



DUNNE IT THE HARD WAY

The Remarkable Story of a Millwall Legend

Alan Dunne with Chris Davies

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Told I was no longer wanted at Millwall over a beer

I considered playing in India

NEIL HARRIS handed me a beer though there was nothing to celebrate. ‘Dunney,’ he said. ‘It’s bad news.’

In fact, it could hardly have been worse. And it was to lead to the toughest two months of my career.

He continued, ‘The club have decided you need a change. It was a difficult decision to make, but next season Shaun Cummings will be the first-choice right-back, Sid Nelson will play centre-half.’

‘You might not be playing and I don’t think you’d want to be here if you are not getting games. You’re the sort of person who needs to play.’

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Relegation from the Championship at the end of 2014/15 guaranteed significant changes at Millwall, with finance dictating many decisions. Yet when Harris called me in his office I believe I had every reason to be hopeful it was to discuss a new deal rather than my departure from the only club I had played for.

I told Harris I wanted to stay, to help the team, especially the young lads, in League 1 because they would need someone with my experience. I had also never been one to go knocking on the manager's door each time I was dropped.

My attitude had always been to get my head down, not make waves and try to win back my place...which on many occasions I had to do.

Harris and I had been team-mates for a number of years and we became friends. He admitted telling me the news was 'tough...difficult...the hardest thing I'd had to do' but he felt I could still play in the Championship and would give any interested manager a glowing report about me.

In the end, I was happy to drop two divisions and sign for Leyton Orient of League 2.

I know it wasn't easy for Harris, who had been there for me over the years, giving me a lot of good advice. I have much respect for the Millwall legend and I would never have wanted a new contract as a favour – not that he would have done this.

If a new deal was going to be put on the table, it must only have been because the manager felt it was best for the club. Harris made the decision and if he believed I was surplus to requirements I respected that.

However, I was in shock. While no one from the side could take much credit from a season that ended in relegation, I had played in 42 matches – more than any other outfield player.

Told I was no longer wanted at Millwall over a beer

I felt I deserved at least the offer of another contract.

I realised I would have had to take a drop in salary though money has never been a huge motivating factor for me and there have been quite a few players at The Den who have earned two or three times what I did. I was still happy at Millwall who had been very good to me over the years.

My future seemed to have been decided in one day, though perhaps I'll never really know.

I think it was the wrong decision for the club to make, though I accepted it even if I believed I still had more to offer.

The day when I left Millwall was always going to come – I just didn't think it would be when and how it did. I didn't feel my time at The Den was up, I thought there would be another year.

John Berylson, the chairman, once said to me, 'I hope you retire in a Millwall shirt.' That was my dream, but how many people's dreams come true? Life isn't like that and you cannot write your own script.

My dad, Paul, said, 'You haven't left Millwall...you are just going for now, it's a temporary parting.'

It was not a divorce, only a separation.



MILLWALL'S relegation had been confirmed before the final game of 2014/15, a 4-2 away defeat to Wolves. As I walked off the pitch at Molineux I had no idea it was to be my last match for the club I had been with for 23 years.

I was boarding the coach when I saw Mark McGhee, Gordon Strachan's assistant with Scotland, and I shouted over to him. We had a brief chat about the game and shared a few

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memories. It was good to see McGhee who had given me my debut 13 years earlier so he had witnessed my first and last matches for Millwall.

The next day was the end of season awards party where I spoke to a couple of board members who gave no indication I would not be with Millwall the following year.

My contract was ending in June and while there had been no talks about a new deal, the signs were positive, not least because on the Tuesday the players who had been told they were being kept on had to report for a fitness test, to assess things like weight and body fat which would be checked when pre-season training began.

I had been instructed to be there though Harris was not present because he was involved in a meeting with the board. That night I played in the first half of a charity match along with Harris.

At half-time Chopper said he wanted to see me in his office to give me what turned out to be the worst news of my career.



I RETURNED home almost in tears and told my daughter Lola who was a few days shy of her ninth birthday what had happened. She started crying and my wife, Aimee, had a go at me for telling Lola.

I felt I needed to share the news with my family and there is no easy way to pass on sad times.

Not the best day in the life of Alan Dunne.

The following day we all went on holiday to Dubai where, for the first two nights, I could not sleep. I kept going over and

Told I was no longer wanted at Millwall over a beer

over what had happened and why it had happened, but maybe you can over-think things at times.

John Berylson tried to contact me, but I wasn't ready to talk to anyone. As he was probably in Boston it would have cost me £2 a minute for a transatlantic call so I texted him and said, 'Chairman, I'll ring you when I get home,' which I did.

I thanked him for all he had done for me and he was very complimentary, hoping one day I'd return in a coaching capacity.

'The door is always open for you, Alan,' he said. 'You'll always be welcome back.'

My phone was almost on meltdown and not just because of the heat in Dubai.

It was humbling that directors, other players and friends in football texted me. Sid Nelson and Ben Thompson were just two of the younger lads who tweeted nice things about me which meant a lot.



'ALL GREAT changes are preceded by chaos.'

This was a message my wife, Aimee, texted me. At the time, I had no idea what the next step in my career would be, but I can look back on my time at Millwall with a million happy memories.

I achieved just about everything I could reasonably have expected, apart from playing in the Premier League which was always going to be very difficult. If the supporters see me as a Millwall legend, that fills me with pride. It was all I ever wanted to be as a kid and I know my mum, Elizabeth, looking down on me, would also be so proud.

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I played for the club I love for 23 years and for that I am thankful. I was part of an FA Cup Final squad, I was voted Player of the Year, I won the Goal of the Year award, I played at Wembley in an FA Cup semi-final and a play-off final. I experienced European football while I was also appointed captain. The club granted me a testimonial and I played 388 games for Millwall, scoring 23 goals.

I miss The Den – I remain a Millwall fan and my heart will always be with the Lions. I met some wonderful people during my time there and as much as anything it was disappointing not to be able to say a proper thank-you to the tremendous Millwall fans when I left.

That day will come. But when I look back on my 23 years with Millwall I am left with one big regret.