

Johan Cruyff, Johan Neeskens, Johnny Rep, Ruud Krol and Wim Suurbier.

On his debut he marked Wim van Hanegem of AZ Alkmaar, likening his fluid movement to Alan Hudson's. "Afterwards we got drunk at a club called La Bateau and the tennis players Ilie Nastase and Wojciech Fibak were there. I thought I was a bad dancer but Fibak was shocking."

How did a North Staffordshire bull terrier handle the highly technical Dutch game? "Training was an eye-opener. At Stoke or Vale it was one ball between seven. First session at Sparta there was at least a ball each. I couldn't tell who was a centre-forward, full-back or winger. They were all doing stepovers. They put me in midfield to win the ball.

"All the lads spoke English but after a few weeks I asked the coach not to speak it. If I didn't understand, I'd ask. So the card school on the team bus, we did it in Dutch."

The next summer Sparta accepted an offer for Lees from neighbours Feyenoord but he dug his heels in about the buyers paying for the house he and Claire rented. "A mistake, a regret. I was badly advised."

Brighton's new manager, Alan Mullery, contacted him as the couple were about to go on holiday. "He said 'Don't go'. I said a week wouldn't make any difference. It did because they bought Mark Lawrenson from Preston instead!"

He stayed in the Netherlands, becoming Roda Kerkrade's record recruit for £100,000. "My dad said 'They must be mad'. We had a good side: Dick Nanninga, who scored in the 1978 World Cup final, was up front, with Theo de Jong, who'd played in 1974 final, in midfield. Nice house, more money, but I was unhappy almost from the start. I'd learned Dutch in Rotterdam but going south to Kerkrade was like a Geordie going to London."

Deciding he needed to be nearer to his ailing father, his next choice was between Birmingham and Blackpool in 1979. Jim Smith had recently received £1 million for Trevor Francis and spent it on nine players for Blues. Lees was one of them.

After a few games the Bald Eagle called him in. He had bought Colin Todd and said 'You know why, don't you?' I went 'Because he's better than me. If I were you I'd pick him ahead of me'. I was 29, been around a bit, so I didn't kick up a fuss. Toddy was a top player. I used to give him a lift in to training together because he'd been at Everton.

"To be fair to Jim he realised I played football for money. At Christmas he put my wages up £50 a week. I got every first-team bonus while turning out for the reserves on Tuesday afternoons. Six months after I came back my dad died, and I was here and saw him every day. So the move worked out."

In 1981 he joined Newport, where John Aldridge was a friend and teammate. After a season soured by a falling-out with assistant manager Bobby Smith he left for Morning Star in Hong Kong. The Dutch connection led him to the Far East, with Hans Kraay in charge, although Lees

HITTING THE TARGET: Lees scores for Roda Kerkrade against DWV in 1977



concedes it was "basically a holiday" for himself and Claire.

"They wanted to get Asian players to create more interest but there weren't many up to the standard. If George Best had gone the public wouldn't have been interested."

Lees thought he was done with the Netherlands. However, in 1982 he was asked by Pim Verbeek, an ex-Sparta player who later coached Australia and South Korea, to sign for DS 79, from Dordrecht. The prospect of partnering midfielder Gerrie Muhren, a former European Cup

winner with Ajax and brother of Arnold, made him keen to sign.

With the right-footed Lees in left-midfield, DS 79 won 5-0 at Heracles Armelo on his debut, going on to gain promotion. Alas, they finished bottom of the Eredivisie in 1983-84, bowing out at Amsterdam's old De Meer Stadium against an Ajax line-up containing Frank Rijkaard, Ronald Koeman, John van 't Schip, Jan Molby and an 18-year-old who was already No.9 for his country.

"I marked Van Basten and restricted him to five goals, one a fantastic bicycle-kick. Had him in my pocket! They'd scored 93 and needed seven for the century. It was 5-0 at half-time and they took the foot off the pedal after getting the seventh. It ended 7-2 ... a massacre. Their last goal came with 15 minutes left. The crowd invaded the pitch and there was a 20-minute hold-up. It was the only way we could stop them.

"As I came off I looked at the big clock and thought 'Terry, you've gone full circle, the full clock, here'. I remembered that first trip to Torquay when I was the young kid among all the senior players. Now I was the veteran, trying to stop a world-class player, a kid himself.

"I had another year on my contract but on the bus I told the coach I wanted to pack it in. He pointed out Ajax had beaten other teams by big scores and asked me to think about it, but I wanted to come home."

Frank Barlow had replaced Allan Clarke as Scunthorpe manager and he persuaded Lees to join them rather than Northampton by arranging with Port Vale manager John Rudge for him to train there two days a week. Which is how he became an occasional colleague of Botham's.

On New Year's Day 1985, Lees was nursing a hangover as he arrived for Scunthorpe's match at Tranmere to find a huge media scrum. The snappers and hacks were there because a story had broken about Botham's latest shock-horror cannabis story.

Increasingly, Lees felt "it was a young man's game and time to stop". His 139th and last League game (he made 142 Dutch league appearances) was a 3-3 draw with Vale. "It seemed a perfect ending, especially since Rudgey played for Torquay in my first game for Stoke."

That said, Lees was still playing with another ex-Vale defender, Neil Griffiths, when they were both past the half-century mark. "Neil always said 'We're like Stanley Matthews, playing on past 50'. I said 'The difference is Stan played in the First Division and we're playing in the Ansell's Division Five!'"

GOING DUTCH: Lees and wife Claire pictured in Rotterdam

