

A close-up portrait of Roy Massey, an older man with short, light-colored hair, smiling slightly. He is wearing a dark blue or black t-shirt with red stripes on the shoulder. The background is plain white.

**"I regarded the academy
as my family. Roy was
the one who drove things
forward and he had a
strong work ethic. He was
a bit like a father figure."**

Jack Wilshere

A Life in
Football
and a Coach
to the Stars

**ROY
MASSEY**

With Mark Metcalf

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Chapter 1

Finally signing for Arsenal

IN FEBRUARY 1998 I was appointed assistant academy manager at Arsenal. My role was to establish a recruitment and development programme for boys aged eight to 12.

I started work there on 1 March 1998; it was one of the most exciting days of my life. The drive down the road to Highbury, Arsenal's north London home for 85 years, was a great thrill. The white East Stand frontage lay ahead of me with 'Arsenal Stadium' set proudly in big red letters over the imposing main entrance which brought awestruck visitors to the famous Art Deco marble halls with its terrazzo floors.

The entrance was intended to impress and indeed would serve as a monument to the club's permanence in the top flight of the English game. Its status as a Grade II listed building meant it survived the demolition of the stadium itself, being incorporated into the design for the apartments built on the site. But I had no time to linger; I had an appointment with Liam Brady.

Dublin-born Liam, or 'Chippy' as he was best known, was an Arsenal and Juventus legend who had made more than 600 club and international appearances. This included close to 300 for the Gunners. He won the FA Cup with the club in 1979, when he was selected by his peers as the Professional Footballers' Association Players' Player of the Year.

Liam later captured successive Italian league titles with Juventus, a remarkable feat, but he came 'home' in July 1996 to take up the post of Arsenal's head of youth development and was also the academy director.

From 1991 I had been working for the Norwich City youth department. This was initially on a part-time basis. I also ran coaching sessions in Colchester and at a centre I established at Potters Bar in Hertfordshire.

At the time, professional clubs had schools of excellence to which they sought to attract players who were aged at least 13 years old. But junior football was changing. When I became full-time with Norwich in the 1994/95 season, I was asked to look for talent as young as eight. And at the start of 1997/98, Liam, aware of the radical changes imminent under Howard Wilkinson, asked Arsenal's scouts to follow suit. These talent spotters began watching district school football in north London but when they approached the better players they found that I had already got there first and signed many of them.

Liam soon got in touch to ask me if Norwich's under-nines, under-tens and under-11s would play against their Arsenal counterparts at Potters Bar. The Norwich boys had been training and playing with us for some time. Unsurprisingly, they won these games fairly comfortably. A few weeks later, we received a letter from Liam stating that he would be approaching six of the Norwich boys he had watched to offer them trials with Arsenal.

Norwich later played Arsenal in an under-14 match, putting Ross Flitney – a trialist goalkeeper from Potters Bar – in their goal. Ross had a very good game and the following day I rang his father saying I was pleased to offer his son schoolboy forms on the strength of his performance against Arsenal.

There was an embarrassed silence at the end of the telephone. Eventually, Mr Flitney said that an Arsenal scout had been to his house that morning and Ross had signed for the club. It was

apparent that the hunt for young talent was suddenly becoming even more of a cut-throat business.

Clearly impressed by the work I had been undertaking on behalf of Norwich, Liam approached me at the start of 1998 to ask if I would consider becoming the assistant manager at the developing Arsenal academy.

Brady's assistant head of youth development was David Court, who had signed for Arsenal as an amateur in 1959 before turning professional and making close to 200 first-team appearances. Both men greeted me fondly, as did Sue Shipp, the academy secretary appointed just a few weeks before me. I did not know then that I was embarking on a 16-year adventure with one of the greatest football clubs in the world.

Arsenal had actually come calling for me before, 34 years earlier, when I was just 20 and had, with great reluctance, only recently turned down opportunities to sign as a professional for several clubs.

In 1962 I had started studying for a Physical Education certificate at St Paul's College, Cheltenham, now part of the University of Gloucester. I knew that attaining that qualification could guarantee me job security for life and after doing so I hoped to play professional football until becoming a teacher in later life. But in my first term at college, I was accepted for trials with Arsenal.

These were to take place over Christmas 1962 but a bleak, icy winter saw them cancelled for months. I did not make my debut until 23 February 1963. This was in the Metropolitan League as an amateur for the Gunners' A team at Guildford City's ground. We won 3-0 and I scored twice. I later played four more league matches and in the semi-final of the League Cup and scored five goals. I also made my reserve-team debut in a 4-1 victory against Leicester City. I scored once and did the same in another reserve match when Peterborough were beaten 2-1. This gave me a record of nine goals in eight matches.

My team-mates included Peter Simpson, Peter Storey, John Sammels, David Court and George Armstrong, all of whom later became regular Arsenal first-team players.

Former Arsenal and England full-back George Male, the Gunners' youth development officer, then contacted me to discuss my availability for games. I could only play for Arsenal when the college did not have a game as it was a course requirement that I prioritised college fixtures over playing, at any level, for anyone else. I did not envisage that more than 30 years later I would be doing George Male's job.

Arsenal won the Metropolitan League in 1962/63, collecting 54 points from 32 games, scoring 107 goals and conceding 29. Oxford United's reserves came second and West Ham A finished fifth.

The Arsenal A team was created in 1929 to give opportunities to younger players. In 1931/32 they won the London Professional Mid-Week League. With football suspended during the Second World War it was not until the 1948/49 season that the A team was resurrected.

In 1958 they joined the Metropolitan League. The venture was initially successful – with title wins in 1958/59, 1960/61 and 1962/63 – but Arsenal later left after the 1968/69 season, mainly because strong amateur teams were proving tough opposition for the youngsters. Arsenal had finished that season in 13th place out of 16 teams.

In the lead-up to the start of 1963/64, I accepted an invitation to train with the Arsenal reserve squad. I enjoyed sharing digs during this time with John Radford, who, like me, was a Yorkshireman. Clearly those in charge felt that with our broad Yorkshire accents we would have one person each we could understand!

On the first training day, John said he was going to take part in every practice session using his left foot only. John went on to have a fine career and gained legendary status at Arsenal. Despite being a young man in 1963, John did not need a coach to help

him improve a weakness in his game. He identified a problem and fixed it himself.

I enjoyed training with Arsenal and I especially recall a pre-season friendly against Cambridge United that was due to be played at Highbury. The heavy non-stop rain had left the pitch flooded and the game was moved to the training pitch at London Colney. I scored two headers in a 3-0 victory. That was now 11 goals in nine appearances for Arsenal.

I remember the following day a small article in a local paper which stated that the first-team's centre-forward Joe Baker, who was Billy Wright's first signing in July 1962 from Hibernian, should look over his shoulder as college boy Roy Massey appeared to be a big prospect. In September 1963 I scored five goals in two Metropolitan League matches against West Ham and Kettering Town.

The Arsenal reserve team was first set up when the club played South of the Thames in Plumstead and was known as Royal Arsenal. After the First World War, Arsenal reserves played in the London Football Combination, and in 1999 they joined the newly formed Premier Reserve League. The reserves later became an under-21 team with three over-age outfield players and one goalkeeper permitted in matchday squads.

There were generally a couple of thousand spectators at the reserve games in the early 1960s. I was always delighted to pull on the iconic Arsenal kit with its red shirts and contrasting white sleeves. The design, introduced by Herbert Chapman in 1933, made the team instantly and forever recognisable.

On 2 November 1963 I scored once in a 5-0 victory against Colchester United reserves. The Arsenal forward line was Skirton, Court, Massey, Sammels and Gould.

I was then unable to play any more games for Arsenal until the Christmas holidays when I scored once against Rainham Town for the A team in a 4-3 victory. On 28 December 1963 I played what

proved to be my final appearance in an Arsenal shirt and it proved a difficult afternoon as Tottenham reserves beat us 4-0. My overall record for Arsenal was 18 goals in 14 appearances.

Towards the end of the 1963/64 season, Arsenal manager Billy Wright, the legendary Wolves and England half-back, called me into his office to offer me a professional contract. At the time the club had the best overall record in the Football League with seven title wins, one more than Aston Villa and Sunderland. Arsenal had won the FA Cup three times.

This offer presented me with a very difficult decision. Do I sign as a professional footballer for Arsenal? Doing so would require terminating my college course; I had already completed two of the three years.

Clearly, such are the sums of money involved today in signing a professional contract with one of the biggest clubs in the land it would be a much more difficult decision to remain at college, as a young player can become rich very quickly.

In the end I decided to decline the offer as it would have meant not completing my PE certificate. In the long term this was to prove a wise decision.

But if I had played for Arsenal in the first team, I would have followed in the footsteps of another footballer from Mexborough, my hometown. Lionel Smith was born in 1920. During the Second World War he served as a sapper and was badly injured. He made his league debut at left-back in May 1948, aged by then 28. He was still good enough to go on to make 162 league appearances plus 18 in the FA Cup including the final in 1952 which Arsenal lost 2-0 against Newcastle United. Lionel, who was a brilliant passer, good in the air, quick in recovery and swift to clear his lines, was a league champion in 1953 and he was capped six times for England. He later played for Watford.

I had returned to Arsenal just as they were about to complete one of the greatest seasons in their proud history. They beat

Newcastle at Wembley to lift the FA Cup for the seventh time and also won their 11th league title, their first in the new Premier League era. Only Liverpool had won the title on more occasions. For the second time Arsenal completed the Double of winning the league and FA Cup in the same season, a feat they first achieved in 1970/71.

The decision by the Arsenal board to appoint their first overseas manager in Frenchman Arsène Wenger in 1996 had paid dividends. Vice-chairman David Dein had wanted Arsène to become manager in 1995 but he was overruled by other board members who preferred Bruce Rioch, the Bolton Wanderers boss and a former Scottish international. Rioch lasted one season at Highbury with Arsenal finishing fifth in the Premier League.

Dein finally got his man when the board backed his judgement. Dein and Wenger were to forge a magnificent partnership and the manager built a success level that seems unlikely to be replicated anytime soon. Silverware was to become the norm and it was won thanks to a brand of exciting, fast, stylish, attractive football.

Nevertheless, appointing Wenger in 1996 was a bold move by Arsenal. Dutch legend Johan Cruyff, three times a European Cup winner with Ajax in the 1970s, was the favourite to take over but was overlooked in favour of Wenger who on his appointment said, 'I love English football, the roots of the game are here. I like the spirit round the game and at Arsenal I like the spirit of the club and its potential.' Many pundits had not heard of Wenger – 'Arsène who?' – and queried whether he could bring success to the north London club.

Wenger's playing career had not been a major one but he had played professionally, appearing twice for RC Strasbourg in France when they won Ligue 1 in 1978/79. As a manager he inspired Monaco to the title in 1987/88 and the Coupe de France in 1990/91

before enjoying cup success with Japanese side Nagoya Grampus Eight in 1995 and 1996. Wenger was a deep thinker and had strong ideas about team building.

The Arsenal side Wenger selected to face Newcastle in the 1998 FA Cup Final was Seaman, Dixon, Winterburn, Vieira, Keown, Adams (captain), Parlour, Anelka, Petit, Wreh and Overmars. The substitutes were Platt, Manninger, Bould, Wright and Grimandi. Ray Parlour and Tony Adams were the only two of the 16 to have come up through the Arsenal ranks. By setting up the academy the aim was to bring through more homegrown talent, which now would be drawn from across the world.

In my 16 years with the academy, Arsène was the only first-team manager I worked with. He was in charge until 2018, bringing great success with four Premier League championships and seven FA Cup victories plus losing appearances in the Champions League and UEFA Cup finals of 2006 and 2000 respectively.

Before Wenger arrived, Arsenal had a reputation for boring football; many games were low-scoring and while 1-0 wins were pleasing for the fans it was not particularly entertaining.

What those results did show was that the defending was first class. The names of Lee Dixon, Tony Adams, Martin Keown, Steve Bould, Nigel Winterburn and the goalkeeper, David Seaman, remain legendary at the club.

Wenger built his first successful side on this defence. He combined this with his extensive knowledge of top players in France such as Patrick Vieira, Emmanuel Petit, Robert Pires and Thierry Henry to turn Arsenal into a great side. Arsène was also fortunate to have Dennis Bergkamp and Ray Parlour at the club when he arrived. Over the following years he also led the way for Premier League clubs to search for world-class talent in Europe and South America. Such an approach often included spending heavily in order to attract players such as Vieira – who had been with AC Milan in Italy – from other top clubs.

Wenger never interfered with the running of the youth department, leaving it in the capable hands of Liam Brady. Don Howe was the under-18 team coach. Only once during my 16 years with the club did Wenger visit the academy, when we opened a sports centre at the newly built premises in Walthamstow. Clearly he believed that Liam had the experience and knowledge to take care of youth development.

As a young assistant first-team coach, Wenger had a year at Ligue 2 side AS Cannes, where he also set up the training academy, recruited young players from the age of five upwards, carried out trials and rethought the training sessions. Youngsters trained between 8.30am and 10am and then from 2pm to 4pm.

On my first visit to the training ground at London Colney, I was introduced to Wenger by his assistant Pat Rice who explained to him that I had been appointed to recruit and develop young players. The new boss laughed that he and Pat would be watching from the stands with their walking sticks by the time some of these players were ready for the first team.

It was not just an age factor. Wenger already had a great team and he had the resources – only, of course, if spent wisely – to compete in the transfer market against other top clubs for the best players. Wenger's success in leading Arsenal to their greatest-ever period over the next decade undoubtedly meant it would be difficult to produce players from the academy good enough to become first-team regulars. How do you develop youngsters to fill the boots of the likes of Henry, Seaman, Vieira, Adams and Petit?

What Wenger was prepared to do was give opportunities for any youngster who impressed him when doing well in training with the first team. While some had their careers cut short by injuries, many others did not quite show the consistency of performance required to play at the top level of the Premier League and in the Champions League.

Arsène was always willing to help out if we wanted to sign a young player for the academy. On occasions I would take boys and their parents to the training ground to meet some of the first-team players.

Don Howe had a wonderful playing career as a full-back with West Bromwich Albion and England. He established himself as a coach with England and he was the first-team manager at West Brom, Galatasaray in Turkey, Arsenal, Queens Park Rangers and Coventry City. He was a lovely man as he always had time for people and he gained success through his knowledge of the game and encouragement rather than criticism.

When I joined the Arsenal academy, George Armstrong was the reserve-team coach. When I was training and playing for the A team and reserves at the club in the early 1960s, George, a direct winger who made 621 appearances for Arsenal, was establishing himself in the first team at the age of 19. George was an ever-present in the Double-winning 1970/71 side. His testimonial against Barcelona at Highbury in March 1974 attracted 36,000 fans.

George would visit the academy; he took a great interest in the young footballers. George was very popular among the young reserve players and everyone at the club was devastated when he suddenly collapsed during training after suffering a brain haemorrhage in October 2000. He died in the early hours of the following day. George was a wonderful footballer and an outstanding human being. A pitch at the London Colney training ground is named after him.

Developing the right facilities

For the first two years of academy football, from 1998 to 2000, the under-nine to under-12 squads played their home matches at weekends at the historic Brentwood School in Essex, which dates back to the 16th century. I later discovered that it was the site of

the execution in 1555 of Catholic martyr William Hunter. Nothing quite so sinister took place when I was there!

Every Monday we trained on the floodlit Astroturf pitch. The development of floodlights in the 1950s and Astroturf a decade later proved to be a great combination for football coaching. Astroturf was first used in 1966 at the Houston Astrodome. Not only could it help overcome the cost of laying and maintaining natural grass, it could also be used in bad weather. The facilities – as we'll get to later on – were not the best, however.

Liam Brady and club director Richard Carr were soon searching for somewhere to buy so that the academy could have its own facility. A suitable venue was found in west London but it was felt that it was too far from the Arsenal catchment area that took in the East End and Essex from which many notable players had emerged over the years, including West Ham United's Bobby Moore, Geoff Hurst, Martin Peters and Trevor Brooking.

As the academies developed, West Ham had a tremendous array of talent with most of their young players coming from Essex and east London, although they did venture into north London, notably to take Joe Cole from Somers Town, Camden, from under the noses of the staff at Arsenal. However, Arsenal had their own talent from Essex in the Romford-born duo Tony Adams and Ray Parlour, who between them made more than 1,000 first-team appearances for the club.

Driving through Walthamstow, Liam and Richard noticed a 'for sale' sign on a site in Hale End containing playing fields, a pavilion, changing rooms and tennis courts. It belonged to the Royal London Hospital, the facility having long been used by hospital staff. It was just in the right place being next to the Crooked Billet roundabout, where the A406 and A172 met. It would be easily accessible for parents driving their boys to training and it was also a short bus journey from the Blackhorse Road tube station. Highams Park tube was also nearby.

Arsenal had no hesitation in buying the ground, which formally became the Arsenal Football Club Youth Academy, more commonly known as Hale End. Money was spent on the dressing rooms and the pitches. Groundsmen were instructed to mark out three pitches for 11 v 11 matches and a similar number for eight-a-side games.

The tennis courts, which had been kept in pristine condition under the tender care of the two groundsmen – Phil Howard, a Spurs fan, and John Stewart – had to go. They were replaced by a floodlight Astroturf pitch. This dismayed John and Phil, the latter having worked on these courts for 30 years, but they soon came to terms with the fact that Hale End was being used to develop footballers instead of future tennis players. Their relief was reinforced when Liam told them their jobs were safe. Phil even swapped sides to become a Gunner and loved going to watch games at Highbury and later the Emirates Stadium.

Like all of us, he was especially thrilled to watch young players who had come through Hale End make their first-team debuts. Phil and John, whose wife Moira did the cleaning and made the numerous refreshments at Hale End for the players and coaching staff, spent well over a decade working for Arsenal. Both men retired, like myself, in 2014.

In the 2000/01 pre-season we started preparing the training ground and within two years a first sports hall was built on one of the pitches. I had my own office and it was with some pride that I went to work each day and heard the opinion that with up-to-date facilities we could not fail to develop players who might one day play for Arsenal in the Premier League. Our facilities were the envy of the other London clubs, all of whom were a long way from matching our progress.

Chelsea was sharing pitches with Fulham and Wimbledon, and it was not until 2004 that the Stamford Bridge club started construction of their own training centre at Cobham where the facilities are now excellent.

Tottenham had sold their academy training ground and were renting pitches from a local club. This unsatisfactory state of affairs only changed when their new training ground at Hotspur Way, Enfield was finished in 2012.

The Chelsea and Spurs youth academy systems have developed several youngsters who have played for the first teams and internationally, and competition between the top London clubs to find youngsters who might make the grade is now understandably fierce. Any promising player fortunate enough to have several top clubs chasing him might be swayed to opt for the club with the best facilities.

I retired in September 2014 along with Liam Brady, who was replaced with Andries Jonker – who had been assistant to Louis van Gaal at the 2014 World Cup held in Brazil where they took the Netherlands to third place.

In his first year in charge of the academy, Andries persuaded the directors to invest in a complete overhaul of the facilities. The process took two years to complete. There is not an inch of the old academy that I now recognise. This includes a rightly much-improved security system which means that all cars are checked before entering the site and visitors have to complete a registration form. In the early years at Hale End, it had proved possible for two thieves to get on to the site and enter the changing rooms before taking Gordon Lawrence's car keys and then stealing his car.

The radical transformation is for the better, and Arsenal can compete in terms of facilities with Chelsea and Tottenham to sign the best young players in the London area.

There are far more people employed today at the academy than when I started. Back then, Steve Leonard and I, plus the three groundsmen, were the only full-time staff but we did have very enthusiastic, reliable part-time people helping us out.

Tunde Adeshokan, Gordon Lawrence, Rob Dipple and Ossie Aibangee were the first coaches I appointed to work with the

under-nine to under-12 age groups. I came across Rob when I went to watch his under-ten team play. He was a young man in his early 20s. I could see that he was passionate and had loads of enthusiasm for the game. I noted one of his players who was head and shoulders above the rest.

Ossie subsequently went on to work for Tottenham before becoming manager of Brentford's academy where he recruited good staff and, together, they built up the standard of the players the Bees were attracting.

Tunde has given great service to Arsenal as a coach since he started with the Gunners in 1999 and subsequently as a scout, a role he was still undertaking on a part-time basis at the time of writing.

It was my job as assistant academy manager to ensure that coaches treated all the players the same. They might have a liking for some of their players, often because they are the best in the squad, or even a dislike because of their attitude, but it was extremely important that this like or dislike was never felt by any of the boys.

The four coaches and others who followed them attended training two nights each week and gave up their Sundays for the games programme. Gordon travelled in from Great Bentley, an Essex village 67 miles away from the academy. The coaches very rarely missed a session. Money was not their motivation; it was just a real desire to help the boys reach their full potential.

Arsenal and Highbury

The club was formed by David Danskin, who became Arsenal's first captain, and his friends in 1886. They all worked at the local ammunition factory, hence the club nickname of Gunners, at Royal Arsenal in Woolwich.

Highbury was originally built in 1913 when Woolwich Arsenal moved from south-east London to north London. The new ground was an opportunity for the club to attract more fans. The stadium

was rebuilt in the 1930s when the famous Art Deco East and West Stands, designed by architect Claude Waterlow Ferrier, were erected. The immaculately kept pitch, on which over the years some of the best players in world football had performed, ran from north to south. Ferrier died in 1935 but his design for the West Stand was used to construct the East Stand under the supervision of partners in his company.

Highbury's record gate of 73,295 was for a First Division battle against title rivals Sunderland on 9 March 1935. Arsenal ended the campaign by winning the league for a third consecutive season. The famous team, which thus equalled Huddersfield Town's record of three consecutive championships in the 1920s, had been built by former Huddersfield manager Herbert Chapman, who died in 1934 aged just 55.

When I played at Highbury in the 1960s it had three covered stands. The open terracing to the left of the East Stand tunnel that led to the pitch had a huge 45-minute clock at the top of it – it became known as the Clock End. To the right of the East Stand was the terraced North Bank, which in 1936 saw a roof erected. This was subsequently replaced in 1954 after it was destroyed by the Luftwaffe during the London Blitz.