

to me, "Les, what I'm offering you is the First Division, I'm telling you that you're good enough to make it and when you do I'll do all I can for you." Ted was a man of his word because after I'd broken through and played in the first team for a while, Chelsea paid me about £700 and Ted rounded it up to £1000. But I would have gone to Chelsea for nothing if the truth were known.

Even though I was nervous, the feeling I got when I signed for Chelsea was like walking on air. I remember going up by train to sign and there was thick smog hanging over London. I also vividly recall opening the window and taking deep lung-fulls of air as I approached Leigh-on-Sea. The smogs were dreadful in those days, there was a dirty, brown haze that hung in the air over London and we had to run down The Embankment in it when we were training at Stamford Bridge. Some players even used to wear masks to protect themselves from the fumes as they jogged.

When I first arrived at the club I was so keen during those training runs that I used to sprint flat out up at the front, which used to annoy most of the older players. They would always have a word with me to slow down because the pace I was setting meant they had to work harder. I soon learned to keep them happy. More worrying for me was the quality of Chelsea's junior side, which included the likes of Jimmy Greaves and David Cliss, who were both marvellous players even at that age. They were so good, winning by a hatful of goals every game, that I knew I would always be looking over my shoulder at Chelsea. Imagine how I felt during the Championship season when Seamus O'Connell turned up one week, nobody had ever heard of him, then he scored a hat-trick on his debut. Competition for places was always fierce.

My Blues debut came up at Newcastle, and although Ted had put me down on the team sheet to play at inside-forward, I was pushed up to centre-forward from the start. This suited me down to the ground because their centre-half only came up to my shoulder and I knew there was no way he could out-jump me. I remember how desperate I was not to let anyone down that day.

I didn't have a particularly good start to my Chelsea career to be honest, I struggled for quite some time, only making five appearances that first season and I felt out of sorts. I didn't think my new team mates knew my strengths and it took a little bit of time for them to get to know what kind of player I was - I guess I was in awe of a few of them too. But I knew that as soon as I scored a goal I would start to relax more. At Southend I'd learned that you scored just as many goals mis-kicking the ball as you do from perfect finishing, so as long as a goal came my way, any goal, things would be okay.



March 1955 – Les Stubbs dives in against Blackpool during Chelsea's 0-0 draw



Les Stubbs heads over the Arsenal goalie during a 2-0 Chelsea win