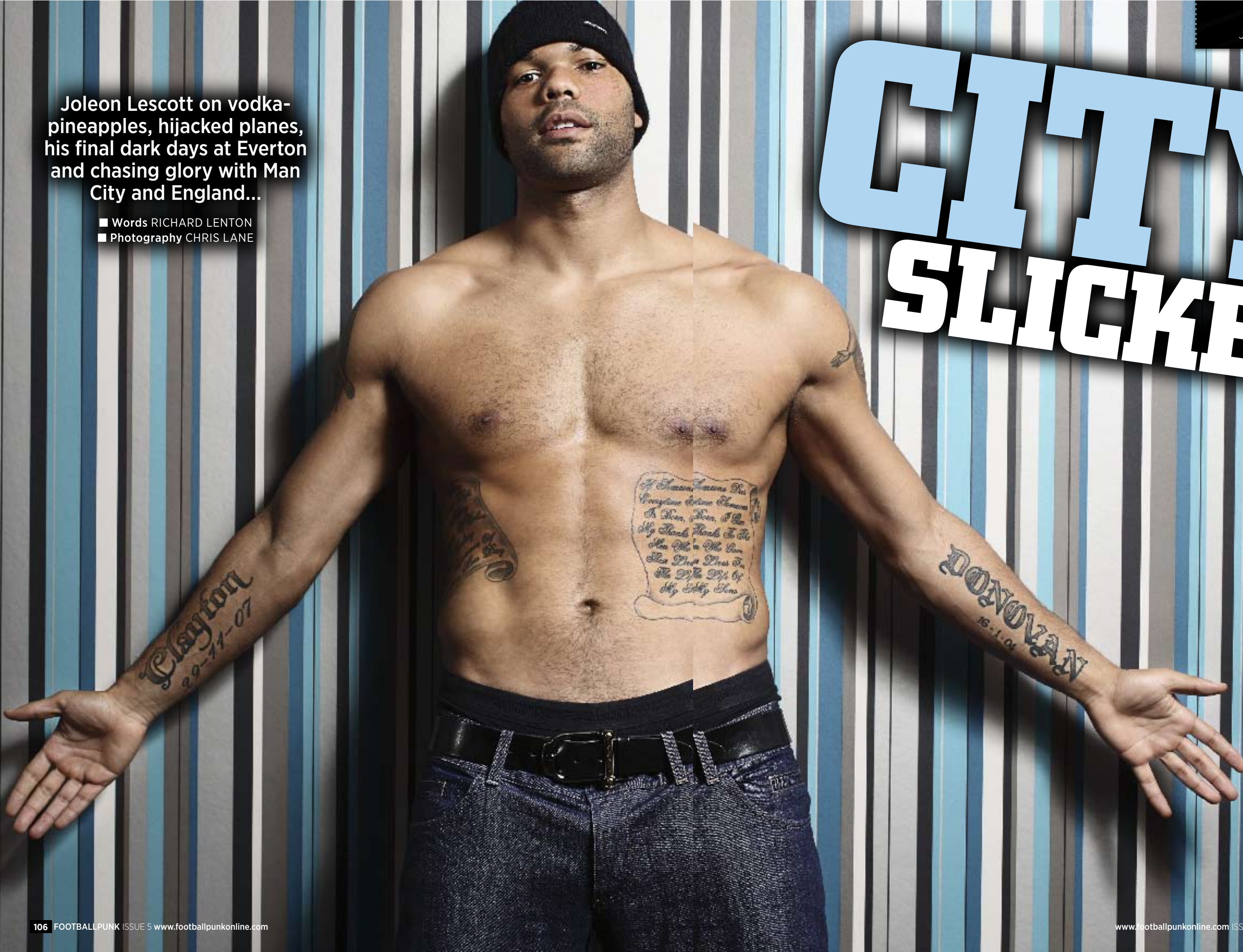


Joleon Lescott on vodka-pineapples, hijacked planes, his final dark days at Everton and chasing glory with Man City and England...

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# CITY SLICKER



# When

Joleon Lescott left Everton for Manchester City in August, the words 'greedy' and 'disloyal' were two of the most popular words being bandied about on fans' forums on the blue half of Merseyside - along with several other words of the more industrial

variety. 'Everton are just as big as Man City. It's all about money, it's disgusting' wrote one irate fan (I've corrected his spelling by the way). But does the predictable 'greedy footballer' stereotyping ring true with Lescott? After all, surely there's a difference between chasing a soiled buck and plain old ambition? Can Everton win the Premier League? Not a prayer. Can Man City? Erm... maybe. They've certainly got the potential to be a dominant force in English football over the next few years now that cash is floating around Eastlands like leaves on a breezy autumn morning. Does Lescott have more chance of ousting Rio Ferdinand as England's first choice centre back now that he's playing for City? In my humble opinion, yes he does.

At the end of October, City's press department contacted us to say that 'Joleon loves Football Punk and is keen to be interviewed'. Within 24 hours I was sat on a train bound for Manchester. Flattery gets you everywhere...

We arrange to meet in the Manchester City suite at the Malmaison Hotel. Dressed in a gingham shirt, black t-shirt, a thick woollen beanie, designer jeans and shiny black trainers, he's taller and more imposing than I imagined. Despite suffering the after-effects of a heavy cold that has dogged him for the past week, he's perfectly at ease; and why shouldn't he be? - after all, this is a man who's living the dream. Three months on from his controversial £24million move to City - a club who harbour genuine hopes of breaking the top four monopoly - and with a place in England's starting XI at next summer's World Cup a real possibility, now's a very good time to be Joleon Lescott.

After Joleon engages Football Punk photographer Chris and I with some light-hearted, getting to know one another banter, Chris accelerates straight for the money shot... "I've heard you've got some great tattoos," he says. "Can you take your top off so we can get some photos?" This could be the shortest interview on record... Can you really ask a Premier League player to do that? "Yeah, no problem," says Joleon cheerfully, as he disrobes to unveil a physique that has me reaching for the phone to renew my gym membership.

But there's far more to Joleon than big money transfers, World Cup ambitions and bulging biceps. The fact that he's even here is a miracle after he spent months in hospital recovering from an horrific car crash at the age of five. The permanent scar on his forehead is a constant reminder of not only his ordeal, but of how precious life is. A tattoo on his torso - a torso that I'm now much more familiar with - proclaims words of a similar sentiment.

Lescott is also a man of principle. After accusing then Newcastle midfielder Emre of making a racist comment towards Joseph Yobo during Everton's clash with the Magpies back in 2006, Lescott was incensed when the full might of the Turk's legal team crushed his testimony by picking up on a discrepancy in the evidence given by himself and Tim Howard. Howard accused Emre of calling Yobo 'a fucking nigger', while Lescott's written statement said that Emre had used the words 'fucking negro'. Lescott insists that the incident was conveniently swept under the carpet, and he now refuses to actively involve himself with the FA's Kick It Out campaign. "A couple of times a season I have to wear a t-shirt, but that's it. I won't do anything else," he says. Joleon Lescott ain't your average Premier League footballer...





**Thanks for getting out of your sick-bed for us Joleon, I know you're full of cold.**

"There's no sick-bed, I took the kids to school this morning! I like to help my fiancé out when I can."

**Fair play. Do you get plenty of attention from the other parents?**

"There's been a little bit more since I joined City, but usually the parents are quite quiet and keep themselves to themselves. I like to go there, drop my boy off, watch him play for a bit and then get away."

**Is your boy into football?**

"He can't get enough. He's got Manchester United kits, Man City kits, Barcelona kits - he doesn't understand that he needs to pick one and stick with it!"

**You can't let him be a United fan though, surely?**

"Er, no, we won't be renewing that kit! He's a big fan of Wayne Rooney though. Last season when I had to meet Wayne to give him some Everton tickets, my boy was just staring at him, really star-struck. It was the first time I'd seen him so quiet."

**What's a typical night in the Lescott household?**

"I like to cook. I'm not blessed with a natural physique; I have to watch what I eat so I tend to cook most meals so that I know what's going into my body. If I wasn't cooking I'd be in the kitchen eating rubbish!"

**If I'm coming round to your place for dinner, what would you cook?**

"Bolognese; a healthy option with turkey mince. My two sons will eat anything as long as they get a cake after. I've got to get them some Krispy Kremes this afternoon. Last time they ate them they were sick everywhere!"

**Nice... What would you all do after the head of the household's culinary masterpiece?**

"We'll watch TV, a film or play games. Normal stuff."

**Okay then, what's your favourite TV show?**

"Oh God... *Gossip Girl!*"

**What the hell is that?!**

"It's an American teen drama; it's my partner's favourite, but I do enjoy it. I really like *Masterchef* - I always get it on series link. I love *Hell's Kitchen* as well."

**Favourite film?**

"The Friday trilogy with Ice Cube."

**Are you into your gadgets?**

"Not so much now. I just got my Xbox fixed last week though - it'd been broken for a month. I love the Tiger Woods game - that and Pro Evo. I can't play golf in real life; I wouldn't even know how to hold a club, but I'd fancy myself against anybody on that or Pro Evo."

**Let's talk real football! What's the vibe like at City?**

"It's great. I'm really enjoying it. A lot was said in the press at the start of the season about egos clashing, but everyone (new signings) here has come from big clubs and want to win things. We're all ambitious."

**Exciting times ahead then?**

"Definitely. It's really gelled and there's a real sense of excitement among the lads. We know that we can achieve things - not just in the future, but straight away. The fans are buzzing as well. They're enjoying watching

huge names like Carlos Tevez and Emmanuel Adebayor as much as I'm enjoying playing with them."

**Have you noticed any similarities in the management styles of Mark Hughes and David Moyes? From the outside looking in, they appear quite similar.**

"They're probably total opposites to be fair! David takes a lot of the training at Everton, whereas the gaffer is at the training ground every day but isn't hands-on in every session. We've got Eddie (Niedzwiecki) and Mark Bowen who take a lot of sessions and dictate what we do, but if we need to be told something then the gaffer is there to tell us. He's always there in the background watching, like a Big Brother kind of thing."

**I imagine Mark Hughes feels under pressure this season, knowing he has to deliver...**

"Yes, but as players we all feel that kind of pressure as well. You want to be under pressure to do the right things, you want to have to win things."

*It was the desire to win silverware that prompted Lescott to leave Everton in the summer after three years on Merseyside. However, his subsequent move to City was protracted to say the least... On August 11, in an attempt to hasten his dream move, Lescott handed in a transfer request, which was immediately turned down. Four days later, Everton, with Lescott still at the heart of the back four, were annihilated 6-1 by an irresistible Arsenal side on the opening day of the*

**"THE PILOT ACCIDENTALLY HIT THE HIJACK BUTTON. WHEN WE LANDED A SWAT TEAM RAN ON WITH GUNS AND WE PUT OUR HANDS UP. I THOUGHT, 'IS THIS FOR REAL?'"**

*Premier League season. To describe the next 10 days in Lescott's life as 'topsy-turvy' would be like describing Marlon King as 'a rather silly boy'...*

**August 17:** *Lescott, upset by his performance against Arsenal, trains on his own in the Everton gym, even though it's the players' day off.*

**August 18:** *Trains as normal with the first team.*

**August 19:** *Told by the manager that his attitude has been poor, and that he will have to train on his own until the end of the transfer window. Fitness coach Steve Round told not to work with him, then has to back-track 15 minutes later and monitor Lescott in the gym for health and safety reasons!*

**August 20:** *Lescott virulently booed by Everton fans after taking his seat in the crowd for the Europa League clash with Sigma Olomouc.*

**August 25:** *Signs five-year deal for Man City after Everton accept £24 million bid.*

**Do you feel bitter at the way you were treated by Everton after City's interest in you leaked out?**

"It's just one of those things. The biggest thing for me was the manager saying my attitude had been poor and that I had let down the boys, which was so inaccurate. I pride myself on my attitude. I work hard every day in training and in every game. I'd hate anyone to think I had let down the boys. I'm just glad to get on with things now and play my football for City."

**Is it true that, after David Moyes told you to train on your own, you tried to train with the reserves but then he stopped you doing that?!**

"Yeah that's all true. It's not nice, but he was my manager so I had to respect his decision. I left his office (after he was told to train on his own) and went straight outside to where the reserves were training. I explained that I wasn't training with the first-team squad and asked if I could join in. They said 'no problem', but then, about 20 minutes later, the first team came out and the gaffer saw me and called me over. He forced me to walk off the pitch. But fortunately for me that part of my life is over now. I enjoyed my time there and I've still got a lot of great friends there, but I'm excited about my times ahead now."

**Can you tell me about your initiation at Everton?**

"It was painful. We had to go to Dallas for pre-season and every new player had to sing a song in front of the lads. It was the closest I've come to pulling a sickie. I knew the song I wanted to sing but I didn't know the words. I had to download the lyrics from the internet and I was practicing in my room before we went out. Joseph Yobo was the host of the night - he's a really good freestyler. Anyway, he called me up and I had to stand on a fountain in the restaurant and sing Wonderwall. Thankfully the boys knew the words and joined in. Tim Howard was the only player to pick a song they didn't know the words to - it was some obscure number."

**When you flew to Dallas, it was the first time you'd been on a plane to the US since your post 9/11 drama on a flight to New York - in fact, you vowed never to visit America again...**

"I was with Lee Naylor (both were with Wolves at the time) and our girlfriends. We were separated because there weren't enough seats on the plane to sit together, but all

I wanted to do was sleep anyway. Part way through the flight, unbeknown to us, the pilot accidentally hit the hijack

button, so the airport at New York told us we couldn't land. Suddenly we saw fighter jets outside the window of the plane and they guided us down. When we landed there were four black vans and a SWAT team; they jumped onto the plane with guns and everyone put their hands up. I remember thinking 'Is this for real? They ran down the aisles and checked the toilets. It wasn't until we all got off I thought 'Imagine if there was somebody on there'. Obviously it was soon after 9/11 and that's why there was so much of a panic."

**Did you get any compensation?**

"They gave us a free 50 per cent off voucher for our troubles, but I never got round to using it!"

**America's not your favourite place then...?!**

"I love America now. I've been to LA a couple of times, Florida with the family and New York. I'm a big shopper. They've got some great things out there - clothes especially - which you can't get anywhere else."

**Where else do you shop?**

"High street, online, or anywhere I think I can get something that other people won't have."

**I'm an ebay man. Do you dabble?**

"No. A friend showed me a couple of bits he got off there and I was thinking, 'They don't look original mate!' I stick to the official websites."

**Who's the best dressed player at City?**

"I'm up there! Wayne Bridge, Nigel De Jong as well."

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Early days at Wolves; his final, ill-fated appearance for Everton in August; signing for Manchester City and strutting his stuff for England against Brazil in Qatar



**Based purely on his taste in cars, is Stephen Ireland the worst dressed?**

"He's quite cool to be fair, but he tends to wear the same trainers no matter what he's wearing and sometimes it doesn't go. I haven't told him that though! Micah Richards is hands down the worst dressed. He wears anything - he must get dressed in the dark! He's got so many clothes but it's all so random."

**Does Stephen Ireland get any stick about his cars? He's had some shockers...**

"Not really. I've only been at City a fairly short time so I'm not going to cane him about his cars. It's not hurting anyone. You only live once."

**You mentioned Wayne Bridge earlier. Do you see him as a big rival to you for getting on the plane to South Africa? You're both versatile defenders who can play left back...**

"Hopefully both of us will go. Bridgey is an out and out left-back; I've played there before but I don't see myself as a left-back. If needed I can play there, but England have got enough left backs so they don't need me."

**What's it like to play under Fabio Capello?**

"Good. He knows every player - their strengths and weaknesses. He goes into great detail preparing for our opposition and has great confidence in us no matter what the situation is."

**He bollocked Emile Heskey when he saw him texting at the dinner table. I can imagine he's quite a disciplinarian?**

"He dictates what he wants and the boys abide by that. He's quite strict but it's not outrageous. We all have to eat together, but it's not a problem - it's good to bond like that."

**Have you had any dreams about the World Cup?**

"Yeah, every player wants to be involved in the World Cup. If I can play consistently well for Man City then hopefully I can be involved."

*World Cup dreams seemed a long way off back in 1987 when a five-year-old Lescott was struck by a car as he stepped into the road outside his primary school in Quinton, Birmingham. His mother could only look on in horror from the family car as her son was dragged along the road. His head injuries were so severe that there appeared little chance of survival, but, after undergoing major surgery and a succession of subsequent operations, he made a full recovery. However, the scar on his forehead is a permanent reminder of his brush with death.*

**You're a down to earth guy who seems to have a great perspective on life. Does much of that stem from surviving such a horrific accident when you were younger?**

"I don't know, probably. Because I was so young when it happened I wouldn't know if it's made me the person I am today. I've got great family and friends and the way I am is because of them. I feel lucky. A lot of people have come off a lot worse. I have a scar but I have nothing to worry about. I know there was a time when my mum and dad didn't think it would turn out as good as it has done, put it that way, but thankfully the doctors worked their magic. I was in hospital for a few months and it was difficult for my mum, dad and the whole family, but I think maybe it helped make us the tight unit we are today. My family would never let me get big headed or get carried away with myself, which I wouldn't want to be anyway."

**Your brother, Aaron, is a big hero of yours. Is he still at Bristol Rovers?**

"Yeah I was speaking to him this morning actually. He was going through his next few games with me - they've got quite a tough run. We must speak about three times a day. Every morning, because he has to travel down to Bristol, I get a call at five to nine when

he's in the car and I'm just dropping my little boy off at school. It's a morning ritual. He was a big inspiration; to see him playing made me want to turn professional myself. We're very close."

**Why did you leave Wolves in your early teens?**

"I was finding the training and the professionalism difficult - I wanted to relax and go out with my friends a bit more. I felt it was more important to enjoy football than anything else so I played in the local Saturday and Sunday leagues with my mates. But as I got into my last year at school I realised football was what I wanted to do. We had a good school team so me and about eight of the boys went for a trial at Derby County, and three of us got through. I ended up being offered a YTS at Derby, but by that stage Wolves were also offering a YTS because my parents had kept in touch with them. I chose Wolves because I would have had to move out of home to play for Derby and my mum wasn't ready for that!"

**After establishing yourself at Wolves and helping them win promotion to the Premiership, you were injured for the whole of the 2003-04 season. Did you ever think 'I've missed the boat here'?**

"At the time, yeah. It was horrible, but touch wood, I haven't really been injured again. It was frustrating - I'm not a nice person when I'm not playing. But getting injured helped me get mentally stronger and more focused on what I had to do to get to the top. I still don't take anything for granted though."

**You seem like you take everything in your stride. Is there anything that makes you angry?**

"Nothing makes you as angry as your other half!"

**You're brave saying that! Are you a beer, wine or spirits man?**

"Spirits. I never drink in the house but if I do go out it's spirits - I like Grey Goose vodka. I drink it with pineapple juice."

**What?**

"Everyone says that, but you should try it! I've converted many a man to vodka and pineapple. It goes down easy. Most of the Everton boys gave me stick but I managed to convert them to it. You don't get a banging headache like you do off beer."

**Where do you go out if you get the opportunity to let your hair down?**

"I haven't been out with the City boys yet; everybody tends to look at the bigger picture now as there's more to lose. You can go out as often as you like when you've retired."

You have to ask yourself 'Is it worth it for one night?' I'm not saying I don't go out at all though - when I was injured on the last international break I went out with friends and family who I hadn't seen for a while."

**What's the most you've ever spent on a round?**

"When I signed for Everton I took friends and family out for a meal and drinks. The bill was about £1,200."

**Any ideas what you will do after football?**

"I like fashion so I'd like to get involved in that. Music as well - I'm into hip hop and r'n'b and my dad's a DJ. He's into old reggae, all the vintage tunes, and he's still getting the vinyl out. I've got decks that need to be set up, they've been packed away since I've been up here. When I was growing up I was into garage so that was the stuff I used to be on the decks with. But I'm dreading the day I've got to finish playing football to be honest. If I can't play at the top level I'll go down the leagues and play for as long as I can. Hopefully I'll still have the drive to do it - but I'm willing to play in any league in any country. I just love playing football."

**"MICAH RICHARDS IS HANDS DOWN THE WORST DRESSED. HE WEARS ANYTHING - HE MUST GET DRESSED IN THE DARK! HIS CHOICES ARE JUST SO RANDOM."**

