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{ INTERVIEW }

# WHEN HARRY MET SANDBANKS

*He may have travelled the world in pursuit of footballing silverware, but ask Harry Redknapp where he is most at home, and the answer is not Loftus Road, Boleyn Ground or even White Hart Lane, but Dorset's own beautiful playing field, Sandbanks*

It is near impossible to strike up a conversation with Harry Redknapp without mentioning football. Not that he's adverse to discussing other things, or is in any way intimidating – in fact from the very outset of our exchange he is extremely friendly, helpful and seemingly happy to talk about anything that you'd care to mention. But when you look at Harry, the first things that come to mind are strikers, stadiums and silverware – he is the quintessential English manager, and to say that it courses through his veins is almost to understate the extent to which he lives and breathes 'the beautiful game'.

"From kicking a ball as a kid under the street lamps of Poplar and standing on Highbury's North Bank with my dad, to my first game at West Ham," he says, already lost in his own passion, "I was born head over heels in love with football. It saved me, and 50 years on that hasn't changed one bit – I'd be lost without it."

Harry is the manager who has seen it all – from a dismal Portakabin at Oxford City and training pitches with trees in the middle, to the unbeatable highs of the Premiership, lifting the FA Cup and taking on Real Madrid in the Champions League. His is the epic journey of one of the great managers our country has ever seen. In an era now dominated by foreign coaches, Harry is the last of an old-fashioned breed of English football man, who has moved with the times and always come out fighting.

This year has seen his autobiography, *Always Managing* hit the shelves – a number one bestseller for two weeks, which is set to sell 100,000 copies by Christmas. But why now? Traditionally these tomes are wheeled out to revive a flailing career, or pre-empt its final curtain call, but neither of these things can be said for Harry, who is as active as ever

in his management of Queen's Park Rangers (QPR), a job which he "loves one hundred percent". In truth it came down to charity – Harry is a huge supporter of the Bobby Moore Fund, which promotes bowel cancer awareness. This where all the proceeds from the book are going.

On a more local scale, Harry, a Sandbanks resident, is tireless in his support for Dorset and Hampshire charities, including Leukaemia Busters, based at Southampton General Hospital, and Julia's House, the Dorset children's hospice. His generosity is, in his own words, "mostly fuelled by my love for this area, and, even more so for the people who live here." Exhibiting the same passionate tone that I assumed was reserved only for matters relating to football, he continues: "I moved to Christchurch in 1972, which I loved, and then Ashley Heath, which I loved too – and now Sandbanks, which I will never leave." Before I can ask him to explain the reasoning behind his admiration for the area, he has already launched into a justification: "It's got everything – there's the sea of course, and the forests, but it's also just such a fantastic way of life – and the people, you just can't fault them, they're so great. Incredibly supportive." This must be why, despite managing a London club, Harry chooses to remain in Dorset and commute to London daily. "I can't imagine being anywhere else now," he says.

His love for the area was first fuelled by his time spent playing for AFC Boumemouth, where he remained for four seasons, between 1972 and 1976. "That club will forever be close to my heart." So much so in fact, that when QPR play Boumemouth, Harry says he still feels a particular pressure to perform. "Apart from the fact that they'll all rip it out of me if we lose, it will always be a



ABOVE: Harry with his wife, Sandra  
"the most important person in  
my world"

### THE STATS

- Harry previously managed Bournemouth, West Ham United, Portsmouth (twice), Southampton and Tottenham Hotspur
- While in his second spell at Portsmouth, he managed the side that won the 2008 FA Cup
- At the conclusion of the 2009–10 season he guided Tottenham into the UEFA Champions League for the very first time



**ABOVE:** Harry (centre) on his wedding day in 1967 with wife, Sandra and Frank Lampard Senior  
**ABOVE RIGHT:** Harry with his late father, Harry Redknapp Senior  
**RIGHT:** Harry with his two sons, Mark and Jamie  
**LEFT:** Harry's beloved Sandbanks in the stormy winter. Image courtesy of [steve-smith-photography.com](http://steve-smith-photography.com)

special place for me.”

Having decided to move on from playing, Harry cut his teeth in a coaching role in America, but was then quick to return to Boumemouth as Assistant Manager in 1982, where he then became Team Manager a year later. “When I retire,” he says wistfully, in a tone that would seem to suggest that it’s a long way off yet. “I will buy a season ticket at Boumemouth, and go and watch them play every single week.” So even in retirement, it will always be about football...

But what would Harry have done if he hadn’t made the cut as a player? Or in fact if he hadn’t been able to be involved in the game in any way? “It doesn’t even bear thinking about,” he near-visibly shudders, “but I guess I would have followed my dad into the dockyards of East London. That was what everyone did then.”

And is there anything about the game that he really doesn’t like? Predictably, “losing”, is the knee-jerk reaction, but on further reflection he says: “Ninety nine percent of the

fans are amazing people, but sometimes the abuse you hear coming from the crowd is absolutely disgusting. It sickens me. But I think that is the same with any sport – despite the overwhelming majority of supporters being absolutely fantastic, you will always get one or two idiots – I just wish they weren’t there.”

It seems almost futile to ask what the best bits are, as I fear the list may never end, but to paraphrase, the things that Harry loves most about his job are “the game, the training and being around footballers. It’s never a dull life. I also loved going abroad and managing in Europe – I enjoyed every minute of that.”

In terms of regrets, he is characteristically pragmatic. “Things happen for a purpose,” he says. “There are always ups and downs, but I’ve been very lucky.”

Football will always be a part of Harry’s life, and alongside watching his beloved Boumemouth, he says he will spend his retirement watching his grandchildren. “They love their football already – Harry is seven, and he’s just started training at Boumemouth,

funnily enough being coached by Matty Holmes, who I coached when he was 15 years old.” There’s also Bobby, who at the age of five is just about to start “playing properly.” They do start them young in the Redknapp household...

When Harry talks about his family, his tone audibly changes – he is softer, quieter and calmer – it is clear that this is what matters to him most. But even more than football? “Even more. So much more. My wife Sandra means everything to me, and we’ve had the most wonderful marriage. Family is my all – what makes me happy, what gets me up in the morning, and what helps me sleep at night.”

The quintessential football manager has two great aims in life: “to see QPR promoted this year, and to live a long and happy life with my family.”

He may be a man of steel when he’s standing pitchside watching his team take on the world, but underneath Harry Redknapp is a family man, a kind, affable man – and, dare I say it, a bit of a softie. Sorry Harry...