It was a day of anticipation. What would he be like, what would he say, and just as importantly, would I get that coveted signature? Those were my thoughts as I travelled from Southampton to Birmingham.

It was at the Hyatt Hotel on Broad Street where I waited for the West Bromwich Albion legend Cyrille Regis. As my recording equipment was placed on the table, I realised the stature of the man. After all it was he who set up the location, and where else than a five star hotel complete with piano backing tune for our meeting.

After a nervous wait, Cyrille strolled in complete with tracksuit bottoms, an Adidas jacket and a bobble hat. Instantly I was relaxed. A man who treats everybody equally – this is what I thought as he walked in as if casually walking around the house.

As we met and shook hands, a family spotted him at the table next to us and said politely, ‘hello Cyrille’. As I expected, the big man chatted with the family of four, amusing the young boy who sat in awe watching this football hero.

I had to wait a further ten minutes as Cyrille spoke to the Manchester United goalkeeping coach – United were staying that night on the eve of their match with Aston Villa – but eventually he came over. As he lay down on the couch next to my microphone, he gave off the vibe that he was as adept as any interviewee.

The 53-year-old was a fine footballer who showed audacity, strength and a great eye for goal. His career centred across the Midlands; pulling on the shirt for West Brom, Coventry City, Aston Villa and Wolves.

Along the way, Cyrille managed to break the racism barrier aimed at black players and was the catalyst for their inclusion in British football.

Between 1977 and 1984 Cyrille scored 112 goals for West Brom, his first professional club. His involvement with the Baggies is still celebrated today. A team in which “The Three Degrees” were born – that of Cyrille, Laurie Cunningham and Brendan Batson, formed a dynamic threesome along with stand-out players such as Tony ‘Bomber’ Brown, Derek Statham and Willie Johnston.

Cyrille admits he holds West Brom closest to his heart and always checks their result first on a Saturday afternoon. He came close to winning the title at the Hawthorns with that talented side but his only trophy came for Coventry in 1987 when the Sky Blues beat Tottenham Hotspur in the FA Cup Final at Wembley.

That trophy success was a long time coming, and something Cyrille certainly didn’t think about when he was playing in the non-league for Hayes. Back in 1976, it was all about living an honest lifestyle, mixing football with hard graft.

Cyrille said: “Non-league is a totally different environment. I was an electrician and it was an appreciation of working eight hours a day and then playing football.

“It was great in terms of character building. But it also gave me an education. If it doesn’t go well for you as a football player, you have something to fall back on.”

Regis looked eager to tell me about the differences between his Hayes career and the modern-day youth player.

“The modern player that comes from the academy doesn’t have the appreciation of working and playing. They haven’t got the contrast of what I could turn around and call real work and playing football at the same time.”

The French Guiana born player scored 51 goals in two seasons in non-league. His first season was spent at Molesey before he moved to Hayes. After being spotted there, it was a quick transition and suddenly at 19 years old, Regis was signing his first professional contract with West Brom.

But as a side, the Baggies didn’t win anything despite having such great players. However, Cyrille is quick to defend his time there when questioned about the failure to win anything.

“I don’t have any regrets. As a young kid you make decisions at the time. I had a fantastic seven years at West Brom. Coming from the building site and playing top-flight football was just a joy.

“I had some great managers in Big Ron and Jonny Giles and travelled the world. There was never any burn-out.”

Regis spent seven years at West Brom and enjoyed his best form as a Premiership player. But despite his ability and goal scoring credentials, he only received five England caps.

He said: “It’s one of the conundrums in football; it’s subjective. Back in the 70’s and 80’s there were a lot more English players playing in the Premiership. You had to get past the likes of Kevin Keegan, Bob Latchford, Trevor Francis and Peter Withe, who were all strikers.

“Nowadays, there are only 30-40% English players. It’s easier to get called up for England. Myself, I played at the highest level for five years but didn’t get a cap in that time. The dynamics have totally changed in terms of number of players in different positions.”

His England caps made him very proud, and it is obviously the highest echelon to play for your country.

Something Cyrille treasures just as much is his FA Cup winners medal. I sat and listened as he took me through the Cup run in 87.

“Moving to Coventry was a poor decision. It was an emotional one and my form dipped for about two years.”

Cyrille now looks back and believes he could have achieved more at West Brom, or even moved to a more successful club than Coventry. Despite the FA Cup win, Regis was frustrated at his sudden dip in form and subsequently getting picked for the national team was a thing of the past.

But eventually things began to turn for himself and the club.

“It wasn’t until John Sillett and George Curtis took over that the ethos changed. They threw a lot of work into team spirit and togetherness and the style of play changed under them.

“The strength of the side was the team spirit. John and George tweaked the team and we enjoyed training. The laughter, the stories and the buzz built friendships. We spent more time as a group than we did with our wives and girlfriends.”

During the run, Cyrille was part of some the most enthralling games of his career.

“There were some fantastic games. We beat Manchester United 1-0 with a scrappy goal and beat Sheffield Wednesday in the quarter-final. We then returned to Hillsborough to play Leeds and beat them. It was bittersweet for me because I should have scored a hatrick that game, but I knew we were going to Wembley; the first time in Coventry’s 104 year history.

“There were 40,000 plus at Hillsborough and coming back on the coach was brilliant. But there’s nothing worse than going to a final and losing.

“I was the biggest name in our squad. Our final opponents Tottenham had international stars: Glenn Hoddle, Chris Waddle, Ossie Ardiles, Chris Hughton, Ray Clemence and Nico Klasen. That year Clive Allen scored 50 odd goals, they were on fire. It was the poor boys against the rich boys.

“But we had belief. Prior to the final we beat them in the league at Highfield Road. We knew we could beat them.

At this point, he pauses for breath. Perhaps he needs to re-focus before channelling his emotions on the day he laid his hands on the famous cup.

“Running out in front of 90,000 fans is one of the scariest things anybody can do. There is expectancy and pressure. On top of that, we went 1-0 down after just two minutes. I’m sure commentators are thinking ‘told you so’, and one thing you don’t want is to be embarrassed 4 or 5-0.

“We got back to 1-1 then it was 2-1 at half-time. Keith Houchen scored a classic goal that was sold everywhere for the equaliser at 2-2. We went into extra time and fought through the pain barrier. We showed our strength, all be it through Gary Mabbutt’s knee – the Spurs defender scoring an own goal - to win the game.”

It was then that Cyrille explained the extrinsic rewards of a close knit city winning something as important as this.

He said: “You cannot experience that joy and emotion anywhere else. And you don’t understand what football means to the community until you win something big. There was something like 200,000 fans on the streets the next day during the coach celebration.

“It makes you feel so proud of the area. 25 years later, Coventry is still living on it now and it just brings it home to you what football means to the community.”

I was overwhelmed by such a compelling story; Coventry were an average team but pulled together through sheer camaraderie.

But just as the strugglers of the modern Coventry City have to do, it was time to move on. This meant talking modern issues in the game.

In Regis’ playing days, players and fans would talk and drink together after matches. He rounded up his team mates and headed to the local pub after a win or a loss to socialise with the fans. Such a situation is alien nowadays, and Cyrille opened up about the Premier League.

“The modern top-flight is brilliant. It’s a great model, it’s sexy and it’s international. Everybody wants to watch it and that’s why Sky has put £3billion into it.

“But the one thing about modern football that is not the best is the relationship between players and fans. It’s getting wider and wider because of money. Fans can’t watch a training session and there’s no access to players.

“We were more of a working-class type of player and nowadays they get one or two million a year and don’t go to the local pubs. It’s all off-guard and players are off-guard too; talking to the media and fans. How you bridge that, I really don’t know.”

As the piano softened its sounds, the subject in the interview chopped and changed.

When Cyrille retired the public were disappointed to see such a figure leave the game.

Cyrille went into coaching, landing a job in the youth and reserve set-ups at West Brom. But he gave it up relatively quickly; just four years in fact that he stood on the sidelines.

But whilst others slip away into the wilderness, Cyrille has continued his involvement in football but on a different level. He now acts as a football agent for the Stellar Group and is very driven to help young players, forming a lot of his ideas from his playing days when agents didn’t exist.

He can use his name as an advantage over other agents because parents of young players relate to Cyrille.

“I would say when I was younger I wish I had had an agent. You might be a very good footballer but it doesn’t mean you’re a good negotiator. How do you know how much you’re worth and what your value is. An agent knows your market forces and we try and maximise a player.

“You have on average seven years to maximise yourself financially and I don’t see an employment agency at a football club.

“The hardest part of our job is to find clubs for rejected players; they just let you go. We pick up the slack and encourage the boys, getting them trials and getting them back on the ladder.”

Personal problems can severely disrupt a players career and Regis is a true believer that an agent should do more than just oversee football matters.

“We make sure they live their life right. We make sure their finances are right and the internationals get good PR and commercial revenue. We sort out their cars and any issues they have off the pitch or even on the field. We are someone they can trust and have throughout their career.”

Cyrille asks his players what else they are good at. Do his players have to re-train after their careers? He helps his players to re-acclimatise after their careers and gain valuable skills in order not turn to alcohol and twiddle their thumbs.

Cyrille is heavily religious, openly stating he is a born again Christian. It was during difficult family times that his mother found God, and Cyrille has experienced a similar thing back when he was playing.

He is just as known for his charity work. An honourable man, Cyrille spends a lot of time during the week supporting charities such as Water Aid and Christian Aid.

He also inspired and helps to support nephew Jason Roberts’s ‘The Jason Roberts Foundation’; encouraging youngsters to get involved in sport.

“My wife Julia and I decided four years ago to align ourselves to a charity. Water is a global commodity and it’s a United Nations right for clean water. We contacted Water Aid and wanted to actually see how they spend their money.

“We went for a week to Ethiopia to some of the towns and villages and saw how they help the local community and how the towns manage and sustain the water, so when the workers leave the locals can work the pumps correctly.

“Kids are happier and mums don’t have to travel for hours to collect water, and instead they can stay at home and open cottage industries.

“Training and education transforms a region. Going there and coming back to England to raise awareness and money is massive. What I do now is speeches and the money will go to Water Aid.

“This year we did a Coventry against Tottenham football match – a re-run of the Cup Final to support water aid - so it’s two fold really, in terms of raising awareness and raising money for the Water Aid charity.”

Charity work is fundamental to Cyrille’s life and he believes massively in it. In fact, when Cyrille was awarded an MBE in 2008, it was for services to charity rather than football.

Whilst he is talking passionately, we finish on a more controversial topic; black managers in football.

Back in the 70’s and 80’s, Cyrille was the catalyst and fundamental reason for the introduction of black players in the British game. He was a pioneer player for others of his race getting involved and believing they can play in the game too.

Regis has his own views on why Chris Hughton of Birmingham City and Chris Powell of Charlton Athletic are the only two black managers in the Football League.

“I think football mirrors society. You go to the banks, NHS, police, and you don’t see black people in management. You don’t see black people in administration in football and there are all sorts of reasons and levels for that.

“As a black player in the 70’s, by my performances I could get in there and break barriers. For instance, we supposedly couldn’t handle the cold weather, we were ‘fancy Dan’s’, too laid back etc, and we broke those barriers. And when it turns to managing it goes to ‘they can’t manage’.

“It is tough and Powell and Hughton are doing a great job. But they need to be successful and not just be a manager. By doing well for their respective clubs, they are breaking stereotypic views of black people in management.

“But what you really want to go and do is ask employment agencies who give other people jobs why they aren’t giving management jobs to black people. Is it prejudice, do they not have their badges? It’s difficult from our perspective to self-analyse.

“In the 70’s when we played it wasn’t accepted to just say ‘Yes he did ok’. You have to be saying ‘Oh, what a player!’, and yes I do believe the Rooney Rule will counteract some of the prejudices that are there. An interview process may just change their minds.”

The interview had finished, but the conversation had only just begun. We continued to talk football, as if we had known each other for years.

At the end of the night we shook hands, and went our separate ways. The piano continued to play, but it was Cyrille’s friendly and informative comment that was music to my ears.