

# METRO UNITED ALUMNI FOCUSED ON ENGLAND CAREER

After being born in the U.S., Frank Simek moved to England when he was 12 and started living a soccer players American dream, developing his skills in the Arsenal youth system. Simek took a moment to speak with **Soccer365's Andrew Rogers** about moving to England, pulling on an Arsenal jersey, and more...

**AR: It's often been said that it's St. Louis, Missouri but Millstadt, Illinois is where you're actually from.**

Simek: Yeah that's my hometown, when everybody asks me I usually say St. Louis because that's the big city and everybody knows where it is but 'Stadt's actually my hometown it's a little town in southern Illinois maybe about 3000 people in it.

**AR: OK so a town of 3000 people, where about is soccer in a young American's life in that situation?**

Simek: To be honest I played soccer since I can't even remember, it was one of the first sports I started playing. When I was real young I played that and baseball was the other big one I'd play soccer one half of the year and baseball the other half. Then obviously as I got older I started to focus more on soccer.

**AR: So would it be fair to say then, that football wasn't the be all and end all for you; there were still other avenues for you?**

Simek: Up to a certain point, up until about 12 years old that is when I really started to concentrate on soccer and that is when I really wanted to become a professional soccer player. Baseball is still something that I like to do, I still go to the batting cages or whatever but I'd say that from 12 onwards I really focused on soccer.

**AR: Ok so is that when you came to England?**

Simek: It is yeah, we moved over here as a family and of course living in England it's hard not to get immersed in the culture over here, and obviously baseball its not played anywhere so I'm sure that had a lot to do with it actually.

**AR: So take us through the steps, you come over to live and then you become part of the Arsenal set up and that is any young players dream. How did that come about?**

Simek: Actually when we moved over here as a family I played for a Sunday league team and the coach of that was Tony Gale who was an ex-West Ham defender. When we moved over he knew some people at Arsenal and he got me trials there because he was the coach of my Sunday league team. That was when I was about 12 and I was with them from around 12 to about 20.

**AR: At 12 years old did that shock or surprise you, was it intimidating? Obviously you were too young to appreciate it but at the same time did you realise the situation because this was a big occurrence for you.**

Simek: Yeah it was, it was a big deal I mean previously we were here about two years and I knew all about Arsenal and how big of a thing soccer was over here. But to grow up in the Arsenal youth system that produced some good players it's not an easy club to progress through because there are so many good players. But when you're working day in day out with those players it helps you tons as well.

**AR: A large number of our readers for some strange reason support Arsenal. Can you tell them about the Arsene Wenger youth set up or the Arsenal set up?**

Simek: I think you have to look at it as one of the best in the world, I think what Arsene Wenger has done there is nothing short of spectacular. I think if you look at the amounts of money he spends as well, compared to the likes of Chelsea, just bringing people through and the scouting networks that they have.

Looking back just being part of that youth set up maybe that's not a good thing for you because they are always looking to bring players in, trying to unearth the next gem from wherever. But that's what makes them such a good club as well you know, they bring in players like Fabregas who they didn't pay any money for and what he has done there to develop the young payers that he has brought in, Gael Clichy and players like that, he has done a fantastic job.

**AR: What did it do for your game, playing with the world's best?**

Simek: I think it really helped it. When I was trying to break through I was 18,19,20 and I think I made my debut when I was 19 in the Carling Cup. It's tough though it's really tough to try and get into that team with so many world class players, and obviously they are always looking to bring in players to challenge you and to make the team better. But looking back it's a good learning experience to see how things are done there and also to work with world class players.

**AR: Ok so what are your thoughts on the current argument, obviously England didn't make it this year, there's a lot of talk about more English guys being in the top sides. What's your take as an insider?**

Simek: I think it's tough you know, I talked about it earlier, they are always trying to bring new players in that are challenging you but if you're good enough at Arsenal you're going to play. Personally speaking I think it's not because you're English that you're not going to play, if you were good enough I think you'd be playing.

I mean you look at the players that he has brought in like Fabregas, Clichy and Senderos they have done well and people like that that have proved that they are good enough. We is going to doubt Arsene Wenger with the track record that he has got to bringing young players through. To say that there are too many foreigners at Arsenal, you know if they are good enough they will play.

**AR: What about as young lad, you've left the environment your used to, how did you cope with those kinds of things, I mean obviously it's not the be all and end all but your not in your most natural environment.**

Simek: Yeah right, and obviously the most important thing as well is that you're living away from your family, people that are closest to you I think that was probably the hardest thing. But if you really want to make it, really want to do well then I think you've got to make some sacrifices and that was just one of those sacrifices that had to be made. If you look at a professional footballers career you're not going to go more than about 35 you've got the rest of your life to go live in America, you know, obviously you're going to miss those things growing up when your 16,17,18 but in the long run if you do make a decent career out of it it'll be worth it.

**AR: And of course you pulled on the Arsenal shirt in the Carling Cup, there are millions of people in the States dreaming, day in day out, that they could do that, can you describe that?**

Simek: Yeah, it was probably the highlight of career to be honest, one of two I think. To pull on the Arsenal shirt was something special I just wish it could have happened more than once but it wasn't to be and obviously I moved on but just to pull on the shirt as an 18,19 year old, to see your name on the back of an Arsenal jersey and to play at Highbury was something I'm never going to forget for the rest of my life: a great experience.

**AR: You went from one massive club to another massive club in Sheffield Wednesday, how did that move come about?**

Simek: I was out of contract with Arsenal a couple of season ago and I was looking for a new club and to be honest with you there wasn't a lot on. Sheffield Wednesday gave me the opportunity just to go on their pre-season tour to Scotland.

I accepted and after the pre-season tour I sat down and signed a contract with them, it all happened pretty quickly, but I knew Sheffield Wednesday, I knew that it was a good big club and I was more than happy to sign.

It meant dropping down a level but it also meant getting a lot more playing time than I had been getting.

**AR: You talk about it like just walking down the road, but in pre-season when you step on that bus with those players there is a huge amount of competition and in that trial environment it is tough isn't it?**

Simek: Oh without a doubt especially at that time, I was out of contract with Arsenal so I didn't have a soccer contract and I was looking for a club.

When I did get invited to go on the tour I desperately wanted to be offered a contract and obviously there were other guys on trial there as well, and you had the guys there already signed up who were in your same position, but that's football, that's how it is.

**AR: What would you tell the fans in America about Sheffield Wednesday?**

Simek: They are a massive club, you look at our stadium and it's a premiership stadium, our fan base is a premiership fan base and all that's missing is for us to be in the premiership.

I think the finances aren't there yet you know, there is still a massive debt at Sheffield Wednesday but if we can manage to keep progressing over the next couple of years I think we could be building something special.

We've got the main things the stadium and the fan base and hopefully we can get there in the next few years.

**AR: The other thing is that you're now in Sheffield, I mean do you eat meat pies, and drink bitter?**

Simek: Not yet no, but I like Sheffield, obviously I was down in London before and London is such a huge city. Sheffield is a bit smaller and it's a good city to live in, right now I'm really enjoying myself.

**AR: Let's talk about that first season and the relegation situation. Obviously in US sports you can do badly but you don't go down. What is a relegation dog fight like?**

Simek: That first relegation season was my first season as a professional playing first team football and it turned out that we were in a relegation dog-fight until the last 2 or 3 games of the season when we finally got out of it.

But there is a lot of pressure you know, if you go down the money is just not going to be there, the fans are going to start going away again and it's a lot a lot of pressure. But looking back on that I think it was good because its not every season your going to get into a relegation dog-fight, and it teaches you a lot about the game and how to go about playing the game.

**AR: But one season on you're involved all the way and you're only three or four points away from the play-offs, it must have been agonizing?**

Simek: It was yeah, it was very disappointing especially as we lost at Birmingham and that was a game we needed to win. But to be so close and to miss out was a huge disappointment but at the same time I think we showed that we are a good team and the improvement from the season before was so dramatic that it was a good season for us.

**AR: Of course those performances over the season were noticed by EPL scouts and managers and then there was this talk of a move to Everton. Can you tell us about that?**

Simek: There were quite a few rumours over the summer, I was actually away with the national team at the time so I was kind of out of the loop, but there was the Everton things and I think there was a couple of other names thrown about as well. But at the end of the day nothing came of it, I honestly didn't take too much notice of it, I couldn't as I was traveling around the country with the national team. But it is nice to hear your name linked with clubs like Everton because they are a premiership team and a top six team in that league. If you're getting mentioned with the likes of them then you have to be doing something good.

**AR: Lets talk about the international side of things, your first international call up, did you get a phone call, did the club tell you, how did that work?**

Simek: I actually found out when somebody from Sheffield Wednesday called me and then I got an e-mail that same day from the US soccer people. To be honest I wouldn't say I was expecting it but I was hoping, I was hoping I was going to get called in. Thankfully I did get called in and it was last season and I made my debut against Guatemala.

**AR: And how was it at the Gold Cup?**

Simek: The Gold Cup, yeah that was good. It was over the summer and it was a really good experience to be involved with but that was the first tournament that I was involved in with the US and to win something was very special.

**AR: Of course Soccer 365 has the midas touch when it comes to people being called up to the US national team. Has Bob Bradley had a chat with you recently? What did he say?**

Simek: He just said that I'm still in his thoughts, but we don't have an international for little while now but you know, I'm always hoping to be called up I want to play as many times as I can for the US.

**AR: And of course there is always going to be transfer speculation, now I don't know if you've heard but apparently there is going to be an MLS franchise in St Louis, they will be looking for some of the big names who have come out of the area, is that something that interests you?**

Simek: Not at this moment in time. I think I want to stay over here and try and get in the Premier league with somebody. But I did hear there was going to be a team out there, I still know some soccer people from St Louis and they are telling me all about it, but its cool St Louis is a great soccer city.

**AR: Finally, the NFL who is it going to be?**

Simek: I think you've got to go with the Patriots. I'm just a bit disappointed because the Rams had a bad year. But to look at the Patriots they are just running over people; you can't argue with that.

**AR: You can't argue with that, and we wouldn't want to argue with Sheffield Wednesday getting promoted this year either.**

Simek: Yeah I hope so, I hope so. I think the odds for the Patriots to win the Super Bowl those are better odds than us getting promoted but we will give it a good shot. We proved last year that we weren't too far off and hopefully this year we can do something.