

# When Bobby Moore went to manage Oxford City for £14,000



For Oxford City, the visit to Notts County in the second round of the FA Cup next weekend represents a significant first. Never before has the club, who ply their modest trade in the National League South, progressed so far in the competition.

But if the temptation is to suggest the players, fans and management heading to Meadow Lane are in danger of succumbing to nosebleeds caused by their sudden elevation into national attention, those with longer memories will recall that this is not the first time Oxford's second club have enjoyed a moment in the sun.

Back in 1980, City were at the very epicentre of football interest. That was when the then Isthmian League minnows [approached a World Cup winning captain to become team manager.](#) And, extraordinarily, Bobby Moore agreed.

“I’d just taken over and thought, ‘Who could we get in who would put the club on the map?’” recalls Tony Rosser, who was chairman for five years in the early Eighties. “I found out Moore was working as a coach at Crystal Palace, was looking for his first management job and was financially on his uppers. So I thought, ‘Why not?’”

Over five tortuous meetings, Moore agreed to remuneration of £14,000 a season, plus a £5,000 signing-on fee and a club Daimler. It was a huge salary by non-League standards, but Rosser met the sum from his free-newspaper business’s coffers, surmising the investment would recoup itself in publicity terms.

“I remember at every meeting, Mike Summerbee always seemed to be hanging around,” recalls Rosser. “I later find out he wasn’t involved in any of Bob’s business. He was waiting to go out for a session with him.”

Just before Christmas 1980, with a posse of pressmen in tow, Moore, wearing a magnificent kipper tie, arrived at City’s tumbledown Whitehouse Ground, a place long since modernised into an executive cul-de-sac.

As he stood in front of the tiny main stand, the look of unease was all too evident in his eyes. This was a man who, 14 years earlier, had been at the very heart of English football’s finest hour. Now he had stepped a long way out of his comfort zone. Nonetheless, in a television interview that is still available on YouTube, he showed he had no sense of entitlement.

“When I packed up playing I didn’t have a divine right to be given the first job that became available just because of what I’d achieved in a playing capacity,” he said.

And his humility was there in everything he did. He was happy to have his office in a Portakabin at the ground, was unfailingly polite to everyone and was even in the habit of collecting up the dirty kit after matches, folding it neatly into the laundry skip.

“We’d go to away games and the opposition chairman and directors would be there in the car park waiting to greet him,” recalls Colin Kirby, then a teenaged Oxford City fan.

“They wanted pictures with him. Autographs. Everywhere it was an absolute circus. And what I remember most was he was just so unfazed, so polite, not at all stand-offish. Through it all he was just so cool.”

His coolness, however, did not translate into results. Despite the attendant media brouhaha, despite the injection of funds provided by Rosser, the team never gelled under his stewardship. On the training pitch, Moore proved not to be the most demanding of coaches. On the touchline he watched in cool detachment, rarely chivvying, leaving the players to organise themselves.

Hoping to improve his squad, he called in favours. Phil Beal, the ex-Spurs defender, arrived as did John Fraser, who had played in the 1975 FA Cup final alongside Moore. But the newcomers found the going tough.

“It was a big step down,” says Kirby. “He’d bring new players in almost every week, there was never any rhythm. And every team we played were fired up to beat the World Cup winner.”

Part of the deal for getting Moore was that Rosser could engage him as a figurehead for his business. They set up a company together called Score with Moore. And the manager spent much of his time pressing the flesh on his chairman’s behalf.

“He was terrific to deal with, so brilliant with people,” remembers Rosser. “He was less brilliant with the players. I quickly realised he wasn’t cut out to be a manager. After about 10 games, only a couple of which we won, I took him to one side and said, ‘Do you know someone who could help?’ He suggested an old West Ham teammate who was then coaching in America. It was Harry Redknapp.”

Redknapp was paid £6,000 to organise the football side, while Moore continued with company promotions. A much more hands-on touchline presence, Redknapp soon brought in another raft of new players. Not all were a success. “There was a bizarre move signing a goalie from Jersey called Martin LeBlanc,” says Kirby. “He wasn’t that good and the fans nicknamed him Kerplunk. Yet they were flying him over for every match. It was all getting a little strange.”

At the end of Moore’s first season, City were relegated. But Rosser stood by his man. “I couldn’t fire him. He’d won the World Cup.” That summer of 1981, Moore had an unusual request. Would the chairman mind if he missed the entire close season in order to go to Hungary to shoot a movie? Rosser agreed, and Moore went off to film *Escape to Victory*, Summerbee in tow. When he came back, Moore continued to work on promoting Rosser’s companies. Results, though, were not forthcoming. And Redknapp found life in the seventh tier frustrating.

“I’d sit there on a cold, rainy night playing in front of a few hundred fans and think, ‘How did I get into this?’” he recalls.

“Then I’d look at Bobby next to me and think, ‘Never mind me, how did he end up here?’” Moore, though, was resolute. Redknapp remembers the Portakabin phone ringing one day. It was John Bond, who was leaving Norwich to take up the manager’s job at Manchester City. He recommended Moore as his replacement.

Moore, however, told Redknapp he was committed to seeing out the job at Oxford.

But even though Redknapp’s presence at training stabilised the league position, at the end of the pair’s second season, Rosser ended the experiment.

“Harry had all sorts of ideas for signings, and I had to keep saying to him, ‘Harry we’re Oxford City not Real Madrid,’” he says. “In the end I realised I just couldn’t keep justifying the money. So I let Harry go

and Bob became football consultant, still working on company promotions.”

A local manager called John Delaney was brought in on a £2,000 salary and the big-name players drifted away. Moore’s job as consultant was short-lived. He headed off to take over at Southend. Thus ended Oxford City’s brief flirtation with the big time.

“The truth is it was never going to work,” says Kirby. “To be honest, it was a bit like putting someone who’s run a five-star restaurant in charge of chip van in a lay-by on the ring road.”