

## *Introduction*

**Stamford Bridge, 29 April 2006.** Chelsea got an early goal. William Gallas headed in from a corner, which of course should never have happened after all the work we do in training defending set-pieces. Five minutes in and we were already chasing the game.

All the same, in the first half, we didn't do too badly. I had a chance when I broke away down the middle, got into the penalty area, managed to hold off two defenders, with only the goalie to beat – but I shot wide. Some commentators later said the grass was too long that day. I'm not blaming the grass. The ball just got stuck under my foot and I didn't manage a clear shot.

In the second half, we went two-down when Joe Cole scored. Then I got booked for a rash tackle and the crowd started shouting, '*Rooney, Rooney, what's the score?*' In the 72nd minute, they scored a third. I felt sick. It was horrible. I could sense some of our team wanting it to be all over, just waiting for the whistle to

*Wayne Rooney: My Story So Far*

blow, though I don't think our heads went down. Mine certainly didn't. It never does. However late in the game, however desperate, I always think I'll score.

In the 78th minute, I got another chance. This time to the left, heading towards the Chelsea penalty area. As I was breaking away, their full-back, Paulo Ferreira, caught me. It was a fair tackle, nothing nasty, but he managed to nick the ball off me. More of a tangle rather than a tackle, really. I went down. And I stayed down.

Somehow, his knee had banged into the back of my right calf. The impact made my lower leg buckle under the pressure. Immediately, I felt something pop. In my right foot. But I didn't know where or what.

All I knew was that the pain was agonising.

I couldn't move and was almost in tears, holding my head with the pain. Play stopped, as everyone began to realise I'd suffered some sort of serious injury. The physios and the stretcher-bearers ran on. The crowd was hushed.

As I was carried off the pitch, I could hear the Chelsea fans, who had been jeering me when I'd been yellow-carded, slowly clapping me off. I remember thinking, 'They don't need to do that – but nice of them, all the same.'

In the dressing room, the United doctor, Doc Stone, checked me out, trying to work out what I'd done. I was confused because it felt different from the last time I'd damaged my foot, in Euro 2004. On that occasion, I

## *Introduction*

hadn't heard any pop, and didn't feel pain until I put my boot back on.

The doc's first thought was that I'd just overstretched the nerves. There'd been no serious tackle, I'd not been clattered. But I thought no, it's more than that. Something has gone. I heard it.

The doc said if it was overstretched nerves, I'd be out for two weeks. I thought, oh no, I'll miss our last two games of the season.

Then I thought, if something has really gone wrong, if it's a broken metatarsal, like that last time, I could miss the World Cup.

In the dressing room, it was very quiet. Not really because of me but because of our performance, being stuffed by Chelsea. No one was talking. The Boss didn't lay into us. He didn't have to. We all knew we'd played rubbish.

It was decided I would go back to Manchester with the team rather than to a London hospital for an X-ray.

There was dead silence on the train. We were all so gutted. I didn't have the energy to play cards. I didn't even play my music.

Last time, it had been fourteen weeks before I'd played again. I was working it out in my head. The Chelsea game was Saturday, 29 April. England's first World Game game against Paraguay was Saturday 10 June. That meant it was exactly six weeks ahead.

If my injury was anywhere near as serious as I felt it was, I had no chance.

*Wayne Rooney: My Story So Far*

I'd left my car at Old Trafford. The players always do that, before any match, home or away. I couldn't drive it of course. My foot was all strapped up with ice packs and stuff, but the pain had subsided, as I'd been given painkillers.

Fortunately, that day Wes Brown had come in with me to Old Trafford. He lives quite near me, so I'd given him a lift in my car. He said he would take it home for me.

From Manchester Piccadilly I went with the club doctor straight to the BUPA hospital in Whalley Range, where I had an X-ray. It showed nothing. But that didn't reassure me. I knew what I'd heard and felt. They then did a scan, a CT scan, I think it's called. That went on for a long time, some 45 minutes, with them asking me to hold on, while they did more. I realised by then that they had seen something.

Finally I was told the horrific news – I had fractured the fourth metatarsal in my right foot – and also chipped the third metatarsal. There was more damage than even I'd imagined.

I had by then begun to think that perhaps I had imagined the pop. Or just hoped I had. Now I was devastated. It was the worst single moment in my life so far.

Things were repeating themselves. Euro 2004, my first big tournament, had ended for me when I'd suffered the same injury. And in a clash with a Portuguese player.

It was by now ten o'clock at night. I had rang Coleen

## *Introduction*

earlier, but I knew she would be waiting for my call. I only said a few words on the phone. I'd see her soon, she had been at a birthday party with her mates earlier in the day and was waiting at her mum's in Liverpool. I wasn't sure who was going to take me home from the hospital, or whether I wanted to go home.

All these last ten years, all that hard work, all the dreams, playing football in the street and imagining I was Michael Owen. All that effort and sacrifice. It wasn't luck, getting to this stage. I deserved it. Now it looked as if my World Cup would be over before it had even begun . . .

## TWO

### *Early Ball Skills*

I was born a Blue. It was hard to avoid it, really, my family on both sides being die-hard Everton fans. But my dad wasn't simply a fan, following from afar – he went to every home match he possibly could.

I attended my first Everton match when I was only six months old and still in nappies. I don't know how my dad managed it as he didn't use a push-chair or a baby sling, which I think he would have refused to be seen with anyway. He had to carry me all the way, which involved two buses to get to the ground, and then hold me during the match while standing at the Gladys Street End. I was well-behaved, apparently, so from then on dad took me regularly. Even when I got a bit older, and was toddling about, I never moaned, cried or got bored during the game. I only played up, he says, on the way home after the game was over.

It was also at the age of six months that I first showed my ball skills, at least that's what my parents tell me.

## *Early Ball Skills*

When a ball was put into my arms I was able to hold on to it. At the same age, I could pick out colours. I'd be sat in my relaxer chair in front of the TV watching snooker and my eyes would light up when the players hit the different balls. Blue, of course, was the colour to which I reacted most.

At two, I was playing soccer and could volley the ball, so dad says, right to the end of the street where we lived. It couldn't have been a very long street.

I also used to volley the ball over my nan's fence, which was about six feet high, but would then have to scramble over it to get it back. Usually I couldn't climb back, though, and would just stand on the other side crying.

In all the photos of when I am little, I seem to be wearing an Everton strip of some sort. What a surprise. There's a snap of me, aged six months, looking very fat-faced and chubby with a large blue rosette which reads, 'Everton to win TODAY'. This was a free rosette, given out with *The Today* newspaper on the day of the 1986 FA Cup final at Wembley against Liverpool. Everton were beaten 3–1, a result we still don't talk about in our house.

On my first birthday, I wore the full Everton kit. For my present my dad gave me an Everton sign, in the style of a yellow car number plate. Someone in his local pub made them so he bought one, for himself really, but he gave it to me anyway. I kept it in my bedroom throughout

*Wayne Rooney: My Story So Far*

my childhood, and took it with me when we moved to Stonebridge Lane in 1998, a bigger council house with four bedrooms and a parlour. Today, the sign takes pride of place in the glass front door at my dad's house. He kept hold of it when I moved out, which shows he always had his eye on it.

I always had a party for my birthday, as did my two brothers. Mum did us proud, providing a sit-down tea, table cloth, place names, ice cream and jelly, jaffa cakes, and games. There were always lots of kids invited, most of them our cousins.

My bedroom was decorated with Everton memorabilia, from the bedside lamp shade to the wallpaper. Posters showed off all my heroes, particularly my favourite player, Duncan Ferguson. He was a hard man and I liked the way he always gave his best.

I can't remember much about those early Everton games I attended with my dad, but as I got older, I used to hang around the stadium after the matches and try to get autographs.

When Duncan went to prison, after he was involved in a fight, I wrote to him twice. I think I must have been aged about nine. I told him he shouldn't be in jail, and that me and my mates were desperate for him to come back and play for Everton. He actually wrote back, thanking me for my letter, and I was made up. He had no idea who I was, of course, and I presumed he replied to all the fans who wrote to him.

## *Early Ball Skills*

At primary school, after my first two weeks when I talked only to the girls, I played football in the playground all the time. At home, too, I used to get up early and be out in the street from seven o'clock, playing with my cousins before going to school. After school, I'd nip over our garden fence and play on the five-a-side pitch at the Gems. I'd often play on my own, shooting in, even when it got dark. They had floodlights, but not, of course, for a kid shooting in on his own.

It's interesting that the older players nowadays often bemoan the fact that street football has died out, due to the amount of traffic and the worries about child security, but I endlessly played in the street with my mates without a problem. And only five years ago at that.

My Uncle Eugene, who often spoiled me, bought me my first leather ball. From then on he had to buy me another one every week, as I wore them out so quickly by playing in the street or on the tarmac five-a-side pitch. And it was Uncle Eugene who took me abroad for the first time, to Disneyland Paris, with his family when I was about eight.

The first proper team I played for was a kids' side, run by the Western pub where my dad used to drink, and which played in an Under-12s league. Most of the pubs on our estate had boys' teams. I first turned out for them when I was seven and scored the winning goal. I also played for several other teams, such as Pye. But I only once played for my primary school team,

*Wayne Rooney: My Story So Far*

St Swithin's, because during my time there they didn't have a proper team.

Copplehouse, another pub team, was my main club which I joined when I was eight and which played in an Under-9s league.

As a kid, I admit I never thought about becoming a professional footballer, even for Everton. I dreamed about scoring goals, and about the Blues winning games, like most other kids – although I'm sure they don't all dream about Everton. It honestly never entered my head that I could possibly be a real player.

However, one day, when I was aged nine playing for Copplehouse, it turned out that scouts from both Liverpool and Everton were watching the game. After the match, the Liverpool scout approached my dad and asked me if I'd like to have a trial.

So two days later, after school, I went along to Melwood, Liverpool's training ground. I don't recall who took me – but I know I was wearing my Everton kit.

Unfortunately, I didn't hit it off with the Liverpool coaches who were a bit funny towards me. I don't know why, but perhaps it had something to do with wearing the Everton colours. I didn't wear the shirt as a defiant gesture, I just always wore it. After school, I lived in my Everton shirt.

There were about 30 kids at the hour-long trial, all aged around nine. We practised our skills and technique, then we had some five-a-side games. I must have

## *Early Ball Skills*

impressed some of them because, afterwards, I was asked to attend another trial the following week. Naturally, I said yes.

In the meantime, my dad received a phone call from Bob Pendleton, the Everton scout who had seen me play for Coppleshouse. Everton also wanted me to attend a trial – but it was scheduled for the same evening as my second Liverpool trial. Despite that, I went to Bellefield, Everton’s training ground, rather than Liverpool’s. That was that. Once Everton had appeared interested there was no choice to be had.

Dad came with me on the bus, secretly hoping to meet Joe Royle, the then Everton manager. It was a similar sort of trial, with about 30 kids taking part in skills exercises, but this time I loved everything about it: the people, the coaches and the atmosphere. There were, of course, loads of other kids, like me, who had turned up in their Everton shirts.

To be fair, Liverpool had probably been just as good to me and I felt my trial with them had gone well. But, being all emotional about Everton, I decided they were so much better and I felt more at home with them.

Straight after that first Everton trial, the club spoke to my dad, and asked him there and then if I would sign schoolboy forms. Of course, we said yes.

Had Liverpool asked me to sign first and not have another trial, then I’m sure I would have signed for them and been a ‘Red’. I think their system was to ask you

*Wayne Rooney: My Story So Far*

along to several trials before deciding whether or not to make an offer. Or perhaps they simply weren't sure about me. Anyway, that was that. Aged nine, I was about to join Everton.

I rushed home from Bellefield to tell my mum. She wasn't in as she'd gone to church, the Queen of Martyrs, to take part in a rehearsal for Graeme's communion. She happened to be sitting next to Franny Jeffers's mother as I ran in, and when I told her my news she burst into tears.

Franny, like me, attended De La Salle secondary school, lived locally, and went on to play for Everton – as had, earlier on, Mick Lyons and Paul Jewell, now manager of Wigan. But, being four years older than me, I never actually came across Franny at school as he left just as I arrived.

I went and told all my mates who were well chuffed for me. To celebrate, we had a kick-around in the street as usual.

I received the official letter from Everton a few days later, in April 1995, and which my mum still has. The club offered me a place for the 1995/96 season at their Centre of Excellence as it was called in those days; later, while I was still there, it became the Everton Football Academy.

The letter said how pleased they were with me, that I would form part of 'our special group of Centre of Excellence players' and that I had to 'set and main-

## Early Ball Skills

**Everton**  
FOOTBALL CLUB COMPANY LIMITED

RH/JMF

April 1995

Wayne Rooney  
28 Armill Road  
Croxteth  
Liverpool  
L11 4TR

Dear Wayne,

Everton Football Club: Centre of Excellence

On behalf of Everton Football Club I am very pleased to be able to offer you a place at our Centre of Excellence for Season 1995/6.

The coaching staff have been very happy with your progress since joining us. As a consequence you will now form an important part of our special group of Centre of Excellence players and to this end you will need to set and maintain excellent examples to your fellow pupils at school and clubs. If you or your parents would at any time like to discuss your progress please contact me whenever it is convenient on 0151 228 3174.

May I request your assistance in completing the attached form and forward it by return of post in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope.

Yours sincerely,



RAY HALL  
Youth Development Officer

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**EVERTON**



**NEC**

*The letter from Everton offering me a place at their Academy.*

*Wayne Rooney: My Story So Far*

tain excellent examples to fellow pupils at school and clubs.’

All that summer I remember being so excited, hardly able to wait for the new season to begin. I suppose it was only then, knowing I had joined Everton as a school boy, that I began to think I might actually become a professional footballer. Grown-ups started telling me that if I worked hard and practised I could make it. Someone has to, so why not me? I suppose hundreds, if not thousands, of kids think that every year.

I started with Everton, at nine, with 15 other boys of my age and we were classed as the Under-10s. As with all Academies, which most professional clubs now have, players of the same year stick together for training sessions and don’t mix with the other years, far less the professional players. Hopefully, you then progress through the years. It’s like school in that sense, with tests and assessments at the end of each year; except that, unlike school, you get kicked out for good if you don’t do well enough.

I attended training three times a week after school, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, from 5 to 6.30pm. Sunday mornings saw us play against an Academy side of our age group from another club in the North West. If we were playing away, we got picked up by a coach at Bellefield.

Each session, my dad or mum took me to Bellefield. In the early years, when we didn’t have a car, we went

## *Early Ball Skills*

on the bus or walked as it wasn't too far away. They would then wait to bring me back. Parents have to be as keen as their kids, making sure they turn up on time, and with the right kit. Some, of course, are even keener than their kids, shouting and screaming on the touchline. I owe a lot to my parents, as well as to Everton, for all their years of support, trailing back and forth with me.

After football training, I also went boxing. At roughly the same time as I started with Everton I joined a boys' boxing club, run by my Uncle Ritchie, dad's brother, at Croxteth Sports Centre. We just did sparring and training. I enjoyed it and although I never actually fought in any matches, I was good at attacking people and had a strong punch.

I loved the football training. We learned a lot of technical skills, like kicking the ball with the outside of the foot. I'm naturally right-footed, and the coaches worked on my left, so I would be able to use that just as well.

I was about average size and weight, but some of the kids in the Everton Under-10s were much bigger than me. There were also one or two whom I thought were better than me, such as Joseph Jones, a calm midfielder and a very good passer of the ball.

However, seeing one or two kids who were better made me try even harder. I wanted to show off what skills I had and so became very ball-greedy. I went for

*Wayne Rooney: My Story So Far*

goal whenever I could and wouldn't pass. The coaches would shout at me, 'Lay it off!' while my dad shouted 'Take him on!' Instead, I would do neither: I'd let rip a shot from the edge of the area and try to score from 30 yards. Which I often did. It was all part of trying to impress, to show them how good I was.

At the end of that first year at Everton, each of us received a written assessment; I was adjudged 'Very Good' for control, passing, stamina, strength, speed and positional sense.


Under the heading of Attitude the report said, 'Does listen, but he dreams about goals, and everything is geared to the back of the net. Great will to win and Wayne has made efforts to work on his build-up play.'

Under Progress and Overall Observations, it remarked, 'Works hard and listens to the coaches. Build-up play is coming on and his left side is developing well. Great motivation and the best natural goalscorer I've seen. Technically, he does things ahead of his years and has good fast feet. Hope he develops physically and does not get overplayed.'


The assessment was stamped by Ray Hall, the Youth Development officer, but hand-written by Andy Windsor, one of the coaches.

During that first season playing for Everton's Centre of Excellence Under-10 team and sometimes the Under-11s, dad kept a detailed record of all the games I took part in. I wasn't really aware at the time that he

## Early Ball Skills



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ASSESSMENT

Name Wayne Rooney Position C.F.

Age .....

Technical Ability

Control Excellent - Wayne has good feet

Passing V. Good - needs to work on left side

Stamina V. Good

Strength V. Good and developing

Speed V. Good

Tactical Ability


Positional Sense V. Good

Attitude Doesn't listen but he dreams about goals and everything is geared to the back of the net. Great ball to win and Wayne has made efforts to work on his build-up play.

Progress and overall observations Watch his head and listen to coaches. Build up play is coming on and his left side is developing well. Great motivation and the best natural goalscorer I've seen. Technically he does things ahead of his years and has good fast feet. Hope he develops physically and doesn't get overplayed.

RAY HALL  
Youth Development Officer

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*The assessment from the Everton Academy.*

*Wayne Rooney: My Story So Far*

was doing that. Now, looking at it, it's amazingly neat, though he can't spell 'Anglesy' [sic].

I played 30 games, against other Centres of Excellence in Lancashire, North Wales and Yorkshire and scored in each one. Against Preston, whom we beat 15–0, I grabbed nine goals, bagged eight in a 10–5 drubbing of Leeds, and six as we beat Manchester United 12–2. I played against Liverpool twice, and on each occasion for our Under-11s. They beat us once 6–2 and then we defeated them 4–3 and I scored twice in each game. All together that season, I netted a total of 114 goals.

The only match I remember now, of those 30, was against Manchester United, when we hammered them 12–2 and I scored with an overhead kick from the edge of the box. Around the pitch were all the parents, with Everton on one side and Manchester United on the other. When I scored, I heard both sets of parents start clapping. That's why I'll always remember that day.

After that first year I received another official letter from the club, in March 1996, saying they were keeping me on for another season. Interestingly, the wording was exactly the same as in the previous letter, all about being 'part of a special group' and having to 'maintain excellent examples to fellow pupils'. The standard wording if you got through, I guess.

When I began that second season, I was thrilled to find I'd been promoted. Instead of being with the

## Early Ball Skills

EVERTON U20 - SEASON 1995-96						
1	EVERTON	4	ST HELENS	1	WAYNE	115 3
2	EVERTON	4	BURY	0	WAYNE	4
3	EVERTON	7	CHESTER	1	WAYNE	6
4	EVERTON	4	BLACKPOOL	2	WAYNE	2
5	EVERTON	15	PRESTON	0	WAYNE	9
6	EVERTON	5	ELSMERE PORT	2	WAYNE	2
7	EVERTON	5	LEEDS	2	WAYNE	3
8	EVERTON	8	N. FOREST	0	WAYNE	3
9	EVERTON	6	BURY	2	WAYNE	2
10	EVERTON	12	MAN. UNITED	2	WAYNE	6
11	EVERTON	2	LIVERPOOL	6	WAYNE	115 2
12	EVERTON	4	LIVERPOOL	3	WAYNE	115 2
13	EVERTON	7	N FOREST	2	WAYNE	5
14	EVERTON	2	N FOREST	1	WAYNE	2
15	EVERTON	0	BURY	0	WAYNE	0
16	EVERTON	10	PRESTON	1	WAYNE	5
17	EVERTON	8	CROSBY BOYS	2	WAYNE	6
18	EVERTON	9	PRESTON	1	WAYNE	6
19	EVERTON	10	LEEDS	5	WAYNE	8
20	EVERTON	6	N. COUNTY	4	WAYNE	3
21	EVERTON	8	BLACKPOOL	1	WAYNE	3
22	EVERTON	10	PRESTON	2	WAYNE	6
23	EVERTON	13	N. FOREST	1	WAYNE	3
24	EVERTON	3	N. FOREST	0	WAYNE	1
25	EVERTON	5	TRANMERE	0	WAYNE	2
26	EVERTON	9	BURY	1	WAYNE	6
27	EVERTON	7	PETERBORO	0	WAYNE	3
28	EVERTON	13	ANGALSEA	0	WAYNE	8
29	EVERTON	9	ANGALSEA	0	WAYNE	4
30	EVERTON				WAYNE	TOTAL 114

*Dad's handwritten record of my goals for Everton boys 1995/96.*

*Wayne Rooney: My Story So Far*

Under-11s, as I'd expected, I had jumped two years and was put with the Under-12s. At the time, when that new season began in August 1996, I was still only 10 years old.

Every season, in each year group, there are five or six kids who get released. It's done quietly, one to one, with the youngster and his parents being taken aside from the rest of the group. It's only later that you realise that certain kids have gone when they are no longer turning up. Joseph Jones, for one, did make it through with me each year, until the very end.

The Everton Academy, like most others, has nine years, right up to Under-19, which usually means a total of 140 boys attend the Academy at any one time guided by 24 full-time staff. I'm told it works out at a cost of £10,000 a year for each boy – most of whom never make it.

Up to the age of 16, the Academy boys are not paid, of course, although their parents may get travelling expenses for long-distance games plus a few first-team tickets every season.

It's not just a matter of basic talent, or even keenness and dedication, that decides who will come through. Boys grow and develop at different times, in different ways.

The big problem comes when a youngster reaches 13 or 14. Other distractions come along: they want to go out with their mates or chase girls. They want to do

### *Early Ball Skills*

loads of other things with their spare time, play with computers or whatever, rather than trail across town in the dark on a cold winter's evening to train.

With me, though, once I got started I only ever lived for football.