

PRESS RELEASE



Cloughie's groundsman goes back to school

A former head groundsman at Derby County's Baseball Ground, who prepared the pitch during the Rams' glory years of the 1970s, has returned to his former school to thank staff for cultivating his love of gardening.

Bob Smith, who started working at the Baseball Ground in 1967, the same year that managerial duo Peter Taylor and Brian Clough took the helm, attended Southgate School in Brighton Road.

Last week he returned to Southgate, which now makes up part of the Kingsmead School, to give a talk to the students about his career and to take a tour of the building.

Mr Smith, 73, said: "I got in touch with the school because I wanted to thank them; without staff at Southgate I would never have discovered gardening. My first lesson, in my first week, was a science lesson and we were given bulbs to plant and put in a cupboard.

"It was the first bit of gardening I ever did and I immediately fell in love with it. The school had allotments and I grew lettuce, radishes and onions and staff gave me a lot of encouragement.

"My mum died when I was five and my dad worked long hours, so I didn't have the easiest start in life. But thanks to staff at Southgate I found my niche, which led me into an incredible career which never once gave me the so-called Monday morning feeling."

Mr Smith told pupils at the school, which today provides education and support for young people with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, that he left school aged 14.

He worked at the Baseball Ground for 16 years where he became the first groundsman in the country to use an overseeding machine and install pop-up sprinklers.

Mr Smith added: "After we beat Leeds, playing on the most horrifically muddy pitch, Cloughie decided the team played better in mud. So I was asked to flood the pitch before all the important matches and block up the drains – and it seemed to work!

“During a televised match against Manchester City, we were awarded a penalty but the referee couldn’t find the penalty spot because of the mud. I had to come out with a bucket of lime and a tape measure – it was my moment of fame.

“I enjoyed every minute of my time with the club and I want to tell young people today that they should follow their dreams. Pupils will be offered all kinds of opportunities when they are at school – grasp them. You never know what those opportunities may bring.”

Last year, Mr Smith, who lives in Stretton, was presented with the IOG Everris and Syngenta Lifetime Achievement Award at the Institute of Groundsmanship Industry Awards.

Assistant head teacher Julian Lemon said: “The students were gripped by Mr Smith’s stories and were particularly interested to hear how he carved such a successful career after a difficult start in life.

“We still offer gardening lessons to students and I like to think that Mr Smith has inspired at least some of our students to think about the opportunities that are available to them.”

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