



The Parish Centre, Cardinal Heenan Centre, 326 High Road, Ilford, IG1 1QP  
0208 5533116 / office@ech.org.uk / www.hidden-histories.org.uk

Archive Reference: 2016\_esch\_STOS\_18

### Interview Details

Name of interviewee: Anwar Uddin

Project: Stadium of Stories

Date of interview:

Language: English

Venue:

Name of interviewer: Joshua Adams

Length of interview: 88:12 // 1:28:12:9

Transcribed by: Margaret Drummond & Joshua Adams & Uzma Ravat

Archive Ref: 2016\_esch\_STOS\_18

*So my name's Joshua Adams and I'm recording for Eastside Community Heritage on the Stadium of Stories project. Do you maybe just want to introduce yourself for the sake of the tape?*

My name is Anwar Uddin. I er work for Kick It Out and the Football Supporters Federation

*And how do you spell your name?*

It's A- N-W- A- R U-D-D- I-N

*And what's your date of birth?*

XX XX 1981.

*Ok then, so whereabouts were you born?*

So I was born in Stepney Green.. er Whitechapel Hospital to be exact. Erm and I lived not too far from Whitechapel Hospital, a couple of roads down. It was classed as Stepney Green, so very much in the heart of, of East London.

*Yeah, so I thought the first thing we could talk about is probably your grandparent's erm do you want to talk a bit about them?*

So it's an interesting one. My er father came over here in the 1960s from Bangladesh so he came over here alone and unfortunately he lost a lot of his extended family when he was very young which is one of the reasons he decided to come to England. My mum on the other hand. Er her dad passed away early again er during the war but her er mum was basically integral into sort of my education and growing up. I spent a lot of time with my mum and my nan because my mum was dis... my nan was disabled and my mum wouldn't.. my mum was her carer so my dad and my family- I've got three sisters and two brothers living in Stepney Green, Ashfield Street, but my mum and er my nan- well my nan lived in erm Bethnal Green and er my mum spent a lot of time there obviously looking after her and my school was close to my nan's so I ended up sort of living with my nan

*Mmmm*

If you like for .. for for .. for the early part of my life but again erm... very much an East End woman er that had severe disabilities so erm it was more so growing up.. you know.. sort of caring for her really. It wasn't that kind of bond that most people have with their, with their grandparents like my kids have with their grandparents. They go out to playing football. It was very much erm an odd relationship if you like..[mmm] erm but yeah.. that was... that was my grandparents.

*So do you know why your grandparents came over from Bangladesh for?*

So my dad er after the war basically in Bangladesh times were hard and he found it very difficult with trying to ... you know... pursue a career that get him the life he wanted [Mmmm] and er in Bangladesh at that time they were asking for people to go over to England to help er redevelop the country after the war. It was something that he felt erm was a bit of an adventure but also he felt like er erm you know obviously a massive country like England.. you know with the glitz and the glamour and he only saw the prospect.. the perspective from the media and it just seemed like a bit of a ... like a like a Hollywood if you like.. and that to have the opportunity to come over and to work in a country, trying to sort of like erm kick start it after what was the war and you know took a lot of resources and erm energy from the country that.. that's why he decided to come and unfortunately for my father he lost the bulk of his family at a very, very young age so when the opportunity came to er come over to England er and it made it easy having the fact that you know the passport situation. It was.. it was fine.. they were encouraging people from Bangladesh to come over and this helped with the economy ..help with the.. with the working in different areas of society. Yeah it was.. it was the right thing for him to do. .Er it was scary because literally he came over with.. with nothing, hardly knew anyone here, so erm looking back now I think it's.. it's a major success that he's got a family and you know he's now living close to me, moved out from east London into ... [yeah] into Kent. [Metal noise] Well yeah, quite a scary thing for anyone, especially back then where we didn't have the technology and knowhow that we do now. So he came over with, with you know a bit of an unknown... er ended up er really sort of settling down in in East London in Brick Lane and er worked in a Wimpy bar.. er worked his way up, became a manager, met my mum, got married very young and erm it was a very strange thing because my dad came to East London which was predominantly very Cockney, white, er working class area. My dad came and he came with an influx of South Asians and there was a lot of animosity in the area, a lot of tension [Mmm] because obviously the racism, the National Front was.. was quite strong. Erm.. he often told me about incidents where he was working in the Wimpy and there was marches and because he was working there, the Wimpy would get smashed in and then what made it worse was that he met my mum who was an English girl from.. from East London, so the fact that you had a...a couple of mixed heritage walking round East London, it was just one problem after another and it's been interesting really because as I've grown up I've seen East London where I was born and brought up turn from a very white .. a very white working class area to now a predominantly Bangladeshi area in Tower Hamlets and I've actually lived through that.[Mmmm] .So it's been very, very interesting to do so .. erm and when my dad you know first.. first set foot in East London it was very, very, very different to what it is now.

*Mmmm. So did your parents ever move round east London or did they always stay in the same place?*

My dad went where the work was.. so he came to East London and stayed in Brick Lane. He went all around East London really so he.. he did a lot of factory work initially, literally wherever the work was he'd go and if he was lucky he'd be able to sort of sustain where the factories were. He worked in Plaistow. He worked in Stratford, he worked as far as erm... all that sort of are really and erm.. just moving around. ...

*Yeah*

You know until he was obviously financially.. Financially stable enough to get a.. a job where he could stay in one place at one time and start to sort of look to stabilise himself, got married to my mum and got a house in erm ... in East London.

*Mmmm. Do you know whereabouts he got married to your mum?*

So they got married...er I'm not quite sure where...they got married in a registry office, I think in Bow, I'm sure, I'm not quite sure where exactly I think they were telling me where they actually got married I don't think it exists anymore.. but erm I mean everything in my life is is very much.. was based in a .. in a three mile radius of East London.

*Mmmmm*

You know from erm Whitechapel all the way to Plaistow – that was where the bulk of my family were from both sides and that's where everything happened between my mum and my dad and erm when my dad did come over a few years later when it was kind of established that it was safe to do so and people that were coming over were having some success in terms of having a decent life, earning decent money, a lot more people came over. So my dad had people from his villages and surrounding areas come over and they settled in like Plaistow area, Upton Park, all around East London [noise] so that's kind of where all the family kind of really, really settled. [Mmm] But it was for me very much sort of East London, Whitechapel, Stepney Green, but you know having some family in Plaistow- that was my life really. Look at it now I mean that's such a small area, [yeah], but that was where everything happened.

*You were just saying there before about the area being predominantly white working class- erm did your parents ever face any sort of discrimination or any.....?*

Oh well, God , yes. .I mean growing up it was.. it was quite scary for me because my mum and dad were always.... My dad worked really, really hard. Obviously he came here and then had very little and that XXX a succ, succ successful businessman, got a great family but the issues that he faced was atrocious, literally Get back to where you came from, you know, beaten up quite regularly, because it was so different. All of a sudden there was an influx of Asian people coming into an area where there was already tensions, already a lack of erm money going round , jobs etc, So it wasn't a great time and then I think what made it worse for my dad was the fact that he married a .. a white woman [Mmmmm] erm you know my.. my mum's family found it very, very difficult to accept my dad for a very long time and there was problems within the families. Half my, my mother's family disowned her initially you know Why are you going to meet a brown person, they can't even speak the language etc So it was constant to be honest, it was literally.. it was every day, part of everyday life but the

way my dad always said was , you know it is what it is. He came to England, to East London at a time where you go through a lot of transition, there's all sorts of racism,, discrimination going on but it wasn't regulated, no one did anything about it and that's just the way it was. If you didn't like it... you... what was the ..what was the alternatives? Go back home where .. you know in terms of your standard of life and what you can achieve was extremely limited. So it was one of those things, you know, this is what you want to do, unfortunately you have to suffer the consequences.

*Why do you think that was the case though? Why do you think there was so much discrimination in East London?*

I just think it's a fear of the unknown. I think... we're talking about a time where none really knew anything about anyone else that was different. I think we take for granted what we have now in the internet, newspapers, phones, you know,,, I think we can look around the world with a .. with a click of a few buttons, what's going on in... in.. in remote parts of South America. Back then it wasn't like that. The only people that you engaged with were people in your society and your close community . I mean when I was growing up in East London, Essex you know... to go to Essex was like a holiday.

*Yeah*

To go to Colchester, Clapton,(Clackton?) these sort of places so it was a very much, you know your own community and in East London in the 60s and 70s your own community were very, very similar. Similar people and all of a sudden, you know almost overnight totally different people, just turning up in East London. I think it's a bit of the unknown but .. but .. but and people are always fearful about that.

*Yeah*

Erm and there was so much tension because like I said you know my dad came here at a time where there was already issues er with the economy... with.. with.. with jobs and etc and obviously he, he coming in very similar to what we have now it's almost reflective er just differently but it was tough but he just got his head down and got on with it. It wasn't the case for everyone ....

*Yeah*

In facts my dad's er you know he.. he he's got loads of friends from different communities, different er minority groups and generally people were great but like anything there's always that minority but back then the minority were very vocal, very strong and one thing for me which I actually appreciated was that at least you knew where you stood and my dad always said , you know there was a National Front march they'd have skinheads with their swastika tattoos and signs and they wanted you to re.. to know that they didn't like you and didn't want you around and er you know my dad appreciated that because at least he kind of knew where he stood from their perspective. I think if you look at racism and discrimination now it's evolved but its... you know you don't know how people think towards your kind of person or who you are because you know everyone knows now if you say something or do something you know you can get in a lot of trouble. Back then there.. it wasn't regulated. If somebody didn't like you they could just be very, very open about it.

[yeah] [sniff] that was the way it was so it was.. it was tough but you know I suppose.. I suppose it was easier than, than the challenge of coming to a new country and making something of.. of your new life anyway so it was it was a tough battle for my dad and I'm.. you know I'm I'm glad that he's someone I can call my dad because some who can do that [Mmmm] I find inspirational really.

*So both your parents came from quite different cultures. Erm was there a struggle on either side to sort of assimilate to that culture?*

Yeah, most definitely. Erm my... Thing is my dad, it worked out because my dad was on his own initially so it wasn't a case of my mum having to become a Muslim or her having to wear certain clothes and do certain things because my dad initially was on his own. It was only later when the bulk of his family came over then, then my mum's family get a real insight into, into what his culture was like [Mmmm] cos he could.. he could erm you know engage in all of the festivities and the different aspects of his culture whereas if you're on your own you can't do much. And erm for my mum, for my dad's side it was very difficult cos my mum come from a very working class East End family, erm my uncles were – one owned a market stall, one owned a pub. You know traditional kind of erm.. one had a café, couple of my aunts worked in factories but again you know it was a struggle because working class family... you know working every hour under the sun to earn to earn some money so it was...it was.. it was a struggle. It was a struggle and erm just interesting really how you look at my mum and dad in terms of the way they look, the things they like, you think, you know, how the hell you, you two ended up staying together all the time? How did you two even find each other attractive [Mmmm] but I think from my mum's point of view it was like, you know, she walked into a Wimpy to see this man and seen this man that she's never really seen looking like that before and she thought it was really exotic something new to her [Mmmmm] that's she's never even heard of or seen and she found it really interesting. The same way with my dad so erm yeah from that respect it was really interesting but erm, you know a very...very much a kind of er different kind of lifestyle than the normal family.

*Mmmm. Has your mum ever had a chance to go to Bangladesh herself?*

Yes, so my mum's been to Bangladesh a few times, One thing about my mum which is fantastic is she really embraces my dad's... not just my dad's culture but sort of everyone. [mmmmmm] she's always been willing to try different food. She just loves people, she's a people's person. My mum worked with disabled people all her life. She's a carer before she retired and she'd have no qualms about you know working with people from different backgrounds and religions and you know initially there was an issue where a lot of people wouldn't work with Asian people or black people [Mmmmmmm] my mum never had any issues like that. She's just really open minded and just lo.. just really looked at people regardless erm so yeah she erm that's what she did and erm yeah they worked really. It's interesting.

*Whereabouts did your mum work specifically?*

See my mum worked at erm she worked at schools so she worked at Raines Foundation School, my school Stuart Headlam School. She worked for another school called Beatrice Tate. These were schools that worked specifically... she worked with the people with special needs or erm... At Beatrice Tate for example the whole school was a special needs school.

She er worked with transport systems like buses and coaches that would transport and send people to holidays. She just cared for those sort of people as .. as a .. as a job and I think she got into that because my nan was severely disabled so she'd .. she..it was just her norm [Yeah] she did it and she felt comfortable doing it. You know in those days there weren't really like qualifications or anything like that. If you were comfortable doing it and you were competent and...and then you did it. Erm so that's.. that's what she did and it was interesting cos one of my sisters went into that sort of field as well. Erm...for ...before she had her children so that's what she did erm and my dad as I say worked at a Wimpy for years then he managed a KFC in Aldgate and he stayed in the same restaurant in the same place for .. for about fifty years.

*Mmmmm. You just said the erm that your mum thought that it was harder work with erm .. well was it your general perception that people didn't want to work with people from ethnic minorities erm. Does she think that kind of perception has shifted at all now with the years or?*

I think yeah, I think.. now I ... because our city is very diverse, it is very, very rare for you not to live on a road with people from extremely different cultures and religious background and if you're a nurse to say, you're not going to encounter someone who's Muslim's going to be extremely difficult but... going back to when I was even before I was born, people generally didn't want to .... if there was a disabled Asian person... they only had their family to help because a lot of people just refused to.. to .. to work with them. Erm and like I said in East London it was very much a transition from going from white predominantly white to predominantly Bangladeshi so within that transition, the white people needed to work with the Asian community . the Asian community needed to work with the white community and a lot of people did but there was always factions that always caused a little bit of animosity, a little .. a few problems.... Which is why it's now sort of turned the.. the other way and a lot of people are kind of moved out of the East End .

*Yeah*

Into sort of like the Essex area, Kent area, and it's now sort of... I would say it went from predominantly Asian/ Bangladeshi and now it's a new transition. I think it's happening now in East London where Brick Lane for example is... is really cool, There's a lot of er younger people living there from all over the country. It's got a hipster feel about it and for me it's just crazy to have seen it change so much in only you know three decades and [yeah] in my lifetime and it's quite crazy really.

*I think that's the beauty of London isn't it – that it's always kind of changing and evolving [Yeah] all the time. [Cough] So just moving on to you a little bit. Whereabouts did you grow up?*

So I grew up in Stepney Green erm I went to school at Stuart Headlam which was next door to my nan's in Bethnal Green er because I was there the majority of my life, growing up er I ended up going to Raines Foundation School which was a bit further from what I lived but again next to my nan's in...in Bethnal Green. Er Stuart Headlam was a very strange school because I would go as far as to say Stuart Headlam ... my school and it was on Tap Street...er Bethnal Green... I would go as far as to say it was....95% Asian....[Mmm] and in fact I was probably one of like....because people.... The really interesting thing about me is...growing up I went to school.....primary school... predominantly Asian...[Yeah] ...and



they all saw me as being non-Asian. I went into a secondary school which was 98...96% white and they saw me as being non-white...so it was really, really strange. I think a lot of people of mixed heritage actually feel that way [Mmmm] because you're not completely I wouldn't say accepted is the right word but you don't feel like you are part of either... you're definitely another if you like [Yeah] er so I went to a school called Stuart Headlam...primary school 96% Bangladeshi...predominantly Bangladeshi but 96% Asian. I was seen as the white boy, went to Raine's Foundation and it was ... yeah .... A total flip... Erma and in Erm Stuart Headlam... yeah I was a kid growing up in East London ... you was limited as to what you could do really.. I mean...you'd go out the house at 10 o'clock in the morning and come back at 12 o'clock at night.. you know there weren't the parks that there is now.... Never any money around [Mmmm] to me the only ...er ... sort of thing I could do was play football because the alternatives were ... sort of steal and get in trouble .. that sort of thing and I never really wanted to sort of .. to do that.. I didn't really... I never really felt receptive to that sort of thing ... I always tried to stay the right side of the law if you like and erm.. but in East London growing up a lot of my friends... kind of... just did that because.. there weren't really anything else to do... so I ended up playing football so playing football all the time and erm and it kind of dictated my childhood really because that's what I did erm and I still all the time...

*Yeah. You just mentioned there about the two schools how you were seen as the white boy in primary school but at the secondary school .. you know so why do you think there was that kind of opinion on.. on either side of the school.*

Er... I think because for me visually...erm to an Asian person I have an Asian name but I'm very fair... I speak with a Cockney accent and I've grown up in a .. in an English family. My dad is Bangladeshi but the bulk of my dad's family... it's a very small family.. so you know very much a... an East End, white, working class family is what I grew up in and as I go...grew older and spent more time with my dad's...dad's family [cough] ... you know I appreciate the .. the Muslim..the.. the Bangladeshi aspect of it but I'd say I'd been .. you know brought up like most white...er working class people in the East End in the 90s..erm but yeah then going to a school which was predominantly white .. Obviously I'm not white and my name's Amar Uddin..[Mmmm] erm so yeah.. you know you're definitely different from them and .. and....and you get that impression [yeah] and growing up in East London it's funny... I mean... people just see you as different and they and a lot of people didn't really know how to take you... er and it was just strange because it was weird you know because when you are in a school which is 96% white .. you don't feel like you're different because everyone around you is white, [Mmmmm] your Mum's white, your family's white. I talk with a Cockney accent, you kind of forget that you are different [yeah] but other people ... erm....you know make you realise that, you know you've had.... You get... you get girls saying ... oh I was really good-looking but I wouldn't go out with him because he was Asian [Mmmmm] something like that.. it just makes you think like....it's a massive barrier to people and back then....more so than it is now... back then it was just like the unknown it was like very much a divide about them and us and... not in a bad way.. but just ... people didn't really ...erm mix... as much as they do now. [Mmmmm]....so like East London if you had a couple of Asian houses.. the Asian families would tend to sort of live together [Yeah] down a certain street...er at school the very few Asian kids that there were would hang around together... I wasn't one of them I tried to sort of break the mould and sort of ... mingle with everyone but... yeah .. It was... It was a strange one because generally

in East London you... you didn't really get that mix ...[Mmmmm] which ... which is quite strange because I think you do.. you do so now.. erm I don't think it matters much now.

*Yeah . So when you were at school, particularly say secondary school did you ever encounter any kind of problems or any kind of discrimination on that sort of front?*

I think ... just like I said about certain comments and things like that.. You always got certain issues but I think the good thing for me was I was ...at school.... Let's look at the American analogy. I was like the quarter back. I was the fastest runner. I was the best football player. I was smart.. er I was popular...so it was really interesting that the way the Asian boys that ...cos two Asian boys that came from my sec.. Primary school that went to my secondary school [Yeah].... The way that they were treated and the way I was treated was totally different. They were almost isolated, hanging around together, didn't have any friends, weren't popular with girls, just sort of.. in the corner [Mmmmm] sat there. And it was almost as if like, well.. you know what's going on but people genuinely treated them totally different to me because I wasn't like them although I was different and erm it's like anything, isn't it? You know at school if you've got the kid who is the best football player in the team and the captain.. He can come and almost walk on water [Yeah] so regular discrimination...it literally doesn't.. doesn't cater for him and it's a strange thing but it ... that was the case ... cos like it said I ...you know I was playing football at a decent level in primary school, went to secondary school and it was like... er top clubs in the country looking at me and word spread and you kind of get well known in your area.. so I was always kind of looked at quite a...erm kind of highly ... looked at highly..[mmmmm] between the other pupils.. so I never really got much issue really...er I got a lot of jealousy from the older boys because I ended up going out with a girl who was two years older than me. She was in my school so ...but I wouldn't say there was major ... it was a good school Raines Foundation.... It was a very good school...so I wouldn't say I had major issues. I think in terms of any discrimination I faced growing up it was always playing football. It was always when I was involved in football. [yeah] er at school, primary school...I always got teased for being white. In secondary school you have comment if you... you know nothing serious but the minute I started playing football properly up in London that was when you'd hear things ... you know and you'd see things... [Yeah ] so at school it was fine.

*So how did you get into football then?*

So literally I was... literally I was just playing on the street and I played all the time because there was simply nothing to do. I've got a younger brother who is a year and a half younger than me so ... cos you know we're the similar age.....similar likes, we just played all the time, great bunch of friends, next door neighbours played football, we always played football, and I was playing football in my primary school one day in the playground and PE teacher just grabbed me and said why don't you play for the school team and I was in year 6 and the school team had a year 7 team and I said erm I'm in year 6 . He said oh really, I said yes, he said well do you want to join the team a year early? Just come to training? So I was like yeah alright so you know another excuse to play football really so I played..... My team at Stuart Headlam. We were terrible... the whole team was made up of Asian kids and literally we would just get battered by everyone...er we played St Ann's...my first ever game on a grass pitch XX with goal posts and a referee and everything and er we got battered but I scored and it was like the first time anyone had scored for my team [Yeah] and erm and I just found it really easy because it was ... it was constructive. I'm used to playing on a really small pitch



in a cage with about a hundred people [Yeah] Give me a grass pitch with eleven players and a load of space, I just found it really easy and erm... so it went from there really so I started getting used to playing regularly and when I erm went to my secondary school er I played for the District ... and I played for the... for London and I was playing with... so from year 8, year, year 8 year 9 in my secondary school I was playing with the Ashley Coles, John Terrys, David Kings... I was one of the best players in England, in London at that time but I was doing all a year up because ... at secondary school I played a year up. So not only was I playing at a decent level I was playing a year up erm and when they realised I was playing a year up obviously I went back to my own age and just... just found it really easy and just ... it just...football always came naturally to me and so that was it really and it played a large part of my... my life. I played for school teams erm My school Raines they were a really strict school so like if you were able you had to do everything. [Mmmmm] You ended up playing for the basketball team and ended up playing for the athletics team. You ended up doing literally everything and it ended up taking a lot of your time up [Yeah] erm sort of outside school erm. The problem I had was that I er ...my parents were kind of like... you know...if you're going to play that's fine but make sure you do good at school, which was actually quite difficult, growing up doing so much things out of school [Cough] even my lunches and my.. my, my dinner times were.. Were ... taken playing basketball or training ... erm so literally growing up it was literally sport, sport, sport [yeah] and that's what it was. I think the other sports that I played ended up complimenting my football and then erm it all started to get a bit serious really cos I was playing for London and then got watched in a game and someone said, Look can you go to England trials. So I went to England trials. I think I was the only player at an England trial that wasn't attached to a professional club [Mmmm] so everyone was kind of like a bit bewildered. Where's this kid come from and erm the fact that I was.. I was Asian with an Asian name... that made me stand out even more and then that was it. You know I played for a team on Sunday. Erm because I kind of really enjoyed the kind of constructiveness and the professionalism of of of playing properly. Played for a team on Sunday erm... in South London called Athenely? [Cough] Peckham and then all of a sudden people were just turning up at my mum and dad's house and oh can we have a chat with you and your son. People were approaching me after games, approaching my PE teachers and then erm just started having a ...you know a... a... sort of meetings with different clubs [yeah] and then ...then that's when West Ham got involved really.

*So how is the whole scouting process at work then in terms of scouts coming to your home like you just said there?*

Well I mean... I think....I think that's probably very unconventional..er m cos I....I actually worked last year ... I was a... an academy coach for West Ham ..but last year erm ...I've seen how things have changed but back then scouts would watch... any game. Scouts could literally walk around the park and see some kid who special [yeah] I know someone at Millwall... I know some at... and that's how it worked and it started happening so regularly ...erm I just shrugged it all off and was like look speak to my school teacher, speak to my manager erm... and it, yeah it got a bit serious 'cos you know my PE teacher contacted my dad erm my Sunday league manager contacted my dad and said look you know look, this is serious all these teams that want Anwar. And I just sort of like whatever, I didn't realise. I wanted to be a football player

*Mm*

But I never actually contemplated it as a career, it was just fun. And erm in terms of everyone else, Joe Cole was in my youth team, Joe Cole's playing structured football, being coached from the age of seven and he was just a phenomenal,

*Mm*

best player I played with as a kid. He was just like a magician. I on the other hand was like twelve, thirteen which is very, very late compared to the others but I just done it for fun without the pressure

*Yeah*

And I think that benefitted me. Cos in my – when I started playing properly, the parents on the side, the coaches, the expectation... I never had any of that. My mum and dad were like gets him out the house and play

*Mm*

Didn't actually realise what I was doing, I'm glad I play football yeah cool and that was it and all of a sudden it got a little bit serious when everyone starts knocking on the door.

*So did you not feel any pressure or any stress when scouts were watching you at all? You shook it off?*

Not at all because as I said, if I'd have grown up, my dad was a football supporter. So I wanted to be a football supporter, I wanted to do this I wanted to do that, I wanted to do next whatever. It may have, but I literally was oblivious to it all. It was almost as if footballers were from a different planet

*Yeah*

And I didn't think that I could actually enter that pathway and achieved what they achieved. It was almost as if what I do and what they do... it doesn't connect. It might, it might sound stupid but you know growing up no one's ever told me that you can actually do that.

*Mm*

I just thought I'd play and it was fun umm but then yeah when it started to get a bit serious, umm I started think about okay... but even then... clubs saying come play... I'm like okay I'll play for West Ham or XXX (0:32:46:2) I have no idea what I wanna do when I'm an adult, no idea and it all happened quite young. We're talking about twelve, like eleven, twelve, thirteen you're still a baby.

*Yeah... So obviously you just said there as well, erm you started playing at eleven, twelve, thirteen, but football was kind of domineering your life. Didn't that kind of feel like you missed out on a bit of your childhood or growing up as a teenager at all?*

Yeah, yeah. I mean I had a great life but I do think that but I think it complimented my school work. Mm so I weren't on the streets all night, drinking, messing around on bikes breaking

stuff. I didn't ... it weren't my childhood. It was more so finish school, play football, come home you know maybe on the computer, did some reading. Don't get me wrong I weren't like a hermit or anything like that

*Yeah*

But it was a bit more... but I think that was me as a character. I was kind of straight. You know in school I wanted to get my work done, you know I don't wanna be labelled the kid who's naughty that was just the way it was. No one, that weren't my parents influence or anything that was just me as a person, I'm quiet erm... pedantic and I like things to be done properly but I had a great, growing up I had a great, loads of friends and I was always popular and I think it just, it actually embellished my life because I was just really highly regarded with everyone. Everyone wanted to be my mate, come here do this and so it never really, yeah I look back now and I don't think I don't ever regret, I don't think it ruined anything, I don't think it missed out on anything, in actual fact, I think I benefitted from it massively.

*So when you joined West Ham did you sign, was it junior forms or?*

Yeah so you just literally signed like a two year contract, a year contract but I think to be honest those contracts... they're... you don't realise you just... and I had this whole yeah go on, I'll sign, play for West Ham but (0:34:41:0) literally you are committed to a club.

*Mm*

Like even at that age, you couldn't just go right I don't like it anymore, I'm gonna go to Tottenham.

*Yeah*

It didn't work like that. But erm the whole, the whole relationship with West Ham was really interesting because growing up, all my family were Spurs supporters. They were all Tottenham, Tottenham mad. North London, they love it. It's strange now 'cos my wife now are all... my wife's family are all Arsenal season tickets but season ticket holders but at school. So my family are 'you're alright, you're a Spurs supporter', my brothers a spurs supporter.

*Mm*

We're all spurs supporters but West Ham were my local team and my mates supported West Ham so I always found it quite difficult. But I never really paid much interest. I loved football so I used to be- I was a fan initially of football of as opposed to of anyone. I loved England; watching national team like 1990 world cup, fell in love with football, Gary Linekar. But then were all these cubs are after me, I just felt like I had a connection with West Ham because one all of my friends supported them. It was, it was all they ever spoke about. Growing up all my mates, all the kids every single yeah all the kids talked about different players. So I knew the club, but yeah I've got my uncle was telling me I'm a Tottenham supporter but I knew nothing about Spurs. I'd never been to Spurs, I don't know who their players were, Gary Linker, Paul Gascoigne but I never really had that, I felt like West Ham, I just knew the ins and outs of ... I just knew the club already and when all the subs were

interested in me. West Ham showed an interest and it's my local club and at the time West Ham had the best youth team the best young players so it was, it was widely known playing for London, England. Erm all the best players play for West Ham. So when they were interested in me I said I wanna be the best, I don't wanna go and play for Wimbledon erm, I don't wanna travel to Manchester, Arsenal. At that time West Ham, you were the best player, you go West Ham.

*Mm*

And erm, so me and my erm Sunday league manager erm got invited to have dinner at West ham and err so we're talking, I'm twelve years old. Then again I come from an Asian background; football is not really prominent in my dad's culture. My mum does doesn't like football,

*Yeah*

Not interested in football. Had a few meetings at home with a few teams and it was nice. You know nice to be told that you're... you're a potential and now you're gonna be great excreta. But what West Ham did was they did something differently, they err they asked me which is rare for a twelve year old, they asked me and my Sunday league manager to come and come to Upton Park and watch a game and have dinner and I thought well you know, my managers like bloody hell, he knew how good I was at that level, grassroots but Christ almighty they're asking you to come and have dinner against QPR? So I got dressed up, manager got dressed up... Umm we went to err West Ham, Tony Carr, met him, had dinner before the game. It was all a bit surreal. 'Cos id gone into Upton Park, didn't realise there was a restaurant, five star restaurant near it

*Yeah*

Err it was mad, I have dinner and then erm walked out to, to where the seats were. And yeah the whole, I mean I work with football supporters now, that initial feeling where you lose your breath for a second, it was... I had that. And it was so strange 'cos I sat down on my seat, all I kept thinking about were my mates

*Mm*

Cos they'd all one: love to be there, couldn't afford it dads never took me always working and I was there, but I was invited to be there and erm I just felt like the claret and blue players, I knew every player on the pitch. I don't support West Ham but all I heard was my mates talking about Tony Cottee.

*Yeah*

And so I just knew him without even wanting to and erm and after we watched QPR West Ham first ever game we watched Tony Cottee scored and it was like oh man and when they were telling me we want you here, we'd love to see you play on this pitch

*Mm*

All of a sudden, that evening, it clicked a little bit. And I thought, like, I actually realised I'm now on this road and the destination is what I'm seeing. And for the first time it never really kind of erm felt that way or looked that way

*Yeah*

But yeah and umm they said to me look, we want you. We know everyone else does erm, we're your local team, erm don't make a decision but do you wanna come to Ireland with us? Erm we've got a tournament called the Milk Cup erm come to Ireland for a week meet the lads and see how you are. If you don't like it we can talk about that afterwards. So after dinner I thought you know that I'm gonna go. Holidays, someone's asking me to go to Ireland, I'm 13 years old... go to Ireland play in this national football tournament, you know, it's like what an adventure that is.

*Mm*

So we went to the Milk Cup and we won the Milk Cup, met Joe Cole all the rest of the players and that was it. Cos we went there and won and not only did we got there and won, I played every single game and was integral to us winning the tournament. That was it. I thought this was my team

*Mm*

What a success, I just thought this is unbelievable. So that was it, didn't even really er entertain anyone else. Other clubs were saying look we can give you counter offers. Let us, come and talk to us I just didn't bother, because for me it just felt like that was where I should be.

*So when you were at the Milk club in Ireland, what other players of west ham having their youth team at the time?*

So at the time, the ones that are prominent now obviously Joe Cole was the best player but we had all the kids were like the best in London. So I suppose now is different, I mean working at the academy last year you got kids from all over the world but yeah I mean the players were just amazing. They always, they was all from Essex or inner London. Me and joe were from inner London but the standard was just unbelievable so went to Milk cup Man United were there, Arsenal were there, these are the teams that wanted me, we just blew everyone away and that was it and as I say come back- it's interesting because I sat in my office the other day and err I don't really do social media but since I joined err the FCF I've got a twitter account so I've had that for about a year now and err I've got a Facebook account because again just to sort of keep up to date with things and someone the other day posted a video of the Milk Cup where I was 14. And it was just crazy it was as if it was another life time. But yeah magical memories but that was it and from the age of 12 when I signed for West Ham, I watched every single game at Upton Park until I joined the first team it was actually a part of the whole thing

*Mmm so what was a typical training session like then and where did you train in playing for west ham?*



so when I was playing for west ham, it was looking back now it's crazy cos when you're that age you've gotta train Tuesday and Thursdays in the evening and you train at Chadwell Heath

*Mm*

So the biggest problem for me was I'm 14 years old, all these big clubs want me, my dad's busy working, my mum don't drive, how do I get to these places so it was a case of my older sister erm taking me and just growing up really fast. We had another lad called Steve Clark who lived in Bow. He went to Langdon Park which is not too far from me. He was at West Ham he signed after me about six months, about six months to a year after me and err we just went together, err jumped on a train walked to Whitechapel station, umm went to Stratford. Stratford to Chadwell Heath to Becontree. Jumped off uh number 62 bus to Chadwell Heath which is a bit of a mission really, it's not close but we did it Tuesday nights, finished training about half nine and then went home. But over the years I mean the coaches were good, parents always dropped me off or coaches would pick em up so initially there was always people to take me until I was confident enough to come on me own

*Yeah, what would a typical training session look like at youth level?*

At youth level it was very much the basics errr, basis for ... to for general people but for but giving us an insight into ow football has developed, tactics what the levels you need to be at and just really trying to work on everyone's weaknesses at 14 there's so much you gotta work on.

*Mm*

And the coaches were aware of individuals and what they needed. Erm and with me I had to play catch up because technically I was nowhere near everyone else. I was like... I needed so much work but what I had was just raw talent and enthusiasm. I was bigger than everyone else; I was quicker than everyone else. My touch was was to their standard was terrible, my awareness, because I'd never really been coached I was just playing for the fun of it because I loved the game, these kids have all been told, stand there do this because if you do this, this will happen. This is the best way to do that. Be careful of that because if that happens you have to... no one's ever told me anything like this. So for me it was just like it was amazing because it was enjoyable because I felt like I'm just learning all this sort of stuff but it was quite difficult because again I was having to play catch up. But what my strengths were at that time they weren't really weren't anyone else at West Ham that had my strengths cos I was big I was strong, I was vocal.

*Yeah*

Very vocal and erm we have some very talented players and I was the one that kind of looked after the talented players. So Joe Cole was the magician and I just sort of looked after the magician really. But you need it in every team

*Yeah*

*So when you we replaying for West Ham and obviously quite a large squad, do you class these people as friends or just sort of work colleagues as such.*

I don't think you can call them work colleagues as such because you spend so much time with them they become friends and they become more than that. I had a 17 year career so obviously playing for different team you do have work colleagues. You do have work colleagues that you know you're working with and you meet on a daily basis but when you, when you erm, when you're young you spend that much time together and you're sort of developing. It's all a bit of an adventure

*Yeah*

You know you spend so much time together but you're growing together. You're a lot more closer

*Mm*

Erm, than your average colleague or team mate. And it was just so much fun because you played for west ham you're getting all the best boots, the club giving from their sponsors, you're getting all the best kit and you can go watch any game you want

*Mm*

Practically you know the the first time its 14/15 you're going to training ground there's first team players wondering around (0:46:08:1) it's unbelievable.

*Yeah did you not ever kind of feel like you want to get one over a team mate at all? 'cos obviously you know footballs ultra-competitive so did you ever feel like that at all?*

No I mean we err we had a really good team and a really good team of individuals that want the best for each other. I just want the best for my team mates because in a strange way knowing that I know now a club can't sign all their promising young players. Its only spaces for a, for a few but you don't really realise that at the time. At the time you just wanna be the best you can be. You realise that someone else may be doing better than you. Someone else might be promised more

*Mm*

Or will do more, but it's all about your own development and trying to achieve what you know you can achieve

*Yeah. So what happens then, or what happens with you after you left the first, sorry the youth team.*

So I was at west ham, as I say in the, as a school boy for a few years and then at school there's a really prominent season when you're in year 11 because basically the club have to decide after being there for two or three years, to give you a professional contract, which is a full term contract. So when you leave school, you become a football player. All be it on a YTS form which is like very, very limited amount of money but you don't leave school then

go to college or university, you leave school and go and play for West Ham. So to be honest that as all I ever wanted to do and I was pretty confident that I would achieve that because I was, I was a very I was a key figure in a team. But for a lot of my team mates it was, it was a horrific time in their life. Am I gonna get through am I gonna play for West Ham and for a lot of them the dream ended there

*Mm*

Cos they just weren't good enough or the club- cos the club are just looking for the best. You gotta have something very very special. If you haven't they might take a couple of players that they believe they can work on but ultimately you know it's it's so competitive and you have to have something even at that age and I was just delighted that I had enough err to warrant err a position in the youth team

*Yeah. So then what happened from there?*

So in the youth team erm I was there for two years as a youth team player. And I think err as a youth team player then I was there for another two years as a professional. So four years as a full time player at west ham and everything was juts amazing because by this point I fell in love with the club because I've watched every game for a six/ seven year period and I just felt like the club was, was my own I felt like it was just meant to be you know and the players that used to come and go and you get to know the first team and for me being a player that lives in the area, goes through the system and then get as professional contract is, is pretty amazing

*Yeah*

Because you really do feel that connection with a club. 'cos everyone around me in my, in my in my normal life were West Ham fans. They loved the club they were obsessed with the club and I played for the club. They all knew were I was and it just felt amazing. It felt truly unbelievable. Umm but yeah standard of football because to be honest I was at West Ham at the worse time

*Mm*

So when I ended up becoming a pro at 17 18, erm and then going onto train with the first team and being part of the first team we finished fifth in the premier league. Our highest ever finish forever and erm so yeah so yeah I was promising, yes I had a lot of raw potential and talent but I had to try and get in front of or compete with Rio Ferdinand

*Mm*

And at the time, people didn't realise but I thought this guy is just world class. He was unbelievable but that was the standard

*Yeah*

That was the standard and umm extremely difficult because he was so good but Frank Lampard, Mark Carrick just to be around that club at that time was a magical experience. If I

could turn back time for my football career it probably would have been better for me to go to a Leyton Orient or Wimbledon because what would have happened is the players wouldn't have been, or they wouldn't have been the amount of good players that they were. I probably would have got an opportunity in a youth team at a young age in a first team. And gone on to play a few hundred games and gone from the bottom up. But I couldn't turn down the opportunity to, to be at West Ham I'm so glad I didn't because travelling the world. Every year we went around the world, Italy, America, France Germany played the tournaments around the world. Playing with world class players. I mean that is, that, that... no matter what happens you've always got that.

*Mm what was it like playing with some of these players, Rio Ferdinand and Michael Carrick?*

It was unbelievable because as a club internally we knew that these players were special. I think it's only now that we can talk about these names and people realise wow oh my god

*Yeah*

Michael Carrick England international Manchester United, (0:51:13:6) Joe Cole, Rio Ferdinand, Frank Lampard, these players were in the same dressing room as me. And growing up the quality of these players were like oh wow I'm here I'm one of the,

*Mm*

It was just fantastic and umm there's no surprise to me that the players that were part of the team when I was there as an aspiring first team players and youth team players no surprise to me they've gone on to be superstar. But that's the magic of the club. It had this like family atmosphere. I went back last year as a youth team coach. Shirley who cooked for us was still there.

*Mm*

Pete who was the kit man was still there and that's what it was you ended up, they end up becoming like family because you're there so much. When you're a youth team player you're at a club so much because you do your training twice a day and I had to clean boots I had to vacuum the full indoor pitch and stuff like that so you spend like, you spend like a two year period at the club and it's just all you know erm but it was just fantastic and the bigger we got and the more success we had you know all of a sudden you come in new season and you share the changing room with Paulo De Canio and (0:52:32:1) players like that and it's just you know what wow. I mean I sat next to Paulo De Canio for half a season and he was just an extraordinary individual an unbelievable footballer.

*What sort of banter did you have then with all these players, did you have any interesting stories to share?*

*Yeah I mean*

*With them or dressing room tales?*

For me yeah for me Paulo De Canio was an absolute character eh was... you couldn't sit next to him and be still because you never knew what he was gonna do eh was always up to something but there was so many erm.. I mean cos when I was in the youth team and I broke into the first team squad and that period of time we had so many players from around the world. I remember there was a player called Javier Margas that we got from South America. For the first few months he didn't even say a word and people actually thought he couldn't speak English. I got injured with him and erm everyone was making – not making fun of him but he had this really bad hair it was like dyed red and all sorts of stuff and were all in the changing rooms and everyone was making fun of him and err everyone's moved out to train and me and him were injured and I'm thinking right I got a day being injured with Javier, Javier don't speak English I thought right this could be sort of me on my own. And he sort of starts cracking up laughing and has a full blown conversation with me in English.

*Yeah*

And no one realised he could speak English no one even asked him, you know what I mean. And this guys travelled from South America to Chadwell Heath and things like that. I just find extraordinary and there's so many of them players from all over the world all over the country kinda come together erm and were kind of part of this success that really West Ham traditional a team that always struggled, were competing with the best. So again yeah just fantastic to be around those sort of people at that time. [54:21]

*Do you think footballs changing now because a lot of clubs are losing a sense of themselves with erm the lack of home grown players or players from the area like yourself? Do you think that impacts clubs at all so like West Ham?*

I do, I do especially for fans. I mean like west ham who's got Mark Noble who's been through he system, been there for years. Captain great player and I think that's amazing but it's very, very rare and it's rare that clubs even have players that stay there so long. It's rare that clubs have players that come from the area I which the clubs are. But the beautiful thing about my relationship with the club is that everyone that was there growing up with me was from the area, London Essex and I think what people don't realise is you realise what an enormity that club is. For me West Ham is bigger than Manchester United, West Ham is bigger than Chelsea, it's bigger than Real Madrid and Barcelona, West Ham is everything. Cos all the people I know, all the family members' friends that I have they're obsessed with west ham. Nobody cares about Barcelona or Real Madrid (0:55:25:0) it's about West Ham and I think if you can get players with that kind of ingrained in them to go out and play for them. For them you might as well go and play for real Madrid cos that is the be all and end all.

*You're just mentioning there as well, when you were younger you were cleaning boots and stuff of that nature and you said you coach now with West Ham. Do you recognise any sort of disparity between footballers of your age back then to now.*

I think 100% because I think; I think they made them stop because they boarded on umm human rights issues to be honest. Because literally some of the things they'd ask you to do would be like ridiculous...

*Mm*



You know...clean the stadium like really? Now you've got about 20million staff to do that. it ... we realise it weren't about cleaning the stadium , it weren't about cleaning the boots it weren't about erm the balls it was about the principles and the messages and the values of doing that. Like appreciate the fact that when you turn up to training there's clean balls. Who cleans those balls? The balls fairy? Someone does that. You know and as a player now, they turn up, got the best card, best food, best ... it's just all there for them

*Mm*

They take it for granted. We never, never took it for granted because we were the ones at six o'clock in the morning that would get there and clean every single ball. For the thing to take them off us and then in an hour every single ball is disgusting dirty. You got to do the same tomorrow. It makes you appreciate that guy that when you're in the first team, be it a youth team player or someone they just hired or the cleaner, whoever it is...that person just sits there for an hour and a half cleaning balls for you. And I think that's really important to understand that and I think not just football, forget football in life.

*Yeah*

It makes you better person because everyone's at a club doing their bit for the players to enjoy and you know I think you have to have an appreciation for that and I think players nowadays don't realise that because everything is there

*Yeah*

Nowadays players go through a system where they don't have to clean boots they don't have to do anything which I can understand because look they're there to be football players but you need to instill principles and make them appreciate the club's history and the people that work around the club and the fans as well.

*Yeah*

And I think it was so important that we did that and I think cleaning boots, standing and vacuuming the indoor pitch and all the other things they made us do made me a better person. So I'm thankful for that.

*So give you a good grounding*

Yeah 100% yeah

*Have you ever come across any erm younger footballers they're throwing it away a little bit because of that attitude?*

I don't know where they get it from a little bit I think you know nowadays If you're like... when I went to West Ham as a baby you know it was all still very much yeah you got something but you still got a lot of work to do. Nowadays you're giving people financial incentive and promises at the youngest of ages and umm for me again this is a personal thing for me it's just, there's a little bit of hunger I think missing. I came from a working class

background. My dad came over from Bangladesh and had to literally had to work for absolutely everything he's got and I, I've got that kind of mentality, you know I wanna make sure I give 100% to achieve something because I've come from not much and I think some players now they don't have that hunger. You know you look at the European championships we've just played, you look at some of the players who've just played, smaller nations, players are nowhere near as good as high profile when they play, wow they play for their country it means the world and erm [clattering] and erm that hunger is essential to success.

*That drive*

Yeah that drive

*So what happened then after West Ham?*

So after west ham obviously, I just wasn't getting into the first team but I was, I was playing well, doing okay you know the players in front of me the Stuart Pierces the Ian Pierces they were just, these are household names (0:59:55:7) it just wasn't gonna happen I had to go and seek another challenge my myself my own profile so I left and went to Sheffield Wednesday (whirring noise) and it broken my heart. Is it okay to...

*Yeah its fine*

Yeah it broke my heard because cos obviously it's a club I love and has been a major part of my life and I had to leave because if I had to stayed there it would have been detrimental to my career so I left and erm it's amazing cos you leave but the club always stays with you. You know you always look out for the results and but really sad to leave but went Sheffield Wednesday and had to sit three months there then I went to Bristol Rovers for two years came back to Dagenham which strangely enough, came back to Dagenham and the reason I came back to Dagenham because I wanted to come back to London but they trained around the corner from Chadwell Heath so it was like I was back doing my usual route I was there six years then went to Barnet and then umm and then retired after going into long league with Sutton and Eastbourne for a couple of years . (1:01:00:7)

*So what's it like being a professional footballer? What's it like playing in front of you know thousands of fans waiting on your every moment, every touch.*

It's unbelievable

*Coughs*

I mean everyone; I think most boys and girls nowadays want to be a professional football player I think it's the thing to be at this country. It always has been and I think to achieve it it's been amazing its... it's for me. Just being in the stadium among fans and walking into a ground ad everyone sort of singing your name and the atmosphere that is just special people say yeah scoring a goal is great but walking out in front of thousands of fans, leading a team of footballers out into a stadium that's paced waiting on your every move. You think if there's 50,000 people in the stadium all eyes are on you. It's quite powerful. For me its great, but for me its almost like how can I say to put it really simple its gotta be they're trying to understand from perspective you never can because it's something out of this world but for

me it was like at school if you got like a dissertation or a piece of coursework at school and its done and its done well that sense of satisfaction.

*Yeah*

You know that achievement, that feeling you get is amazing. You know when you, when you have a child or when you done something you're particularly proud of you fix something but then it kinda goes doesn't it, it goes. I've done it now brilliant now hurrah. Everyone's like well done and then you go onto the next thing. That feeling there, being a football player that feeling is constant

*Mm*

And that's how I kind explain it and its magical cos you have to build loads of shelves to do loads of dissertations that are, that are done well to keep getting back to that feeling. But when you're a player and you're signed for a club

*Yeah*

You're preparing for a game at the weekend, you're winning trophies, you know it's constant

*What was it like playing at Upton Park?*

It's brilliant because of me, just, just as a fan watching every single game and watching every single people do it to actually do it myself it was just amazing. I really like err. Those little things to me are so important and a lot of people oh it's another game, another pitch but not me. I mean they're growing up for six years watching different teams, different players come and go you know just it be part of that history even if it's the smallest component but just to be part of that history. I mean we won the youth club there it was packed so that is as near as you're gonna get to feeling what it's like to play (1:03:53:8) and Upton Park packed every single week. For me just to play at Upton park is just amazing and you know what I think a little part of like me and the club it's kind of died in a way because now with the Olympic stadium it's as if it's sort of like a chapters closed and another ones beginning. But my chapter is definitely at Upton Park and not really the Olympic stadium because I don't really have an affinity to I don't have a relationship with the Olympic stadium, its beneficial, tis fantastic but for me, its Upton park. It's like growing up in a house and you move, whenever you drive past that house the memories flood back and that feeling... that's what Upton Park is for me.

*So when you're playing football as well professionally what were some of the best games that you've come across or some of the best footballers from oppositional sides?*

So be it West Ham I was really fortunate because err (coughs) you always play these behind closed doors other premierships teams like playing against Ian Wright and XXX, Dennis Bergkamp these sort of players these are the best in the world ever. Not just what I had, I had the privilege of sharing a football pitch with these players. So really really err appreciate that I mean Upton Park obviously youth cup there won it 9-0 over two legs which is again unheard of. But over the course of my career there's been just so many players that literally

household names and it's just weird that obviously a young boy from Stepney, an Asian boy at that is even on the same pitch. It's a privileged to be there.

*Yeah, so when you were playing professionally did you encounter any sort of discrimination or anything?*

Err yeah people always think it's the fans but it wasn't, to be fair generally never knew where I was from. Didn't know what religion I was so never really understood but you always got (coughs) certain chants and certain things but yeah mainly it was from coaches... managers and opposing players yeah they try and say something you get one up on you... err the odd comment here and there. And erm it was the way you were treated as well, especially in some clubs, especially when you're your younger you go to new clubs and you're thinly Asian face within the whole club and it's just the ignorance of my father's religion and my father. I mean the most powerful the whole thing for me in terms of discrimination through my experience is that fact that my mum and dad never came and watched me play, hardly ever because I didn't want them to, because every time I came and watched them play, one they would have to listen to the abuse I got and two my dad would get racially abused himself. So I just left them at home, because I thought right I gotta concentrate on playing well and winning and I don't want the added burden as my mum and dad arrived, I didn't want that. Um, which to be honest is ridiculous cos I've got tow b children now and if they replaying, my son he plays I watch him play all the time and I love it. My dad whether he knew I kept making excuses I just didn't want him to come and watch because for me it was just an added burden.

*You think erm British clubs suffer from institutional racism at all?*

I think there's an element of institutional racism just because of where we came from to where we are now. If you think about he make up of a club of its structures, it's very much the same people and its very much like London to England 20/30 years ago now when you transition and new people are different become more involved things changed but I still thinking were in that transition. I think were in that transition but as a country... because football is a little bit behind erm so I think there is an element I wouldn't say institutional racism because you can't generalise because there's good and bad in people in every single football club, you know for every 8000 fantastic people who are open, who are welcoming there's probably idiots and those idiots may be the most powerful people at the club. So it's very hard to sort of, to say but from my perspective I think there is an issue of just because of the lack of numbers you see. People have asked me for seventeen years, why is there a lack of Asian football players playing in mainstream football. And for me there's a huge number of factors that go into that answer. But I think you have to acknowledge that racism and discrimination has to play a part in there somewhere for me I don't think it's the biggest reason by any stretch of the the imagination but for the amount of people in this country, the amount of births Asian lads that play football, try to play football want to play football and the amount of players that have played mainstream were talking about... can name them all on one hand. There's an issue there you know, and that's strange

*Mm*

What an anomaly that is. So there are many factors that go into that. But I think discrimination, prejudices and just er ignorance just has to be has to, is it an unconscious bias?

Are people fearful of what they don't know? Are people unsure of what they don't know?  
They must be, because how else can you explain erm the current situation

*Yeah you just said as well that football's a little bit behind times. Erm why do you think that is in comparison to general society where I think we're kind of in general, I think were quite progressive I think umm in the UK but with football it seems a little bit different doesn't it.*

Yeah because football is... football is a a a place, a entity an organisation within itself. It sits in the UK but it's very much something that don't abide to any laws. It has its own network, a stream of rules regulations, its own little society an that's just because it's very unique and it's, it's competitive.

*Mm*

In this country, you look at the towns and cities you look at the work places, you look at any place you'll go, you notice diversity, you notice difference. Football is... when is ay behind the times its... it isn't as diverse as it should be umm I'm not talking about the playing field where you could argue the playing field is.. a lack of Asian players playing mainstream football but I think more so just generally the makeup of staff that make up a football team, a football club. If you look at the governing side of things, a governing league, premier league the fa I mean what presentation do we have? As a young Asian player id dint realise football was for me because when I watch it on TV there weren't any other Asians playing it no Asian coaches, managers, referees so I just thought maybe it wasn't for people like me. And I still think people feel like that now, which is ridiculous football is for everyone but when there's not a representation for everyone at the highest levels, at the decision making levels that's a concern

*Mm*

Because there are people like myself now who have had a 17 year long career, I know the game I'm a coach, I'm a manager working for kick it out and the SFF there are people older than me, why are they not filling these position to in not of power but integral positons young Asian lad wants to be a coach he can look at this this person in the FA delivering a workshop, just standing on the side of a pitch with an FA jacket thinking wow there's a pathway. If people of my kind, people like me can turn up (1:12:03:8) umm and that isn't the case. I'm not saying that's wrong because let's face it, life is a meritocracy and if you can get to the top, the amount of space is available at the football team or at the top of football or at any level is limited.It's limited. And erm so you know you shouldn't have Asians or black people to eastern Europeans people or any people in a in a in a position for the sake of it, I don't think that's right I think there's enough people now within football from a diverse background that have a good understanding a good knowledge or that game that should be you know flittered around it to give younger people that inspiration and confidence (1:12:54:3) that there's a pathway

*Mm*

I think that's really important because there wasn't when I was growing up and if there had been I think it would have been a lot easier for me because you know it filters down a little bit around the standing. You know people had no idea bout my religion, why I'm.... Why I



don't really drink err why my dad fasted. All these sort of things people had no idea and even questioning about the type of food you eat, why you do certain things, why you were certain things, why you... they just... people just oblivious. I think that's the case now. But I think umm as you said, we are, we live in a country that I would like to think is progressive umm and I think it would be nice to see every, every aspect of this country in terms of media, erm music all the different industries reflect that also.

*So what are these barriers then, struggles to engage people, because obviously I've interviewed a lot of people who are West Ham fans and they almost talk about it being not a white flight but when its, when it's a match day for West Ham, just these streams of white people coming to the ground. Um, But there's a little bit of lack of diversity there.*

Yeah but I think if you look at it from a different angle, if you're a west ham fan, you become a west ham fan probably, not all the time but probably your dads a west ham fan. He will become a west ham fan maybe because he's a dads a West Ham fan.

*Yeah*

So... that would make sense as to why the majority of west ham fans are white from the area (1:14:28:1) past on. My dad came to this country; he didn't know who West Ham were. So how the hell am I gonna know who West Ham were. So I think in terms of diversity, you almost have to manipulate the relationship with the club. So you've got a huge population of Asian people in East London. Their dads weren't West Ham fans, in fact probably the opposite, cos when they came to the country a lot of West Ham fans or the club having the reputation they had, they would have probably felt further away from the club than a Liverpool or Manchester United... that you just see on TV. So if you like football you're probably more likely to support Liverpool or Man United. Because you probably come across west ham fans in your local area that you didn't get on with for whatever reason. Erm but its manipulating that relationship ...a lot of the work I do now it's trying to do that. Because you've got Asian communities, not just Asian communities but you've got communities from all over the country that maybe next door to a football stadium. You go into those communities and they love football, love playing football, they got grassroots teams, they're doing coaching.

*Mm*

You ask them have you ever been to stadium to watch a game? They say no. for me that's criminal.

*Yeah*

There's a stadium a hundred yards from where you live, you want to be a football player... the best way to learn, to develop, to appreciate it is to watch but there's just no connection

*Mm*

And It does come with the family tree you know and with some communities it's about manipulating that that connection. I think clubs can do more, can do that but then from a

business perspective. If you've got more fans then you need, if your stadiums full to the brim, is that a priority? I don't think it is

*So there's a lack of engage from the football clubs themselves within the community*

I think the clubs, I don't think there's a lack of engagement because I think the clubs have great provisions to serve the local community, there's no doubt about that. But is there a provision to initiate the relationship with the club.

*Mm*

Is there a provision or that? Because that's what I do, that's my job, I go around the country working with fans and clubs and there isn't anything like that. Clubs have community arms that will go to the local community, do some workshops. They will go and do some stuff around err healthy eating and different things which is just fantastic but like, it's not like your dad growing up and telling you stories of 1966 and FA cup finals and when Steven Gerrard scored and we lost the FA...that's that, there are not provisions that clubs do that will get you that. And with me the fact that I would spend all my childhood with my mates would argue that west ham were better than Tottenham and that's all I ever heard and you just you just gain that connection and that, and that's why we don't.

*Yeah*

So it's how do you, how do you build that? Erm... you know Upton Park sold out. You know the Asian community. I think do they even know how to buy a ticket? Where to go? I remember how you do... and there's so many things that people don't even realise that they take for granted. So it's just about making people appreciate that if you like football it's there for everyone but football as a family and I'm included in that family so are West Ham so is any other club, it's about meeting these people hallway

*Mm so what individual difficulties have West Ham faced in these circumstances?*

I think obviously West Ham, like Bradford. Bradford's a great example, as a player I played at Bradford every year for about eight years. And I was always excited but Bradford because every time I'd go there on the coach, you'd turn up at the coach in erm in the stadium and everybody would be like Blood hell man, look at the amount of Asians around here. And you know some people weren't as polite as that and used a, an offensive term and tis like Christ Almighty, you're going to a stadium, Bradford's a massive stadium, massive attendance and no Asian faces.

*Mm*

And I thought to myself what? Maybe if I'm playing here, the Asian community will think oh there's an Asian player maybe well watch him. they're oblivious to the fact that who I was, so no one was there so when I got this job at the Football Supporters Federation one of the first things I did was go to Bradford

*Mm*

I actually knocked on the doors of community centres and mosques and there was a total disconnect with the community and the club. They just, they all played football loved Liverpool, Man United, West Ham and I was like what about there the community, the clubs there no... and it's the same with West Ham. It's like this big spaceship that's just there

*Mm*

And on a match day, it gets a bit busy here. Why does it get busy? You know the sort of flirted with, go and find out for yourself (1:19:15:2) some Asian community have, the proactive individuals that are in tune with English culture, but generally its erm yeah there snot really that connection. But having said that Upon Park... West Ham's a popular club. So Upton Park's always busy, always busy, so yeah if you're a club owner is that going to be a priority? If West Ham had 15,000 seats that weren't being filled every single week, I reckon there would be 100 things put in place to get those seats filled

*Mm*

And your first port of call would be the Asian community. But it's not the case is it? So ... and with the job I do... no one wants to force people to watch people

*Mm*

You wanna encourage everyone to go and watch football but when you love a club and you wanna watch a football team ro watch football, that's got to come from you. You know people can put everything in place but effectively if you wanna be there or you don't wanna be there

*Mm*

It's down to you isn't it.

*So what do the clubs needs to do then to change this?*

I think you've just got to you know open up to the community, I think you've got to be at one with the community. Don't be that spaceship, that big bowl that's there...

*Mm*

Engage I mean some of the things I've done erm I've taken kids from loads of different communities to Wembley for example. I've done a stadium tour, sat them down in schools and said do you know this place is important? England have won here in 1966. We've had XYZ and give them a little bit of history because especially for the Asian community, they've missed all that. You know. My dad had no idea about anything to do with football so he never told me about Gary Liniker, Paul Gascoigne Jeff Hurst, these these, I learnt these for myself when I was a little bit older. So erm clubs need to sort of open up and show everyone what they're about and who they are and the people might fall in love with them.

*Mm so what other sort of work have you been doing then, alongside Kick It Out?*

So alongside Kick it Out, part of Football Supporters Federation(1:21:24:1) So we are are a campaign organisation that work with football supporters challenging all the issues that they may face. So a democratic organisation, our membership is free, we've got 750,000 members. And the biggest issue is currently... since I've been at the FFS our ticket prices... extortionate prices people are paying for football and its increasing so campaigning around that. We've got a campaign called twenties plenty. We believe that you know away fans should just pay twenty pounds we've been campaigning hard, we had protests and last year the premier league capped away tickets prices to 30 pound

*Mm*

This is fantastic. Not quite there yet cos it's not quite 20 pound but all of a sudden it's its standing still and it's affordable because footballs just gone to another level. It's literally so... You're a working class man in Liverpool or Manchester city who's loved the club he's whole life. Now that an owners come in and bought the best players in the world with his wealth, ticket prices have gone through the roof.

*Mm*

People can't even support their own team.

*Yeah*

And I think people need to understand that. It's great because it's glamorous. Its world-wide, it's well known. I think we need to not forget that football without fans is nothing. Who wants to watch a game where there's no-one in the stadium. The atmosphere and like I said for me having retired, the one thing I miss about playing is the atmosphere the fans bring into the stadium. You know it's magical.

*Yeah do you think the premier leagues part of the problem then?*

100%

*The rise of TV money and everything*

TV has played a massive role in the issues. Because it's you know, it's the success of the premier league, it's not just watched in this country. It's watched by the whole world. And the TV companies want the opportunities to have it on their screens so they will pay a ridiculous amount of money for the opportunity so that goes into football

*Yeah*

And all of a sudden football can do whatever it wants because there's no other industry that has the amount of money that is has to play with and that's all well and good. That is all well and good that is all well and good and listen I love it because I love seeing the best players in the world. I love seeing Alexia Sanchez and all these sort of players coming to our country but I think we can't forget the the vital cog in all this is the fans

*Yeah*

And if you keep wanting to increase your prices people are just gang to stop going and then it's gonna become like a tourist attraction. So when you come to London, in years gone by. Come to London, go to the city, do the tourist sites, go to the theatre now it comes to London do the sites, go and watch arsenal, go and watch man united

*Yeah*

That's what tis like now, and I think we can't forget where we came from in the country, the fans made football what it is so I think we should always keep them umm you know, with all the developments keep them an essential part of the game.

*Do you think football and clubs like west ham are losing their sense of heritage particularly with you know West Ham leaving Upton Park and going to another part of Newham, Stratford. There's a lot of people there who have had those memories and and experiences and have to create new ones in a complete different area and stadium. What do you think about that?*

Yeah yeah I think its development. I think it's, I think it's a necessary evil I'm afraid. I love Upton Park and I think it's a magical place but the fact that it stopped and it –who knows what's gonna happen to Upton park. It will be demolished

*It's gonna be flats*

If Upton parks flats, the Upton Parks gonna be flats. But to me Upton Park will always have that magical aura about it because that's where all the magical things happened. However if you're in a division and your competing to stay in the division and competing with the best, the best have stadiums like arsenal. Purpose build, fill boroughs, thousands and thousands of people. Now if you are like west ham, which is probably one of the worst predicaments to be in because you're at that stage, you're a mediocre premier league team in terms of holistically. Can you really compete at the top financially? No. Are you gonna get the best players financially? Not really. You got a great fan base with heritage and tradition, but to compete with the best,

*Mm*

You've got to take the necessary steps. Those necessary steps may not be romantic but they're necessary and I think what they will do, is they will become all of those things. But that will take time err because if you don't develop as a club, it's a sink or swim scenario. And I know a lot of West Ham fans are really really, not angry but sad and I'm sad but I think they'll be better or happier being in a premier league in a new stadium than being in XXX or in league one at Upton Park.

*Mmm... so I think we're coming towards the end of the interview now, do you have any final comments or anything on West Ham that you would like to add?*

umm just from a really personal level, I think west ham... when I left west ham it was like breaking up with a girlfriend and it left a really bad taste in my heart you know, having... being bought up in a family of Tottenham supports and finding west ham err I've always



been with the club and the club will always be really really close to me. Irrelevant of where they're playing, what they're doing and umm I'm just hoping it's a new history for itself in the new Olympic stadium and I think it's got so much potential to do so I just hope if we do that as a club I'm talking as a fan now, I'm just hoping we can do it the same way we did it at Upton Park

*Mm*

And not be too erm bullyish and big brotherish to our brothers at Leyton Orient again that's another traditional club and in east London it's got a massive tradition with fans, very family orientated. Erm but were on their doorstep you know and I think, I think west hams fans and club should spare a thought for Leyton Orient because big bad brothers got a new stadium around the corner

*Yeah*

Who's to say, Leyton orient fans won't think oh I'll go and watch west ham. Erm our move don't diminish the proud history and and tradition they've built up also.

*Well thank you for being interviewed*

No problem

*Cheers.*

THE END

#### Interview Details

Name of interviewee: Anwar Uddin

Project: Stadium of Stories

Date of interview:

Language: English

Venue:

Name of interviewer: Joshua Adams

Length of interview: 88:12 // 1:28:12:9

Transcribed by: Margaret Drummond & Joshua Adams & Uzma Ravat

Archive Ref: 2016\_esch\_STOS\_18



The Parish Centre, Cardinal Heenan Centre, 326 High Road, Ilford, IG1 1QP  
0208 5533116 / [office@ech.org.uk](mailto:office@ech.org.uk) / [www.hidden-histories.org.uk](http://www.hidden-histories.org.uk)