75,000-year-old Trafford.
I get more nervous, or not nervous,
I get more anxious or anything like that

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when I know I need to perform or I need to do something.
I think it's a big case of the overthinker in me.
Where you play your best football when you're free and not thinking.
But for people that think as you overthink things,
you're going, I need to do this, I need to do that,
and that's when the anxiety builds up in you.
So that comes along sometimes.
And some games, it's there and you have to just deal with it
and try and find the best route to play well.
And then others, you go through the season,
you go through six to ten weeks without even thinking about football
and just enjoying football and playing your best football.
So, yeah, there's different emotions.
But, yeah, nerves not so much anymore
because, you know, you've been there, I've been to Old Trafford,
I've scored a lot of Trafford, I've won an Old Trafford before in my years.
But it's more the want and the need to perform sometimes.
What about when you're up against like a formidable opponent
or, you know, you're going into a weekend and you're up against a top defender?
Is that the same?
Like, do you prepare more for certain defenders versus others?
Or do you just, whatever, whatever's in front of you, you're going to play?
I prefer, I prepare for all the same.
Everybody's the same to me.
But there are times in games where, say, I came up against a van Dijk in Liverpool.
I'll end up picking on the other centre half instead,
because I know I'm looking at this guy going,
OK, now he's six foot six, he sprints like Usain Bolt.
He's pretty decent on the ball.
So I'm going to stay away from him for today.
I'm going to try my luck on the other centre half and see where I get to.
Yeah, that's this goal.
When you get a big giant like that, like Van Dijk,
I mean, your game is built around your strength and muscle and holding the ball up.
There have been times where you've tried to sort of back into one of these monsters
and they've kind of just like thrown you like a rag doll.
Look, there's been times where they don't even need to throw me.
They literally just pick me up by my arms and just move me to the side.
And I'm thinking, Jesus Christ, I'm a 90 kilo man, six foot three.
And like, how the hell are they moving me that easy?
I'm thinking, oh, God, I'm in trouble here.
It's a whole different world aid.
Like the fact that you're that you've just dropped out of the van Dijk.

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Like, yeah, we don't want to prepare to play against Van Dijk.
It's like it was when we like when we had Ryan on and he's talking about,
we're asking him, who is the toughest player to play against?
And he's dropping Bergkamp and Henri and these guys.
It is really like a different a different world.
And for a couple of football nerds, it's an enjoyable place to be playing in
and have an opportunity to pick your brain on what that's really like.
Good, I'm glad that's what that's what it's about.
I mean, a very fortunate place to be and playing in this this league in the world.
And as I say, only a few amount of Kiwis have ever graced the Premier League.
So now I'm happy to share my my wisdom and my my experiences
and even if they're the shit ones at the same time.
All right, this is great.
So this is a good juxtaposition from where you are now.
And we're going to start building the story of Chris Wood.
We'll be right back after this short break.
So we've asked our mutual friend, Sam Wilkinson,
to write a few lines about young Chris Wood and what made him different.
So Sam is one of New Zealand's best coaches.
He's he worked for years at the West Brom Academy.
But he's writing about his memories of you before you left for England
at Hamilton and Wanderers and Waikato FC.
So he writes, my first real experience with Woodsy
was when he broke into the Hamilton Wanderers first team as a 15 year old in 2007.
He was a pretty quiet and respectful lad back then and never had any ego about him.
But he definitely carried himself with an air of confidence
as though he knew he was going to be a player.
He would often turn up to first team matches in Auckland,
still in the St Paul's Collegiate Kit, having played for the school team earlier that day.
That passion for the game and desperation to play every single minute of football
they could is a really good lesson for young players today
who often start wanting to pick and choose when they play once they hit a certain level.
I would just pause there.
Do you remember that?
I think it's a good point he makes that like that desperation to play.
You'd sort of play for the school in the morning
and then you'd play seniors in the afternoon.
You might play youth team the next day.
Did you just had that bug?
What do you remember about that time?
That time in my life I was just playing football left-hand centre.
I played every single day.
So I trained once on Monday, twice on Tuesday.

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I trained school on Tuesday and then club on afterwards, walked up the road to Park.
Trained on Wednesday doing foot sale.
Double again on Thursday, I was going to the club again.
Trained on Friday and then yeah, as Sam said, I played school football at 8.30 in the morning for St. Paul's.
And then it was a dad taking me up to Auckland to catch up with a team and things like that to play up there.
And then of course plan on Sunday as well.
So there was there was no rest days.
But as a 13, 14, 15, 16 year old kid, I don't need rest days.
I can just play football because that's what you love doing.
And that's where I felt the most happiest.
And luckily, I had parents that were willing to take me around the country.
I know that's not the case for many kids.
But I was lucky enough to have those parents that sacrificed a lot.
But yeah, I just wanted to play football and they saw that desire.
When you're when you're six foot at 14, do you have like a confidence in your own age group?
And is it easy to take that confidence into senior football?
I wouldn't say I've never been a confident lad.
I've never been overly confident or anything like that.
I knew I was half decent at school football and things like that, because I was scoring quite a few goals.
But I guess stepping up into the men's football team, I think it became quite natural because I continued to score goals, which made it easier.
So I felt like, oh, this is just like playing school football.
Now I play another game, score goals and carry on from there.
It's just natural. This is how I see football, just scoring goals.
I think it was a bit lucky in that sense that I could carry on, keep doing that.
But yeah, it's just one of those things I think I was confident on the pitch, scoring goals, but off the pitch, as Sam said, I was very quiet.
And to this day, I'm still a quiet lad.
I prefer to listen and talk.
Are you going to be loving this one?
I know you've put me really out of my comfort zone here, talking for two hours.
All right, Sam continues.
So early on in that 2007 season, he started scoring regularly in the first team.
I remember noticing that the ball always seemed to drop for him in the box.
Foolishly, I thought he was just having a lucky run in front of goal.
As the season progressed, it became clear that he actually had an amazing knack of being able to read and react to play in and around the goal.

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He was able to anticipate where goal scoring chances would land like no player I've ever played with or coached.

On top of this, he was a really calm and clinical finisher, maybe not a score of great goals, but definitely a great goal scorer.

He was always big as a 15 year old and is obviously developed into a physical specimen.

He also never seemed to be phased if he missed chances even at a young age.

He had the confidence in his ability that he was always going to score the next one.

I wonder if we could pause and talk about that goal scoring instinct,

because it's essentially made you the player you are and that that

will facilitate where the ball is going to go and where to be.

Can you teach that?

Like, where do you think that comes from?

How have you been able to read the game so well from such an early age?

Look, yeah, I think back when I was younger, I did believe it was just

I was lucky enough to be able to see and read the game quite well.

And it just happened for me and you can't coach these things.

But I think as years gone on, I think it's something you can coach into certain players, especially ones that are, I wouldn't say the smarter, but just people have been more savvy with about it because you look at percentages of where goals happen and where goals come from.

You can really narrow down the chances where they're going to land.

And that's a big thing, because then if you put yourself in those positions where it's only a 6x6 or 6x3 area, if you stand in that area, it's going to come nearer and nearer about to you if you're there for 90 minutes.

So you'll get chances throughout the game.

Whereas if you're standing outside on the edge of the box or outside near the byline, you're not going to get as many chances.

So I think as I've gotten older, I've realised that it might not have been luck.

I just knew the percentages earlier without actually being told.

Whereas now, if I was coaching a striker, I'd coach them to be in a certain position or think about getting in these positions as the ball's building up or out wide or coming through, because the likelihood of scoring is so much higher than,

say, if you're outside the box shooting from 25 yards, you only have a 3% chance of scoring.

Whereas if you're inside the box at 7 or 8 yards,

if you get more chances there, you'll have a greater chance of scoring.

Yeah, it's a real superpower.

I remember actually watching you play for St Paul's and you scored four goals in this game but you didn't play particularly well.

And I remember coming away thinking, should he got a bit lucky there, the big lad up front?

Like, what happened there?

But it's because your ability, like you say, putting yourself in the right place,

but also just like running through brick walls and putting your head on the end of things when kids that age would often shy away from it.

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So the bravery aspect was there too as well.

Like, has that always been you?

You just haven't been fearless?

Yeah, I think it was just a desire to score goals.

I just love scoring goals.

And I think the desire to, at a young age, as you said, put your head where other people wouldn't put their head and things like that, because it's 15 year old kids, school kids and things like that.

You don't really want to sometimes or you're afraid to get kicked.

But I think I was just, sometimes not the smartest and just thought, bloody hell, go for it and stuck my head in wherever it was, even if the other boots it.

I'm sure one or two times my parents will watch on the sideline going, geez, don't do that, mate.

But yeah, I just love scoring goals.

And I think that's all I wanted to do.

And I knew if I scored goals and I come off the pitch, in my eyes, I've had a good game and hopefully my coach's eyes, even if I haven't really played well.

It sounds to me as well like that.

Accumulation of hours as a young kid on the training pitch, on the playing pitch as well, probably helped hone that instinct of where the chances are going to come from, where the ball might break, like that kind of repetition of that 10,000 hours kind of thing, right?

Like you've packed a lot of football into a young age and probably helped in your formative years of understanding of the game.

Look, yeah, I think you're totally right.

I think if you actually like calculated how many hours of training or things I did over a period of six, seven years, it would tick up quite quickly because it was every day.

It was just the same old, same old doing it over and over.

And then there'll be times where you go, watch my sister play football and then I'm playing on the sideline.

Anyway, you're not training,

but you're still doing something with the ball to make yourself better.

So yeah, I think the cumulative of hours is huge.

Did you ever, like a hot topic in kids these days is like burnout?

But listening to you and how much football you played as a young kid, was there ever any time where you're like,

ah, I can't be, I can't be bothered doing this?

Or was it always that burning desire, this is my dream and this is what I'm going to do?

Like was there a moment where you thought,

fuck, actually I could probably make a career out of this?

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No, there was no burnout.
There was no nothing like that.
It was just, I love playing football.
It was probably one of the only things I was good at.
And when you get at something,
you just want to do it over and over and over.
And luckily that's what it was.
I've always loved the game.
I've never really had a bad moment in the game
or felt like they wanted to give it up.
Yeah, I've wanted to play other sports.
I wanted to play cricket.
I played cricket all grown up.
I wanted to try rugby.
Done that for a few games,
realized I'm not as big as I want to be in that sense
and got hit a couple of times and thought,
nah, that ain't for me.
I'll go back to football.
But yeah, I think it's just one of those things.
I just love football.
So it wasn't seen as like a chore or anything like that,
turning up to games or trainings.
It was just fun and it was with all my mates
that I loved doing it.
There's a clip which I've seen go viral,
an interview did a little while back
where you talk about getting bullied
because you played football in a rugby mad country.
And I've seen like just hundreds of thousands of comments come,
maybe not hundreds of thousands of comments,
thousands of comments come in saying,
how does Chris Wood, this big man,
get bullied for playing football?
But I remember it too.
Like that was my experience.
You were kind of, you know, soccer,
there's a word called back then,
was looked down on a little bit.
Can you talk a little bit about that?
Was that at St Paul's before you moved to England?
Yeah, how you were seen by your peers?
Yeah, it was at St Paul's, you were totally right.

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I think it was in like third and fourth form,
pretty much when I was like,
obviously doing well for school,
but nobody really cared about football.
In the school game, rugby is huge at every school around New Zealand.
Everybody wants to have the best rugby team,
the best people and things like that.
And obviously St Paul's was no different,
even though the rugby team wasn't as good at the time
as like Hamilton boys who were dominating the region and things like that.
But yeah, I remember three or four kids,
I can still remember their faces.
I'd love to have remembered their names,
but I've got their faces in my mind.
Who I can remember literally saying to me about like,
oh, you're just pussy because you play soccer.
And I'm like, come on, that's right.
That's not the reason I do it.
I love it.
And they just kept on the same thing.
Oh, you shit, you're soft, you're everything like that.
And then that's what fueled me to want to play rugby.
And luckily at St Paul's,
they have house cups and things like that
where you play house games against other houses.
And there was a rugby competition.
I thought, here we go.
Let's have a proper gov and use my size and frame.
Lucky I was a big lad and bigger than these people
and was able to run over them a couple of times.
So got my in back in the end.
But yeah, I can remember their faces clear as day saying these things.
Yeah, that's such good fuel to continue the storyline.
So take us to 2009.
You're 17 and Sam's dad, Roger, who we spoke about earlier,
organizes a trial with the West Brom Academy.
And at the time, there weren't a lot of teenage kids
going over from New Zealand to England.
Or those that did would often find it really difficult
and bounce back quite quickly.
But you went over there and had quite a whirlwind start.
Can you take us back to that part of the journey?
Yeah, there's no problem.

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I flew over there with my dad.
He came over there with me.
We had a two week trial planned at West Brom,
a week trial at Everton.
And then there was going to be a week trial at Millwall as well.
And so we had a good month over there that we thought,
here we go, we can have a nice go at it,
flew into Heathrow, traveled up to Birmingham that night.
And then the next day I was in for training with the,
I think it was supposed to be the under 18s at the time.
And as I was going to train in the next day,
the coach or the academy manager who I was speaking to, Steve Hopcroft,
was talking about my age.
And he was speaking like, when you're born and things like that.
I was like, December.
And he was like, oh, so December 91.
He's like, yeah, yeah, yeah.
And he's like, oh, so you're actually the year below us.
So really, I was in under 16.
So it made it even better for me
because their season runs September to September.
So in a long story short, when I got to get in the contract,
that played a big effect in it.
Because if I came in trying to go for the youth team straight away,
I wouldn't have been able to knock one of the strikers out
to get into the team.
Whereas I was a year younger in their terms,
I was able to get through.
But going back to going over there and trialing and things like that,
I can see why people don't like doing it.
It's a bit daunting.
You're walking into a team where
all friends know each other.
All players are playing.
They know how to pass fine runs.
They play with everybody.
So they know where to move to pick out the ball and things like that.
It's like if they came to our club team,
I know where Steve runs to get in the box to cross.
So that's where I'm going to cross it rather than,
OK, this new boy's turned up.
Don't know where he likes the ball,
but I'm going to put it where I think he should be.

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And he's not there.
So it doesn't look as good sometimes.
But yeah, my two-week trial was quite well.
I went to the youth team,
trained with the youth team throughout the day,
trained a couple in the nights with their under-16s.
And then played games with the youth team on the weekend
and scored a couple of goals, which I think helped a lot.
I think I remember scoring at Blackburn away.
We won the game 2-1 and I scored the winner.
And then we played at home against Nottingham Forest.
I think it's a problem.
Nottingham Forest, I think surprisingly,
didn't even think that.
Played against Nottingham Forest.
We drew 1-1 and I scored again.
So I scored 2-2.
So I was like, hey, that's half decent.
And luckily from there, it worked out well.
Did you notice a big difference between the level of leaving,
what was the premier level of senior football in New Zealand
to going into youth football in England?
Was there a massive difference between the two?
There was a massive technical difference
and understanding of football.
They were more intricate on how they're actually being coached
and people's touch playing wise and things like that.
Whereas coming from playing men's football back home,
it was more a result business.
It's about winning games.
How do we affect the team to win games on the weekend?
Whereas going over to England,
there's about developing players,
especially at a young age, to get into the first team.
So it was a little bit different.
The pace of the ball and things like that
came with time over in England,
but they were very technical over in England compared to back home.
So we've got a story.
Apparently there were two lads there, Ash Lovell and Ash Malcolm,
who sort of took you under their wing.
Youth team players, I think,
but really helped you sort of get a footing there.

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So apparently the story is that after picking you up from your digs on the first morning at the club, you walked out of the house in bare feet and they were like, lad, this is Warsaw, not New Zealand. There's used needles lying around on the floor. Is that an accurate time frame? Is that what happened? Yeah, that is very true. Ash and Ash stole two of my best friends to this day. Yeah, I'm actually playing golf with them in two days' time. So yeah, that is a very true story. I remember luckily there were two nice lads. Where we got the house, Mum and I, they were in digs just up the road. So they came down, grabbed me, and we walk up to the bus, catch the bus to training. And I was running late that morning and like any Kiwi does, just goes out the door with shoes in hand. Ah, I put them on when I get up to the bus or something like that. Again, I'm about halfway out the road. They're like looking at me weird and I'm like, what? They're like, why have you got bare feet? I was like, because I was Russian. And they're like, no, put your shoes on, lads. And I was like, yeah, I'll do it. I'll do it when I get to the bus. They're like, no, no, no, you can't do that. This is Warsaw. You were a great buyer at the time. And I was like, you cannot be wearing no shoes around here. There's some dirty stuff around. And I was like, oh, really? He's like, yeah, this is not New Zealand. You can't do that over here. So from then on, I had to put my shoes on before I left the house, which was a bit shit for me. I like walking around in bare feet. But yeah, that's one of their fond stories that they bring up all the time. They never let me forget that one. That is such the key. But they're your tools, right? Your feet are your tools, essentially.

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So if anything happens to them, that's your job done.
Yeah, definitely.
To be honest, I didn't think about it back then.
It was just our feet are hard.
We're Kiwis.
We wear bare feet all the time.
We've got a hard skin.
We're fine.
It's normal.
I'd be all right.
We'll be right back after this short break.
So there's many great parts of the Chris Wood story,
but this is perhaps one of my favorites.
So you're making an impact at the West Brom Academy,
which leads to a call up to the reserve team,
where you scored a few goals and got quite a prolific reputation.
And then injuries to several West Brom players
got you a surprise call up to the first team
for a Premier League match against Portsmouth in 2009.
So this is just the timeframe.
We're talking about less than a year since you left Hamilton
and you're playing and you get a start in the Premier League.
Take us to the beginning of that story.
Yeah, I think my trial happened in 2008.
It was, went over there.
I can't remember what time frame it was.
I think it was just before Christmas or something like that.
And obviously got the scholarship program,
went back to New Zealand,
done the first six months back at St Paul's,
still playing football and studying and things like that,
and then moved over to the UK in June 2008,
ready for the 2009 season.
And yeah, it was a slow process for me.
The first six months at West Brom,
hardly played in the youth team,
found it really tough to try and break in,
adapt to football, came in overweight.
There's stories I probably shouldn't tell,
but like over, I don't know, back home use,
you know, the skimful test.
Yeah, the calipers.
Yeah, I gave up on those a long time ago, Woodsy.

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A long time ago, I gave up on those.
You can relate to the story there.
So on it, it's got like numbers one to 10,
which is one to 20, which is the millimetres.
And I was doing my skin folds for the first time in England,
and actually I was one of the boys walking past
when I was doing mine.
And the physio was grabbed by the sports sciences,
we grabbed my ballet roma abs and things like that.
And I had like number four on it.
And the guys, my mates actually was like,
Ah, Stacy, and you're really, really thin.
That's really good.
And the sports sciences went,
No, it's already been around once.
It was 24 millimetres.
I was like, ah, I just remember that.
I was just like, ah, I mean, it was just like,
Oh, you've got a master.
I was like, cheers, mate.
Cheers.
Was it just, was it used to assume like that brutal as well?
Like, I can imagine it'd be quite,
it'd be quite intimidating.
Like if you show any weakness,
are the lads just piling in on stuff like that?
Oh, massively, massively.
So you try and keep a lot of stuff under the radar.
There was a few stories where obviously,
you have all have individual jobs and things like that.
One of them is like kit.
So they have to,
if there's any kit lying around the dressing room,
at the end of the day,
they have to put it in the bucket,
take it around to the laundry.
And people used to just take the piss out of the kitman
that do it or like the,
the under 18 boys that it was their job.
So like that leaf slips in the shower
or they'll like throw slips at the kitman,
hit them in the face after using them and things like that.
And it's just horrible.

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But yeah, dressing rooms for under 18s were ruthless.
Yeah, people taping up gear, cutting gear,
cutting out bits in their underwear and things like that.
DPs in their underwear,
taping them up into balls and all of that.
That took ages, cutting people's shoelaces,
all that sorts of stuff.
DPs and the undies is a nasty one.
That's a real asshole.
That's when you know you've pissed someone off,
made your left there.
Yeah, and then I'll be having to go to the laundry man
asking for another pair of slippers just to walk home.
So continue that, that sort of timeline,
that call up for the first team,
how much of a surprise,
did you think a few,
you were always a few injuries away
or was that totally out of the blue?
It was probably totally out of the blue
or very much so I never really thought.
I obviously moved through the youth team
to the reserves quite quickly,
done quite well on the reserves after Christmas.
After I came back,
I would come back to New Zealand at Christmas
after I moved over there.
And everybody that I spoke to when I came back,
everybody was like,
are you a different man once you came back from Christmas?
You felt free, you started playing better football,
you just looked better.
So I think the first six months
was a bit of climatizing from moving country,
moving culture and things like that,
getting used to the footballing world.
So I was quite lucky I moved from youth team
to reserves quite quickly, done well.
I think I had only trained with the first team
like two or three times after being just like,
oh, they need an extra man called up and train,
drop back to the youth team for a couple of days
and then they need another guy.

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And then yeah, it was just a Friday,
walking down the corridor
and I was walking past the manager
and he just stops me and goes,
what's it, you got your tracksuit?
I was like, what do you mean?
He's like, your tracksuit to travel?
I'm like, no.
He's like, well, you better go home and get it
because you're coming down to Portsmouth
through on the bus to Portsmouth
that leaves in 45 minutes.
And I was like, shit, what do I do?
I don't have a car at this point.
I don't have my license.
I'm like thinking the bus is gonna take me 20 minutes
to get there and then mum can bring me back.
Can that work?
And then I was like, oh, that's not gonna work.
And then luckily one of the coaches was like,
I'll drive you back to your place,
get your gear and we'll come.
So I remember driving back there,
running in the house, literally ran in the door,
ran upstairs and I was shouting to mum,
mum, I'm off to Portsmouth, just getting my gear.
And then I was back out the door within 30 seconds,
got my gear and straight out.
And my mum was like, what the hell?
Didn't have a clue what I was doing,
where I was going, other than me just saying,
I'm going to Portsmouth.
She didn't, she might have known the first teams
playing in Portsmouth that weekend.
I'd highly doubt it because I'm sure a lot of people
didn't really.
But yeah, and that's, she had to call the academy manager
20 minutes later and be like, what's my son doing?
Where's he going?
Like he's just ran in the house,
grabbed his gear and ran out.
I don't know what's happening here.
And then she got explained to by the academy manager,

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like look, he's gone to the travel, the first team, he's going to be on the bench tomorrow, he's him this time. Hopefully it should be a good occasion for him. Would you like to go down to my mum? And she was like, oh no, no, no, it's his thing, he can do it and like enjoy that time. And they were like very insistent like, no, I think you should go down and experience this. Whether they knew that I was going to get on or not, who knows. But they think I'm sure these academy managers and people who have spoke to the first team environment knew that there was a chance that I could get on and something that my mum would never want to miss. What do you remember about your debut? 17, I think I saw that was Soul Campbell, was like the Warrington defender at the time. It's this whirlwind that's happening really fast. Were you full of travelling with the team and thinking about getting on? Do you have memories of it? Yeah, I mean, travelling was the big one. You walk onto a bus and everybody's got assigned seats and you're sitting there going, where do I sit? And as soon as you get on, someone goes, oh, you can see here, there's a free one here. You sit down and then Chris Brunt walks on and goes, what are you doing on my seat, mate? Get the puck out. I'm like, oh, shit. Done it again. I think they've done it to me two times. Now, finally found a seat. I was like, oh, thank goodness. Half an hour or half an hour into the journey. Woody, we want teas. Go make teas. Walking past everybody. Anybody want a tea? Yeah, yeah, yeah. I had about 13 different teas to make and bring them back and forth. Oh, yeah, we want another one. Two hours later, I'm like, gosh.

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So I was like, tea boy for the first period of time.
And then, yeah, I mean, the game was so surreal.
It was a bit of a blur.
I remember getting called up by the manager.
Come on, you're coming on.
Put your shirt on.
When stood next to him and he was speaking to me
and I was just looking, and I can't remember that point in time
because I was like, just in the absolute days,
I just can't remember anything that was said to me.
I was like, I'm just going to go out and play football.
I just remember running on that pitch
and then trying to do what I could do.
It's set in motion a pretty incredible year.
And I love the roller coaster of your career
because it seemed like at 17,
you made your Premier League debut.
You got your All White's call up.
You went to a Confed's Cup.
You had the Bahrain win.
And then you went to a World Cup,
all within the space of, I think, about 12 months.
So your jam packed some of the best moments of your career
into that very first year.
But I guess you couldn't possibly have understood
how amazing that was at the time, right?
No, that's exactly the thing.
I thought, this is just football.
This is going to happen every time.
It's going to happen every four years.
It's going to get to go to a World Cup,
get to go to a Confederation's Cup.
This is fantastic. Life's great, obviously.
In the last 14 years, it's obviously showing
that it's not like that.
So that's why I've been so desperate
to get back to the World Cup
because I didn't get to appreciate what we were in 2010.
And I couldn't take it in as much.
And that's why it's not a grit.
It's just a little burning desire in me
to get back to another World Cup
so I can fully embrace it the way I should have

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when I was a kid.
But I was a kid.
I didn't know anything otherwise to embrace it then.
It would have been hard to tell an 18-year-old
to embrace that.
I guess it would be hard when the undercurrent of it as well.
I imagine you make your debut against Portsmouth.
You get back to the club.
You're still a youth player.
Are you still doing the kit in the dressing rooms
and putting the cones out?
And like, there is still that hierarchy, right?
So all of these amazing things are happening,
but it's still you're getting pants thrown in your face
and the deep heat in the undies on your day to day.
Is that kind of right?
So you're riding this weird wave
of these amazing things internationally,
but the grind and the reality of your day to day,
is that kind of fear?
100% that's exactly what it is.
You go back and yeah, the boys are happy for you
and the team that you've made your debut
or played with the first team or gone away internationally.
But yeah, you still got a job to take.
My job was the equipment.
So I had to take out the equipment to the first team
training and then train on the first team pitch.
But I'm taking out, we had to take out 20 mannequins
every single session, two bags of poles, ball bags of balls,
two T's of cones and things like that.
They had to be out there every single training
and then we had to bring them all back in.
And it's a good 200-meter walk carrying
all of these things between two of us.
But yeah, your jobs don't go away.
They have to be done.
So yeah, you might have played it the weekend,
but get back to doing your jobs at the exact same time.
It's a great grounding experience
and a humbling experience, I guess,
as well to kind of keep you in check, right?
Because I imagine there's a risk that, yeah,

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I'm a Premier League, I'm a first team player
and you start to, you know, kind of go off into the atmosphere.
But when you're back on the grind,
you still got to earn your stripes, I guess, in a way?
100%. I'm a firm believer in that's what keeps
a lot of players grounded.
Unfortunately, it's phased out of the game a lot here.
Rightly or wrongly, who knows?
But a lot of safeguarding has come into it,
so you can't put kids through as much as you could back then,
when we came through.
But I put it down to, it's what kept me grounded,
kept me on my feet on the ground and just made you
a normal person that didn't make you any better
than anybody else, just because you played a game of football
for the first team, you're still trying
and trying to become a footballer at the same time.
2009, 2010 period, like that Bahrain game in Wellington
is one of the great nights in New Zealand sporting history.
And you're there as an 18-year-old and you come off the bench
and you nearly, we're already won the lap,
but I remember you nearly kind of scored at the end.
And just this insane experience you're having
as your sort of first year as a big-time player.
And then you go to the World Cup a year later,
and I'm sure you're coming up against players
who like a year ago, maybe two years ago,
you might have had posters of them in your wall.
Like this is such a surreal experience for you.
Was someone helping you guide through,
like did someone take you under their wing
and sort of say this is kind of big,
was Ryan Nelson there like sort of mentoring you
through that period or anyone?
Kind of, a lot of people try and help out
and drop little clues and things like that,
but Chris Killam was a big mentor of mine
for good things and for bad things.
We've had some great times together.
But yeah, he was also very good off the pitch
as well as on the pitch for me in my footballing world.
He guided me in the World Cup environment,
especially the Confederations Cup environment.

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He was very popular in helping me and working with me and things like that.
And he was a great man to learn off because he was playing in England at the time doing well.
So it was nice to have someone look after me.
I think obviously Nellie was the big dog with Simon and things like that.
And they, not getting themselves to themselves, they've done them.
But Kelly was the one that kind of looked after me a bit more.
Do you look back on chances that you've missed?
And I'm thinking of one that Italy is one all.
And you kind of break free from Canavaro, I think, and the left foot and it just drifts past the post.
Do you think about that one a lot?
Yeah, the wallet moments.
There's thousands throughout my career.
But that's a massive one.
I mean, if that one just trickles in the bottom corner or I miss hitting, it goes past the keeper or something like that.
How great that would have been to basically send the country through to the group stages.
It would have been incredible.
But obviously it wasn't meant to be.
I think we've done extremely well as a squad.
Just to draw the game.
So we did, but we had fighting chances in every single game to do something about it.
So just continuing on.
So I talked about the sort of the rollercoaster in the ups and downs.
So you've had all these highs and then you come to 2010.
And you go out on loan at first to Barnsley and then it's Brighton and Hovalby and then it's Birmingham and it's Bristol and it's Millwall.
And this, in my opinion from the outside, seems like the period that really made you.
Because I don't think people understand how hard it is to turn up at new clubs.
And this was all in the span of sort of three years.
Trying to make an impression, trying to get a contract, trying to win coaches and players over.
When you look back at that, if I got that right,

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that that was a period that really turned you into the player you eventually became?
Yeah, it was a massive effect on my career.
It's about winning the players over when you're going to dressing rooms and things like that.
The manager's already brought you in as a lone player.
Because he thinks you're good, he thinks you can add something to the game.
But these players don't know you from anybody.
You have to earn their respect to pass you the ball, to create chances or work hard for them to receive in a back.
So yeah, it's a big learning curve going into new dressing rooms. Big intimidating men sometimes.
These guys can be 33-year-old men fighting for contracts, fighting to put food on the table foot.
It's their bread and butter and their livelihoods.
Sometimes when I went down to league one and things like that, it's win bonuses meant so much to people back then.
So yeah, I've had my good spells on the loan.
And I've had my bad ones.
And you learn just as much from both of them.
I learned a lot from my first loan at Barnsley, which was the down one that we talked about, the highs and lows.
That was a low.
Couldn't play, didn't play, got promised a world by a manager.
You'll play this, you'll do that.
Didn't follow through on anything.
So you kind of learn to start to understand that.
Don't believe everybody, what everybody says.
Take it on the actions, how they do things.
That's a big thing to learn.
18 years old when you're a kid and things like that.
But you have good and bad times and Barnsley was a bad one.
But then I was lucky enough to go to Brighton three months later and have an absolutely amazing one.
And win the league and lead one.
So just good and bad times.
What are the mechanics of that loan period?
I think by that stage your mum had moved over and she was in the UK.
Do you retain living where you live and you've got to drive to trainings at different places?
Or do you uproot and move?
What does that actually look like?

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Because three months by three months by three months is kind of niggly.
Like I fucking hate moving at the best of times,
but to have to do it all the time must have been niggly.
So what does that actually look like?
Yeah, it's basically uprooting your life.
Some mums stay back in Birmingham, but I'm uprooted.
Went to Barnsley, but I was in a hotel.
We couldn't find an apartment or anything like that.
Or that wasn't that great.
Barnsley's an OK place to live.
It's nothing major.
A few of the boys have lived there before in the national team
and they'll say the same thing.
But yeah, so I was living in a hotel.
You're not cooking your own food.
So you're eating room service, restaurant food every night,
which isn't great.
You're bored.
You're going from training, getting home at two o'clock,
sending your hotel room or shitless, doing nothing.
So yeah, those are the bad line moves.
When I went to Brighton, I got into it.
I knew from my time at Barnsley.
I do not want to be in a hotel.
So I said to the people like,
if I'm coming down, I want to be in an apartment straight away.
Within my first week, I have to be.
I want to be able to cook my own food,
go walking around and things like that.
So yeah, those are the big differences
from loans that kind of help.
But yeah, you're uprooting your whole life.
Sorry, another little loan.
Are you having to do six initiation songs
at every club that you go to?
Like is that a standard new boy into the environment?
And have you got a go to?
Yes, that is a standard procedure you have to do at every club.
I've done it.
Most loan clubs I started out with singing.
My first one, to be fair, has an age well.
But my first one was the world greatest for the national team.
So it hasn't aged too well or anything like that.

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But that Akeli world's greatest.
It's a tune.
We often have this conversation.
Can you separate the music from the artist?
It's a tune.
It's a tune.
The tune stands up.
Yeah, it's a good tune.
But yeah, we probably won't talk too much on that.
Yeah, and then I went on to other songs, Oasis, Wonderwall.
Very easy to do, Crowd Pleaser.
But I think it was about my third or fourth loan.
I'd done the Haka.
And it got a great reaction.
And ever since that's been my initiation.
Oh, that's the go-to.
That's the go-to.
Having told people about it when I go to new clubs,
I just say I'm doing something.
Yeah, that's fine.
I'll go up and do something.
And they're like, okay, stand on the chair and do that.
And I'm like, oh, I can't stand on the chair for this.
They're like, no, no, you have to stand on the chair.
Saying, don't worry, I'll be fine.
Just carry on.
And they trust me.
And then I break out with a Haka full go for it.
Loud as anything.
Screaming on one of the...
I just picked the victim and screamed
on one of their faces, basically.
Is it a shoot-off situation?
Yeah, is it a Sam Messon?
It's not a shoot-off after seeing Sam Messon's body.
Yeah, I don't have that body to be able to do it.
So I stick away from that.
But no, I give it a good effort, just not up to that level.
I don't know, those skin folds seem to have come down from before.
You might be okay with that shoot-off.
Hey, I'm in good shape now.
You're looking really good.
I was like, oh, those skin folds.

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Oh, thank you, mate.
You're a nice guy.
I'll pay you later on that one.
Did you learn the Haka?
Was that like an Olympic thing?
But you actually learned the Haka?
Or did you just know it?
Everyone just knows the Haka.
I couldn't just do the Haka.
Your kids can do it.
You can do it.
Well, you can do it when you're copying the all blacks on the screen.
Yeah, you'd be surprised if you put under pressure
and it's either they will sing a song or do a dunk.
You're pulling it.
I get it.
You're pulling it down.
Yeah, thank God.
It's in our blood.
Yeah, so you try to make your impressions at these clubs.
And like we said, I think six different loan spales
in a short period of time.
One of our sources says you've still regarded
as a legend at Birmingham City.
You only had a short...
I'm saying one of our sources.
Just say Wilkie said.
One of our sources.
Just say Wilkie.
I'm trying to make it sound like we've got more sources.
One of our sources said you're regarded as a legend at Birmingham.
They'd just been relegated, but they were in the Europa League
and you came on and scored a last minute winner
against Bruges, I think it was.
And the club was in turmoil, but it was a huge goal.
But is that a real moment in your career?
Yeah, it's huge.
And it's still one that I get recognised for now back in the day.
Every time a Blues fan recognises me or comes up to me and goes,
I love it for Bruges away.
And the 99th minute winner, 7,000 people would travel
right in front of them.
My dad was there on the stands as well.

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It was incredible.
Something truly amazing to be a part of
and be able to play in the Europa League at such a young age
and things like that.
But yeah, it's one that everybody talks about.
You bounce out of Birmingham, you go to Bristol,
and then Millwall.
And from what I understand,
this is when the career really starts to take off.
I think 11 goals in 19 games.
And you know, Millwall seems like a really intimidating place
to go and play.
But from what I've heard,
your experiences there were all good.
Yeah, I remember speaking to my agent
before moving there in the summer,
but over preseason, he's like,
we've had Millwall come in for you in the championship.
I was like, okay, yeah, good.
He's like, look, this is really the make your break here.
And I was like, okay, he's like,
the reputation that Millwall fans have,
they're loud, they're strong, they're passionate
in certain ways.
They will let you know if they don't like you,
and they'll let you know quick.
So make your break here.
And I think luckily it made me
went into a dressing room where it's,
it was like going back into like,
the white head of dressing rooms as in like,
wooden benches, just a hook to hand your clothes on.
Nothing special, nothing fancy.
It was just proper old school environment.
And it worked.
It was just so good.
We were playing good football.
We were sixth in the league of scoring every second game
and things like that.
I was 11 and 19, as you said.
It was one of my prolific times
and playing up front with Darius Henderson
and things like that, Liam Trotter in the midfield.

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It was big players that have been around the game for a long period of time.

And yeah, it was just the making of the big steps.

And this leads you to get signed by Lester.

I think I've got that time right, right?

Yeah, Lester.

And so this is the season before they go on to win the league.

You're there.

Did you sense something special was brewing?

Like, did it catch you by surprise that they went on and had the success the year after you left that they did?

In the sense of them winning the Premier League, yeah, I didn't see it at all.

We had a great squad at Lester.

Great players from the time I joined to get them promoted from the championship winning the league, going up to the premiership and spending the first year on the premiership and staying up.

But yeah, when that season came for Metis, they decided to leave and go play for the Premier League.

Decided to leave and go play football or sit on the bench or sit in the stands and watch for a season.

And I chose to leave.

It was because I didn't think they would ever do what they did.

And if I didn't know what I've stayed to be a part of a Premier League winning team,

even though I would have only played one or two games,

yeah, I probably wouldn't have

because my time at Leeds made my Premier League career, basically.

But to be a part of that environment

would have been something special.

But your Leeds experience wasn't all smooth sailing as well, right?

I just want to jump in before we go to Leeds.

All right, all right, all right.

I just want to ask about Jamie Vardy

because Jamie Vardy at Lester is a character who I'm sort of in awe of.

Is he the fastest player you've played?

In terms of out-and-out speed,

did you see things on training fields

or have speed tests?

We were like, Jesus Christ, Jamie Vardy.

You love speed, eh? You love speed questions.

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Yeah, he is bloody quick.
And he's always had that knack for speed.
That's why he's been one of the great strikers
in the Premier League on why he scored so many goals
because of the speed element he has.
So, yeah, he's a very good player, great guy as well,
got him really well with him off the pitch as well,
had some great times together.
And it was just a good bunch of lads at Lester.
So, yeah, he is probably one of the quickest players
I've played with, Brennan Johnson at Forest
and Erlanga are two very, very quick players.
Erlanga is very quick,
so that would give him a run for his money, definitely.
Was Marry's there at the time for Lester?
Yeah, Marry's came in.
He came in at the start of the season
when we got promoted or in January, actually,
the January when we got promoted.
And he always had the ability, the technique was quality.
His left foot was a joke.
But he was just a bit lightweight.
And then once he learned to use his body
in the right way of manipulating it before the contact came in,
he turned out standing.
And that's why he's won the Premier League a few times.
He's done quite well in the career
and now earning some good dust over in Salty.
Yeah, I wonder that when you see a guy like Marry,
he's like what he's gone on to achieve in his career.
And in those sort of earlier years,
and you see him at training,
he's like, this guy is unbelievable.
Are the guys that stand out like that
in training like short-sighted games?
You're like, no one can get near him.
He's just top-top.
Look, yeah, he was good.
I didn't think he was Man City good at the time,
but he also was still 22, 23 years old.
So he had a lot of maturing to do at the same time, football-wise.
Same with Harry Kane when he came to Leicester on loan.
You could see he had all the ability in the world

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finishing left right for you with a ridiculous finisher.
What I'd say he'd go on to be
one of the greatest Premier League strikers in history.
Didn't think so, but I can see why,
because he is so good at finishing.
He adapted everything with his game
and he just got better and better over the years.
Where was the picking order?
So you and Harry were in the same team at Leicester.
Were you on a par?
Like, was one of you sort of above the other at the time?
I could say it's my claim for fame.
Yeah, I was luckily above him at the time.
I think there's quite a famous photo,
especially in Leicester terms,
where Harry Kane, Buddy and Drinkwater,
all England internationals,
are sitting on the bench for David Nugent.
It's an eye-opening up top in the playoff match,
which is obviously surreal.
The amount of goals both of them have gone on to score
and things like that.
It's over 100 goals on the prim.
And for England, it will cup some things like that.
And then, of course, Harry doing what he has done over his career,
being one of the best strikers ever.
That's so cool.
That's like my claim to fame is I keep you on the bench.
You're going to claim the claim as you give Harry Kane on the bench.
You know, it's all relative.
It's all relative.
Can I ask my leads question now?
Let's go to leads.
All right. So leads, you had exceptional results on the pitch,
but it was a tough time off the pitch.
I think I've heard you talk about the challenges of being in that environment.
But can you, for those that don't know,
tell us a little bit about how that was and what happened?
Okay.
It was a very up and down time at Leeds.
They were going through a lot of turmoil off the pitch.
New owner, very volatile owner and things like that.
But I came in after they spent, I think, three million on me,

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which was a decent chunk of money for them back in those days.
They spent that much money in that time.
But yeah, I came in trying to be the main number nine and things like that.
And my career there didn't really get off to the best of starts.
It took me four or five games to score a goal,
slowly picked up a goal here and there.
And ended the season with 13 league goals in 35 games.
So it was one of three ratio, which is okay.
It's not, it's not too bad.
Of course, everybody wants a one and two striker,
but it could have been a lot worse, I was thinking.
But come the end of that season, I was getting booed.
I was getting pauses after the game from fans
when I was just standing there signing autographs
for other kids and things like that.
They were telling me I'm shitting things like that,
do better and so many words.
But yeah, for four months at the end of that season,
the start of the next season, I was getting booed,
which was a real eye-opener.
It's something that I had to quickly learn to deal with.
And basically just think about,
don't give a fuck what anybody else thinks,
care about who you know and what you care for.
So my family are doing this for my family and my friends,
the people who do support me,
the fans that do want to care or actually care about me
as a player doing well, not everybody else.
Don't try and please everybody else.
And that's I think a big turning point to my career
and in my life that you can't please everybody.
And there's always going to be someone that doesn't like you.
There's always going to be someone that thinks
you're a shit footballer or you know, good at their club.
But there's going to be a lot that do you think you're good.
But of course, negativity outweighs positivity
in a lot of sense, especially on social media
or in the day and age, in the world these days.
That is elite mentality.
When you are turning up to your home club
and you're getting booed every time you touch the ball
for months on end,
like what you've just said is brilliant.

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Did you have a mindset coach to help you through that period?
Like were you navigating that on your own or how did you do it?
I had spoke to sports, well we've got sports ecologists,
a few times throughout my career I had one at West Brom
who I spoke with a few times and things like that
and you get some tricks and trades.
But the biggest guy who really helped out was James Beattie at least.
He's one that kind of took me under his wing,
obviously fellow striker and things like that.
Just basically gave me the guidance to think about,
don't worry about whatever people think.
Think about we believe in you, your team believes in you
and that's all that matters.
Don't worry about anything else and just focus on that
and just keep reiterating.
And there was like little like code signs we had
when I scored goals, looked at him and do a little code sign
that remember it's just about us, not about everybody else.
And we'd just go back to business and it was back to business again.
Go score that next one, go tell them go get another one,
go get another one and go from there.
And it worked that second season you sort of did you win them over?
Did the booing stop when the goals started going in?
Yep, as it always does.
The fickle fans that did boo in that way,
everybody else turned to positivity as they all do.
It was only a small majority of the leads fans of course,
but they're just always louder than everybody else.
But yeah, it did change and turn to everybody liking me and enjoying
me scoring goals and doing well for the club.
Was it when you're on the pitch, can you hear the booze
or are you so focused in the game that it washes over you?
Like what is that experience actually like?
Well, the first few times you're thinking you hear something
but you don't actually process it.
And then it happens again and again.
And then you're thinking, okay, someone is actually going,
is it actually for me?
And then it just keeps going like next time.
Next time you're like, yep, that's for me.
And then you can hear it all the time
because you hear the tune to it.
So yeah, it's just part of life having to deal with stuff.

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I'm sure a lot of footballers haven't had to deal with it.
And I'm sure a lot of footballers have had to deal with it.
Yeah, it's one of those things you go through the game
finding different elements to deal with things.
I think it's really hard as a Kiwi to probably understand it
because the only time generally New Zealand sports fans
ever boo is if we're playing Australia.
You know what I mean?
In rugby.
In rugby, yeah.
It's quite a foreign concept, I think,
for sports fans here to kind of understand.
The most basic, I guess, analogy I can make
is kind of people's opinions on all Blacks here in New Zealand
about who should be playing or who shouldn't be playing.
But in the UK, it's a real fishbowl, like tabloid culture.
I imagine as well as the booing in the stands,
you're getting online abuse or people coming into your social media
accounts and giving you shit.
Is it like life in a fishbowl for a Premier League footballer?
Yeah, it well and truly is.
You do.
Luckily, at that time in the career, only Twitter was there.
Instagram, I don't think, was as big as what it was these days.
So you're not getting as much abuse,
but you're getting abuse on Twitter.
But for me, with social media,
yes, people can abuse and be keyboard warriors,
but there's also ways for people like us to block it out.
Don't have your comments turned on.
Don't search your name or don't look at your comments
or anything like that.
Just stay away from it.
It's very easy things to do,
but the simple things aren't always easy sometimes.
And of course, everybody wants validation.
And some players or some people always look for their validation
in other people.
That's why they look at comments on Twitter, Instagram,
and things like that.
But that's not where you should be getting your validation from.
And that's where I learned from a bit of James Beattie
and other things like that.

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And my validation comes from my friends, my family,
the people I love and care for.
We'll be right back after this short break.
So you have this breakout season with leads.
You win the fans back and then Burnley come in for you.
Can you talk about the specifics of what happens
when a Premier League team comes in with a big money offer
to pull you away?
Like, is it your agent giving you a call saying,
hey, this is happening?
What do you want to do?
Like, how does that all work?
Okay.
I mean, after having a great season like I did,
I was hoping we got promoted as leads.
We were in the playoffs and things like that.
I was hoping we'd stay in the playoffs and win the playoffs.
Unfortunately, we just missed out on the playoffs.
So as one of those woodsies, you've had a great season.
We know you want to be playing in the Premier League.
We want to get you there as agents.
Is that something you're open for?
And my dream has always been to play,
be an established Premier League striker.
And so it's like, yes, if the opportunity arises,
I will always listen and look.
I'm happy at Leeds at the moment
because I was enjoying my football doing a great time.
But it's not something I'll turn down
as long as the deal is right for everybody.
So over the summer, I was away with the national team,
I'm pretty sure.
And things like that, nothing really happened.
And then over preseason, things start to come in.
You have a few interests from XYZ.
Other ones, some can run hot, some are cold.
But then Burnley came in quite strongly
and said, we want to sign you.
What are you going to say?
Obviously speaking to the agent,
what are you going to take to get them to sign?
Are Leeds willing to sell and things like that?
And it was one of those, Burnley went to Leeds,

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put in a bid, got rejected, went back,
and then it was like, can you negotiate on the price?
And at the end of the day, I had to sit down
with the owner of Leeds
and discuss about future plans at Leeds
with contract talks and things like that going,
you know I want to be in the Premier League,
you know I want to be in the Premier League,
will Leeds, is there a contract there worthy of
me being able to stay and things like that
to go into the Premier League with Leeds
or is the right time to move into the Premier League now?
And well, credit to Leeds,
they put a great offer and things like that.
But the draw was the Premier League
and once there was a Premier League club
with concrete evidence, it was where I wanted to be.
I wanted to be playing in the Premier League
and luckily Burnley was that club.
That whole transfer area is so fascinating.
Like if you're playing FIFA on PlayStation
or Football Manager, it's like just a case of
increasing the bid, you know what I mean,
with your controller.
When you're like living the negotiation,
it's such a wild thing to think.
And I made a note before of like a £3 million transfer
that you had earlier on in your career.
And then you go to Newcastle and it's like rumoured to be
£25 million.
How much of that plays in your mind
if you're sitting there in your lounge
in the evening going,
yeah, from Cambridge.
I'm now with £25 million.
Do you consciously think about that?
Or is it they're all just numbers
and other people sorted out
and your job is just to play football?
It's pretty much the second one.
It's all numbers and it's for them to sort out.
For me, you're an asset at the end of the day.
I was with Leeds.

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They want to sell me for the highest price.
They only want to buy me for the lowest price.
Whatever they agree on, that's your market value
at that point in time.
So the number doesn't really matter to me.
But it's just what someone's willing to pay for
at the end of the day for an asset.
And you just got to deal with the number
that someone puts on you and hopefully love up to it.
Or if you don't love up to it, you don't love up to it.
There's no being around the bush, you just go for it.
Are you still getting \$100 a goal
from the old mate down at Cambridge FC?
To the moment, no.
Unfortunately, that was a one-go offer.
That was a lovely, my first paid contract at 14 years old.
That's a long way from \$100 a goal at Cambridge, I'll tell you that.
It's not bad.
But does it become normalized for you,
the relationship with how much money Premier League players get?
I'm sure the car park is full of the flesh as cars
and everyone's got the most designer gear.
For a humble Kiwi guy, has your relationship with money changed?
No, I'm still a very conscious person with money.
I'm very savvy.
My dream and goal in the world of money
is to fund generations of my family line,
give people and my family opportunities that I didn't have
or my parents didn't have or anything like that.
So I've always been very careful with my money
and put them in the right places to hopefully build something with it.
Tell you what, he's not shy of putting his credit card on the bar
to ensure the boys have a good night out.
It's as Newcastle experienced at the 2012 London Olympics.
Into the Olympics.
Big man looked after a lot of boys that night.
Yeah, sometimes you have to step up and look after the lads,
especially when you become the captain of a team for the Allways.
Sometimes it's the captain's job to put the car behind the bar
and I've raked it in on a few of Nellie's credit cards before.
Actually, it might have been Nellie's credit card that night.
It might have been Nellie's credit card.
I think it was Nellie's credit card that night, definitely.

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But I've raked it in on a few of his,
so it's only right that when Tommy's name came up,
I made sure I raked it in on his credit card too.
Yeah, very good.
So five great years at Burnley.
Your goal was to become an established Premier League striker.
I'm guessing after about year one or two, you realised you were there.
That was your level.
You were smashing it.
You were a very good player, one of the best players in the team at that level.
Is that the moment you talked about earlier where you really felt like you belonged?
Yeah, I think it was after the second season when you've done it back to back.
That's when you know this is the league that you're going to play in for a long period of time.
You've done consistently well.
Now it's just about reproducing every single season
and hopefully trying to get better and bigger because you still have ambitions.
I still had ambitions of winning trophies,
going to bigger clubs, moving on to a top four club and things like that.
You still want that.
You still have those drives to get there where they'll happen or not.
You don't know, but it was only going to happen if I scored more goals.
So I had the hunger to do that, score more goals,
and that's what kept me fighting every season.
But yeah, the feeling established was from about then,
and then it was about just keeping that establishment and being the,
I wouldn't say a household name,
but a name that people know and relate to as a Premier League player.
You and Crouchy, Peter Crouch, overlapped for a little while there at Burnley.
Did you have a bloody good podcaster actually as well?
Yeah, he's a bloody good podcaster.
He's very good.
Did you guys ever play as a two together?
They ever have the wood Crouchy?
Tall and taller.
Yeah, taller, much, much taller.
I don't think we did.
He was coming off the bench a lot for our team.
Sean Dyche wanted him to play a more head-on-the-stick type role,
but he was a lot more than that,
and he didn't really enjoy that role,
I don't think, as much as he liked.
Obviously, he all left to speak about that for himself.
But yeah, he's the one that I never really got a chance to play with.

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We had some big boys in our team already,
same Vokes were still there,
Ashley Barnes were still there,
so we had some big, big guys around.
So yeah, it wasn't perfect,
or I think it's a chance to play with Crouchy,
but it was nice having him in the team.
Ryan Nelson, who played for Blackburn for a number of years,
spoke about the Blackburn-Burnley rivalry
and how intense that match can be.
Did you play in a few of those derbies,
or did the teams not overlap?
The teams didn't overlap,
but I did play in one of them.
It was my second game.
No, it wasn't, actually.
It was my first game.
It was my debut.
I came on.
I came on and a 2-0 win against them at Blackburn.
I just signed, and we played them in the cup.
I think it was a carling cup at the time.
And yeah, it just took over from there.
It's pretty fierce, that one.
They hate each other most definitely,
but yeah, it was nice.
We were at a time where our team was quite good,
and their team wasn't as good at the time,
so we kind of dominated them like they did last year.
The move to Newcastle then was a really interesting one,
and it got a lot of attention here.
Newcastle's such a big club.
They were struggling in a relegation battle.
You were the chosen one that would help them survive,
and the way they were playing, and I had all this money.
That must have been a real buzz.
A club of that size coming in for you,
and then to play as much as you did,
basically starting every game,
and help them achieve the goal that they bought you in for?
Yeah, I mean, it was something completely different.
Like, it was so quick how it happened.
I think it happened within 48 hours of the interest coming in,

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and them speaking to Burnley saying,
we want your striker.
What's it going to take?
And Burnley was like, we're not selling.
And they were like, they put in a bit of,
I think it was just shy of 20 million and things like that.
And my agent and myself knew that I had a release clause
in my contract that obviously Burnley put in the contract.
And we knew that if they kept bidding,
it was going to trigger.
It was just if they were going to keep bidding.
And they said twice more indeed.
Exactly, and they got it in the end.
I think Newcastle were after four or five strikers at the time,
all around a similar value,
but it was just which one could they land on
at the right price, right for the team at the same time.
And luckily, it was me, and I remember leaving training on the Monday,
and I got a call on the way home saying that
that's been accepted.
It's triggered with your release clause.
You have permission to speak to Newcastle if you want to.
And then it was just from there, spoke to them, obviously.
Terms were with the agents,
they were dealing with that side of it.
They knew my numbers and things like that,
that I would like and wanted to get to.
And I dealt with the gaffer and the head of recruitment
to understand their vision and what they wanted from the club.
And as you can see, the vision was absolutely huge
of what they wanted and where they wanted to take the club.
But they were first and foremost in a dogfight,
and that's what I was brought into.
We had an episode a while back with Chelsea Lane,
who's an Aussie by birth Kiwi by choice physio,
who went over and worked with the Golden State Warriors in the NBA.
And she talked about the nature of teams and moving on,
and how sometimes you can see a player at training one day,
and then in NBA terms, they get traded the next day
and they move somewhere else.
When you leave a place like that, that you've been at for a while,
is it as black and white as that?
Is it one day you're there, the next day you're not,

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and then you'll remove from the WhatsApp chat that night?

What does it actually mean?

Yeah, it was sometimes pretty much like that.

Normally there's a bit of transfer speculation

and things like that that goes on,

but with this one, it was literally nobody knew about.

Got triggered and that night I was waiting for the phone call

at like seven o'clock tonight to travel up to Newcastle

for a medical the next day.

So it was a big turnaround of things,

and yeah, none of the Burnley boys knew about it.

I obviously wasn't in contact with many of them

because of what was happening and things like that.

And yeah, obviously by the time they all got agreed

at seven o'clock at night,

fully in, it was released to the media.

That's when the messages started flowing in

and things like that.

You leave and you go in and all of that,

and it's one of those you just have to go radio silence

for the next few while until everything sorted.

Chris Wood has left the group.

Definitely not that.

Do you wait to be removed or do you say,

hey, Lads, thanks for everything.

It's been great.

And then you like, this is a genuine question,

like the mechanics of a group chat.

It's one of those you wait until you've signed it there

where everything's gone through,

you put in your goodbye message,

and then you remove yourself.

Right, it is that.

Yeah, after about, so you put in your message,

wait about half an hour for good luck,

enjoy, or as often as they can, and then remove yourself.

And then this is just a real niche question of my interest.

Because you have moved around so often,

did you save numbers of players in your context list,

or do you just leave them as numbers?

No, I saved 95% of them, definitely.

Cool, great.

I just wanted to check that.

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It's just other people I know don't save names,
and they just leave numbers on there.
I'd find that really weird.
I wouldn't know if a random text came three years later,
who it is, and you're struggling to figure out who it is.
Well, I'm glad you've saved my number.
That's why you always reply to me.
Yeah, that's why.
I don't actually love WhatsApp friends requests.
It's just when the face comes up,
you go, actually, I know who that is.
Yeah, that reminds me.
Weird areas.
So at this point, you've played under so many great coaches,
Roy Hodgson, Sean Dyke, Tony Moabry, Eddie Howe.
We've talked about elite mindset for you dealing
with those struggles that it leads in the booing.
I wonder if we could talk about coaching.
What separates, in your opinion,
like a good coach from a great coach?
And you've had so many different styles of coaching.
What is it that really hits hardest with you?
The two main things for a coach is being a good
tactician, coaching-wise, and then also being a man manager.
I think it's very difficult for a manager to have both.
They're either sometimes a very good man manager
and lacking a bit in the coaching technical side of it,
or vice versa.
Very rarely you have anybody that is 10 out of 10,
or 9 out of 10, 9 out of 10 in both elements.
Eddie Howe was probably the best manager for both.
He was a very good, unbelievable tactician, footballer,
understanding the game, getting his opinion across
to the players, onto the pitch, off the pitch,
and then managing players in general.
He's extremely good at that.
He's personal.
He relates to you.
He wants to know about your family.
And he gets you to open up about your family,
your trials and sufferings and things like that throughout your life.
And yeah, he's probably the top one throughout my whole career.
How common is the gaffer given the team of bollocking?

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Is the halftime bollocking or after a game?
Or is it you don't get that at that Premier League level?
That's kind of more analysis down the...
That's more northerly.
Yeah, is that emotional kind of rah-rah?
Is that there still at that level?
Yeah, it's still there.
It happens every fourth game.
There's something that pisses off a manager.
And it could be because your team's 1-3 on the balance
and you just let your standards drop for one game.
He's going to kick your ass about getting it back to normal.
Or you could be losing every week and you need to kick up the ass anyway.
But yeah, it's definitely still there.
And all managers in the Premier League have that side to them.
Do you personally respond well to someone getting after you,
like a manager giving you a real kick up the ass
and sort of critiquing what you're doing?
Or do you like a more sort of passive style?
No, I prefer the kick up the ass.
But only when it's deserved.
I don't like a manager just picking on or saying stuff for the sake of saying stuff.
You need to make sure it's relevant, make sure it's correct.
And because as players, you know when you're having good and bad games,
you know when you're not doing your job right.
So pick me out for those times.
Don't pick me out when I've actually done all right.
And there's worse players that have done worse things
and you're not even talking to them.
So as long as they know that and they do it in the right way, I'm all for it.
Have you got another?
No, no, I was just saying players pick up on that too,
when it's genuine critique and not just doing it for show, I think.
Yeah.
I'm going to take an opportunity to use coaches
as a chance to segue into your international career with the All Whites.
Do you enter conversations with clubs in the UK
and always have to reiterate how important it is for you
to play for the national team as often as possible?
I think I've been lucky enough over my career
that they have seen how important it is to me.
At Burnley, they knew how important it was to me.
Traveling, going to there, obviously not ideal,

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but for most of my time at Burnley, after the Peru game, we didn't play for a long period of time. So they were lucky they didn't have me going away as much. But when I signed for Newcastle or Eddie was like, I know you're a big, big on your international team. We will not stand in your way. You'll always be allowed to go if that's what you want to do. And of course, for me, that's huge for me because I want to be playing as many All Whites games as possible as long as I'm fit and able to. A record's important to you in the international space. Like you're the all-time leading goal scorer for the All Whites at the moment. I think Ivan Visilich has maybe 18 appearances in front of you currently or 19 appearances. So you're nodding your head. So you're obviously aware of these things. But are they motivating factors for you to continue that longevity? Yeah, they are. The goals one was a massive one. I wanted to be known as one of, if not the best, All Whites strikers or goals grown. Well, thank you very much, Ennis. Yeah, I really wanted that one. That was one I really wanted to get to, especially after seeing Smelso go so close, but not getting it. Where when I grew up was growing up and throughout when I started playing, I thought, oh, Smelso's going to beat this record and he's going to do so well. He is an amazing striker, brilliant player, goal scorer to the tee. It was just unfortunate with the game times not being as much as possible and not playing as frequently. He didn't get the chance to get to those goals and that record. Whereas once I didn't see that happen, I was like, that's something I want to strive for and get to. So once I got to that, I was extremely happy. And I'm sure I'll take more pride in it when I finish play. But yeah, that one was a definite motivation one. To bring you up to current day, you came out with the All Whites to play Australia about a year ago, I think now, and you got injured. And it's been a pretty rocky- China. It was China, the China game.

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China, China.

And it's been a bit of a rocky road since then.

You moved on from Newcastle.

We signed it Nottingham Forest where you are now.

And as we spoke about at the start,
scoring the winning goal, being back fit again.

Has it been quite a challenging last 12 months with injury?

And are you feeling good again?

Are you on top of the world again after a difficult time?

Yeah, I mean, injury is hard to deal with here the best of times.

Every time it seemed to go back to New Zealand, I get injured in some way.

As I said, the Australia game, I broke my ribs, broke two ribs.

So I had to come off in that game.

And then when I came back to the China games, I told my Rick Finn and needed surgery on it.

So that put me out of those games, which was hugely frustrating because that's all I like
doing is especially when I'm back home playing in front of my home crowd.

It's so nice to be back home when we do get to go back home.

So that was a bit of a kick in the teeth.

But yeah, this is the first massive injury or big injury I've had in my career.

So it's been tough to deal with.

There's been good days.

There's been bad days where you just want the world to swallow you up
and just want to move on to the next day.

But that's in your life, you and things like that.

And you just got to find ways of getting ahead of it past it.

And that's where your support networks come in.

My missus is a big one.

My family is a huge one.

To be able to take your mindset away from football,
to make sure you're still in that good mindset,
going into a next training day or something like that.

I think, can I just jump on the family point for a minute?

I think it speaks volumes to your character,

that you're so committed to playing for New Zealand,

that your club stuff won't stand in the way of getting you play.

But at one of the nation's cups,

you made a decision to leave to go and attend your sister's wedding.

I think New Zealand had qualified for the final,

playing Papua New Guinea in Papua New Guinea for a place at the Confed Cup.

But that family bond was strong enough that it did take you away.

Can you speak about your family for a moment,

especially your sister and your mum and dad, your immediate family,

and how big a support they've been to you to allow you to achieve these goals?

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Look, yeah, I mean, ultimately the be all and end always, I wouldn't be where I am today without them. I would never achieve the amount of stuff I've achieved without them. My parents, as I alluded to earlier, they ferried me up and down the country, given up their time, giving up their jobs in the end of the day to move over to England, giving up life with their daughter, having to leave her in New Zealand and come over to England to look after me. And then my sister, having to give up her parents and her brother, living over the other side of the world and not having that support. And that family network that she would need and want at times at 18, 19 years old to go on into university. So sacrifice, they have done more than enough for that for me. But they just mean the world to me and my sister means so much to me that there was nothing that was going to stop me going to my sister's wedding. My sister was good enough to book a wedding in June in New Zealand. In winter, around my footballing schedule, anyway, it was out of a FIFA window. It was six days after a FIFA window should have ended. And OFC aren't the best at planning. So they didn't stick to the timeframe, which obviously hindered me being available for those games. But it was one of those I spoke to the manager before the tournament even started and said, I need to be at my sister's wedding. She is one of the most important people in my life. I want to be there. Do you want me to come to the first bit and up to the semi-final if you make it there? Or would you like me to stay away and not be a part of it to wreck the team culture and environment? And that was his decision to say, no, I'd still like you to be there, be a part of it, which is what I wanted to be because I wanted to help my team get to the final. Even though I can't play in the final, I want to do what I can to be there. So yeah, it was one of the things I was lucky enough to score some goals in those games to get to the final and they were more than adequate to get the job over the line at the end of the day. That's so cool to hear. I've also heard you say that your sister was technically a better footballer than you. Is that tongue-in-cheek or is that legit? No, technically she is. She's always had a better touch than me. She's always been better with the ball and things like that. I just had the brute strength guy for goal and as you alluded to earlier or Sam said, I don't score great goals, I just score goals. And that's what's obviously made my career.

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Do you think she would have played in this women's World Cup had she continued down the football path because she played age group international, right?

Or did she ever play for the football ferns?

No, she only played age group.

She played on the 17 World Cup and on the 20 World Cup.

Would she or not have?

I think the football ferns sacrifice a huge amount to be footballers in New Zealand.

They don't have as much funding or anything like that as I believe they should or as other countries get.

So I think she chose the right path going down academia because she is a very intelligent person and I think that's what fulfilled her life most.

She got more joy out of that side of it and playing football on the side rather than sticking out and grinding at football, which it can be grueling at times as

I know from being good friends with some of the ferns.

Hey, this has been brilliant.

What do you like?

Thank you so much.

I so enjoyed this episode.

I won't keep you much longer, but just looking forward, 31 now.

I've heard you say that you want to be playing Premier League football till you're 35.

I feel like your style of game lends itself to longevity at that level because it's not quite so built on that top end pace which players lose around there sort of late 20s, 30s.

Yeah, Steve, thanks mate.

But he's speaking from experience, would you?

He never had it to begin with.

Am I wrong?

That is why you'll be able to play that long, right?

Yeah, let's hope so.

That's probably one of the things I will never have to lose is the pace because I've never really had it.

I mean, I'm okay at speed, but nothing major.

But yeah, I want to play as long as I can in the Premier League and that's my main goal, whether I can or can't get to 35, that only time will tell or whether a club will keep me until 35 will be different.

But yeah, I want to play as long as I can, I ain't afraid of dropping down leagues or anything like that.

At the moment, I just want to play football as long as I can and play national team as long as I can and just continue to be a footballer and do the thing I love to do because you're a long-term retire.

Are you the kind of guy that moves back to New Zealand after the football career is done or you think you'll stay in the UK?

I think I'll be living in the UK after the football in Korea.

I do want to come back and spend at least a year in New Zealand and that's something that

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the message is open with, which is great.

Whether that's still playing football or not playing football, who knows.

But years gone down the line, that might be an option.

You've got to start that bloodstock syndicate back down here in Cambridge, back in those routes, right?

Because horse racing is a big, is it a big interest of yours?

And is that something that keeps you, I guess, fresh outside of football?

Yes, yeah, it's a big thing for me.

Obviously, my dad loves it and grew up, got taken me to the trucks at Cambridge and things like that and enjoying my time there.

And then over in England, Jack Cork and I get on extremely well and we both love horse racing, their family is a big horse family.

And so is obviously my and my dad's and my mum and dad love going to horse racing meets because they get a free day out, which is nice for them.

But yeah, I'd love to breed horses.

Need to get a good one first.

Either a good stallion or a good mare would be nice to breed out of to go that route.

But yeah, I think horses will always stay in my life.

Well, anyone, any of the between two bears universe that's listening because we have a big listenership here in New Zealand that if you've got some bloodstock and you want to link up with Woodsy, drop us a line slide into our DMs and we'll see what we can do.

100% 100% I'd definitely be well and truly open to having having horses out in New Zealand and being involved back there.

That'd be that big quality.

I'd love to bring a stallion line over from New Zealand, maybe a good stallion mirror horse over in New Zealand and then bring it over to the UK to race.

That'd be lovely.

I'm not sure though how the top hat and tails would go at some of the race tracks down here in New Zealand.

You've got a good selection in your wardrobe.

Thank you.

Yeah, I have to give it a good go, don't I?

Is it mandatory in the UK to really go the full nine?

At Royal Ascot it is, yeah.

And that's where we go definitely every year.

It's we make it the occasion, obviously middle of June, perfect off season time.

And yeah, top hat and tails, it's good fun.

It's totally enjoyment.

I don't know if I pull it off as much, but I think as I get older, I'll pull it off a bit more.

You're going to go top hat and tails for the wedding?

No, I'm not.

When's that big day coming up?

The wedding is 17th of June, 24th, so 10 months away now, so it should be good.

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Yeah, nice.

Invites are still obviously on the way, so we'll look forward to it.

We'll clear our schedule outside of a FIFA window and make sure that we're there for that one. Perfection.

It takes a long time to get from England to New Zealand, doesn't it?

A couple of good EMCs though.

You never know, would you?

Very true.

We actually might be looking for one, so you never know.

Also, for anyone out in the between two beers universe that's looking for EMCs, just slide into our DMs and we'll be there for that.

Why do you have numbers of good ones?

They're saved in your WhatsApp mate, don't worry about it.

Okay, a couple of questions for me to wrap up.

We talked a bit at the start about physically imposing defenders.

Who is the physically the strongest player you've come up against in the Premier League?

Van Dyke does jump out there straight away because he is a man beast.

He is big, strong, huge and quick.

He has gone at all.

He is a top-top defender.

Skirtle was another one.

He was a bit of a deck to play.

He always used to keep pinching you, grabbing you.

Every when the ball was down the other in the pinch, he's just holding you and raking down the back of your Achilles.

So he was a little deck to play.

Do you get into any of those dark arts yourself now?

Not really, no.

Too nice.

Yeah, unfortunately, I am here.

But no, just let other people do it.

Best player you've seen at training across your career?

Oh, wow.

Probably Stephen Holloway.

Very true.

There has been a lot.

Mahrez does stick out.

Harry Kane, obviously, is two big ones.

Actually, Westwood, one of the best technicians I've played with, Bruno Gemmares.

He's going to be a top-top talent.

I know he is already, but he is huge.

I have to go for either Bruno or Riyad, one of the two.

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Last one from me.

You've never played against Messi, but you've played against Ronaldo.

And I wonder, you know, they're so high above the rest in terms of the greatest players.

When you're preparing to play Manchester United and a team with Ronaldo in it, how much has it addressed in the team talk?

So-and-so is marking Ronaldo for the day, or is it talked about,

I guess you don't big up how good the opposition are,

but is it kind of like mentioned?

We really need to watch out for that number seven.

Look, yeah, I don't think any of them like coaching stuff or anybody mentioned it,

but when you're on the team bus and then you just speak to the guy, say,

where Burnley is playing left-wing Ronaldo, I'm talking to the Louten guy,

make sure you kick that bastard so he doesn't score a hatchery,

because it doesn't make us look bad.

And he's like, yeah, I need to get in there and first before I can kick him.

I'm like, yeah, probably true, you're that slow.

But yeah, it's one of those, the boys chat about it, trying to stop them.

But if they're on it, they're unstoppable.

Those two, you're looking at, and Bappe and Harland and Neymar,

that could be one of the top ones across the game of my generation, at least.

So yeah, if they're on top of the game, Messi and Ronaldo, you ain't getting neither.

Hey, this has been Epic, Chris.

I love the send-off, like, good luck for the game against Man United in a few days.

It's so cool to be able to say that.

Mate, this has been a really cool trip from the humble beginnings in Hamilton to what you've achieved now.

So it's been so great hearing the story in so much detail.

So thanks so much for giving us your time, Che.

Yeah, like, hearing about the work ethic that was instilled at a young age,

or that you looked after in your own ability at a young age is amazing.

And also, I'm a real big one on old-school values.

Like, Wilkie uses no school like the old school test.

So to hear you talk fondly about having to keep yourself grounded

and having to take the goals out and the kit out and do all that stuff at a young age,

just instills really good values that I can see coming through in your role now.

And I know from inside the All White's camp,

I know you're big on moving around the tables and really engaging with all of the players

and not just sticking to a click, which might have been the case with things gone by.

But I couldn't encapsulate it any better than Wilkie's words.

And Wilkie finished his essay that he wrote about you with this paragraph.

So these are Wilkie's words, but I echo them 100%.

So Wilkie says,

He's gone on to have a great career, which is amazing, but not surprising.

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He's always been very grounded and humble.
When I've caught up with him over the years,
and I'm sure many others would say something similar,
that humility speaks volumes about his character
and the job his parents did bringing him up.
Definitely genuine, ambassador material.
I'm glad.
Yeah, this has been incredible.
To like Stephen said, great that this is your first long form conversation.
It's been amazing to see your rise from where you started to where you are now,
but you're still the same old woodsy.
So thank you very much and all the best for that Man United game.
And we look forward to seeing you in the All White shoot again sometime soon.
I appreciate it, guys.
I mean, it's been fantastic coming on.
I've been fans of the show for a long time.
I remember listening to the early day of podcasts.
Back when you had the footballers on and things like that.
And so it's been a real joy to come on.
And as I've said to Trish, who obviously helped sort this out,
it's one that I've always wanted to be on.
So thank you guys for having me.
You guys are true pioneers and great guys to me and good friends.
So thank you guys.
Cheers for D.
Hey, guys.
Thanks for tuning in to see short form videos of all the best moments from the set.
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