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Interviewer: Okay, so can you just start by telling me your name?

Alan Rayner: Alan Rayner.

Interviewer: And what your involvement with the club with is?

Alan Rayner: I've supported the club since 1980. I started offering my services towards the end of that season. I collected tickets on what was known as the back gate in those days. I was then invited to go onto the committee, which I did. Fairly soon I was the Commercial Manager. After that, I became Vice Chairman and in 1985 I became the Chairman and I've supported them since then, so it's 31 years.

Interviewer: How long were you in Stevenage before you became involved with the club?

Alan Rayner: Oh, about 15 or 16 years with this club. I actually moved down here – I started to work on the ambulance service and then swapped to the fire brigade in '65, but I didn't actually move

until March '66. I watched one game when it was Stevenage Athletic, when Alan Gilzean – yes, Tottenham player – was the player manager. But the pitch was absolutely atrocious, it was like a ploughed field and the football was terrible, so I didn't come back again until somebody told me after a few games in 1980 that Stevenage had come off of the St George's playing field and they were playing good football.

I came down here; I liked it and stayed ever since.

Interviewer: How did your involvement in the club go from just a supporter to chairman?

Alan Rayner: Hard work and no one else was going to do it, I suppose. How did it evolve? Well, I've always been a chap who likes helping others. That's why I had the jobs that I had, ambulance and then fire brigade. I also helped run various charitable organisations, so I've always liked helping others, but I've always loved football. I've played football as long as I can remember, since I was a kid. I used to play on Hackney Marshes years ago. I like to get involved; when I see something that I like, I like to help run it.

To be quite frank, any club that gets someone like me out of the blue, they're very lucky, because I was a good, hard worker for the club. I used to raise a lot of money for them. I spent a lot of time going round the town, scrounging raffle prizes and getting someone to sponsor us and getting sports bags for the football team and this sort of stuff. Being in the fire service, I was a fire prevention officer, I was visiting loads of different factories, doing the things that I shouldn't do, scrounging prizes and money for the football club.

The vice chairman then left and they asked me to be vice chairman, all the committee, and I got voted in at a meeting and the same thing happened when the previous chairman George Clarke left. They asked me to become chairman and I did a very good job for two or three years, but it became a bit too much, all the work that I was doing here was a hell of a lot of hours work to be quite honest. It was affecting my home life and my work. My chief officer called me up one day and said, "You're spending too much time with Stevenage Borough. I like you to have an involvement with the community, but you are spending too much time there." My wife said it in very much the same sort of tone, so I had to pack it in.

Interviewer: What years were you chairman for the club?

Alan Rayner: '85, '86 and half of '87.

Interviewer: How was the club during those times? How did the club do?

Alan Rayner: Yes, we did very well. We got a promotion from division two to division one of the Isthmian League and then we carried on, as I say, the first year we didn't and the second year we did get promotion and the third year I had been told to pack it in sort of thing. They did all right. The manager did quite well, but then after that we went down again to division two. That's when Paul Fairclough turned up, we had a new chairman and he did very well. Turn it off for a minute, I can't think of his bloody name. He was a good mate of mine. Isn't it terrible when you get older? Do you know, I can't think of his name? Isn't it

wicked? It will come to me. He was a councillor and I got him on as vice chairman.

I asked him to join the committee as a vice chairman to help us deal with the council and he did a very good job with that and then when I left, he became chairman. For the life of me I can't think of his name at the minute. Betty, his wife... it'll come, not at the moment. But I stayed and supported the club. They voted me in to be an honorary life vice president, which I still am. I used to go away a lot, but since my health deteriorated I haven't been away so much, travelling is a bit too much. The knees are gone these days I'm afraid, up and down stairs and sitting in cramped coaches and cramped seats at football grounds doesn't do me any good anymore.

I still support the club and it's in my blood, it really is. I go to sleep at night spending the lottery money on what I would do with the club if I won the lottery.

Interviewer: Just on that note, who were the people with the money at the club when you were in charge?

Alan Rayner: Nobody had any money. None of us had any money; we were all ordinary working class people. Wherever we went we paid our own expenses, we never took a penny out of the club for phone calls and postage and stuff like that. If it wasn't for me and people like me, who came before me and came after me, the club wouldn't have existed. It was all down to pure, hard work from a lot of volunteers. A lot of them are dead now, unfortunately, but I mean everyone who did the grounds were all volunteers and I used to help cut the grass as well on occasions, as the chairman, I still got stuck in.

I used to come here on a Sunday morning and clear up all the mess that the players had left in the dressing rooms. If the fire alarm went off at night, or the burglar alarm for some reason, I used to get called out. Yes, it was a lot of work, but I thoroughly enjoyed it. I can't say I didn't because I did.

Interviewer: When you stopped being the chairman, do you think you left the club in good hands?

Alan Rayner: Yes, very good hands. Ken, it's coming. He was actually the mayor of Stevenage for a while and I can't think of his blasted name, isn't it wicked? Never mind.

Interviewer: Since you've lived in Stevenage, how do you think the area has changed?

Alan Rayner: It's quite a lot bigger. It's not quite so friendly as it used to be, because we were all ex-Londoners, married couples coming down here. Now there are more unmarried or single parents – I don't really want to go into that – all over the place. The Labour council run it very, very well, no complaints about them. Yes, it's still a nice town. It's a very safe town. I would be quite happy for my wife to walk out late at night, or my kids and not have anything happen.

It doesn't matter where you go, there's a little bit of trouble and there's some odd punch ups. My son used to get punched up every Saturday night, but that's kids for you. Apart from that, no, it's a very nice town, a very safe town. I love it here and it really upsets me when I get people running Stevenage down

because there's nothing to run down about it. It's a very nice town. You get different sorts of people in every town, in every village and every city in the country, so I don't know why people decide to run Stevenage down. It's a bit concretey; the town centre could do with a change, which we're hoping will happen. I'm hoping it will happen before I kick the bucket, but there you go.

Interviewer: How do you think the club is helping the community around Stevenage?

Alan Rayner: I don't get too far involved in that and I'm very upset that more people do not support the club. For the size of this town, I think we're sort of bordering on 70,000 people now and we're playing good football. We've got two good promotions, we're playing in division one, we're playing clubs like Charlton and Sheffield United, Sheffield Wednesday and we still only get between 2500 and 2700 people, which is absolutely ridiculous for a town this size. I don't know why they don't come, I really don't.

Interviewer: That's quite strange. You've got Watford who are just the league above and they average about 15,000.

Alan Rayner: Yes, I really don't know. I know Watford is a bigger town. I think a lot of the problem is, in my opinion is, the ticket prices are too dear for this town. There is a lot of unemployment in the town. There is also the proximity of Arsenal, Tottenham, Chelsea, but I don't think that's the reason. My honest opinion is that the tickets are too dear, but the chairman won't do too

much about that. He thinks he's right and he's doing all right so far so I can't complain.

Interviewer: Okay, just moving onto what happens on the pitch. Is there a particular favourite player you have?

Alan Rayner: Now or in the past?

Interviewer: From any time.

Alan Rayner: There's a player called Danny Dance, he was a brilliant right-winger, absolutely brilliant. The best non-league player ever, one of the papers called him. For some reason he was never picked up to get into the league. I think eh would have done really well. No, he was an absolutely brilliant player, nice bloke as well.

Interviewer: Is there a particular squad that you would say is the best you've seen at Stevenage?

Alan Rayner: We had two squads that were very good. One was under Frank Cornwall, who was the manager a while back and unfortunately died fairly recently. The other one was with Paul Fairclough, when we won the league, by a record score and record points. Phil Driver was a left-winger; he came from Chelsea, who was playing in one of our best sides. We played really good football. I mean I'm not very good at memorising names, but there were lots of good players in Paul Fairclough's

side. Unfortunately even though we won the conference they wouldn't let us go up because something went wrong between Victor Green, who was the chairman at the time and the Stevenage Borough and the work wasn't completed in time to please the league's rules so we didn't go up. That was that.

Interviewer: Can I just ask you; were you at the Newcastle games?

Alan Rayner: Yes, both of them. The first one was rather nasty because there was a problem between Victor Green and the chairman of Newcastle. I can't think of his name at the moment. Newcastle I think played the big I am, saying, "We will come to pay a visit to your club at a certain date to see what it's like." They didn't phone up and say, "Can we make arrangements? Is it all right to come?" The letter said, "We will be coming." I think our chairman took umbrage and said, "No, you won't, no one will be here." Things went down the pan after that and although we drew with them, Kenny Dalglish was quite nasty with Paul Fairclough. Paul went to shake his hands and he just hit him with his shoulder, we saw that on the pitch, so things didn't go down too well with that lot and then unfortunately we lost 2-1 on the replay.

The second game we just kicked their backsides, I mean they weren't in the game, 3-0 it's ridiculous really, that sort of club. No, unbelievable that was.

Interviewer: Were you able to go up to the game at St James' Park?

Alan Rayner: No, I didn't go up to there.

Interviewer: How many away games have you been able to go to?

Alan Rayner: When we were in the lower leagues, I used to go to all of them, especially when I was chairman. But unfortunately recently my health has deteriorated and I can no longer sit squashed on a coach. I went to Brentford on Tuesday night, nowhere to park so we're driving round and round and when we did park it was miles away from the ground. It's painful for me with my legs and my lungs to get to the ground and when we get there, upstairs where the seats are, you've got to climb a load of stairs and the seats were the most uncomfortable things I've ever sat in. My knees would have been sticking over the chap's shoulders in front of me if there had been someone there, but fortunately there wasn't so I managed to stick my feet up and sit on two seats.

Those are the reasons I don't go, it's just purely I can't manage it anymore. It's uncomfortable.

Interviewer: Do you think the club here looks after its elderly supporters well?

Alan Rayner: The who supporters?

Interviewer: Elderly supporters, long-term supporters.

Alan Rayner: Yes, well, people like myself, we've been made honorary vice presidents and we don't pay to get in anymore, which is very

nice. The older people have all got seats if they want them in the stand and they get in at a reduced rate. The wheelchairs are catered for, coming through the main gate, up the Broadhall Way in. No one that I know of has ever complained about not being treated right at this club.

It's always been a very, very friendly, homely club, although I would like to say at this point, some of the chanting of the younger people is not very nice. They use bad language and I'm not into that. I mean I swear, but I don't swear in front of women or children and they're shouting out at the top of their voices and it's not nice. I think it demeans them and the club.

Interviewer: Do you think there's a different attitude between the younger supporters and the older supporters now?

Alan Rayner: Yes, definitely. I think the older people; first of all I think they've got more respect for everybody, women and children. I think they're more knowledgeable than the youngsters are and they don't make as much noise, but they still appreciate the football. Well, youngsters are youngsters aren't they? That happens in every walk of life, sometimes they get a little bit too exuberant and too noisy for the older people's tastes.

Interviewer: Is this how it's always been, like since the '80s, there's always been young supporters chanting words?

Alan Rayner: No.

Interviewer: It's a relatively new thing?

Alan Rayner: It's fairly new in the last couple of seasons I think that they've come up with some of this swearing stuff. I don't like it. There weren't enough of them to – we used to have 150 people down here when I was chairman and that was it, so anyone who swore was told to shut up and behave themselves by the older people.

Interviewer: Is there any particular great games that you remember? I know we've already talked about Newcastle. A few people I was talking to earlier mentioned Woking as sort of ____ [0:17:35].

Alan Rayner: Oh Woking, yes. Woking was the club that everybody here loved to hate and they kept beating us, once again, like Torquay did recently. I think we only ever beat them once, that was in a cup game and they had a brilliant player called Clive Walker, used to play for Chelsea, again. He used to turn us inside out every game; he was brilliant. I only found out recently that he was one of these players who had an injury, decided to pack up football, got an insurance claim of some sort and wasn't allowed to play professional football anymore and that's why he played for a lower league club. He was absolutely brilliant and I hated him.

There's a little tune – do you want to turn that off?

Interviewer: What's the tune going to be? How do you perceive the difference between the level of football in the Conference and the level of football Stevenage are playing now?

Alan Rayner: Actually there's not a lot of difference. The side we've got is basically the same side that we had in the Conference; there are only two or three blokes that are different. It's amazing, sometimes we play absolutely brilliant football, keep it on the ground, other times it's just hoof it up in the air, which I don't like and neither do many of the supporters. Maybe that's the reason a lot of people don't come because they don't like the football, but whilst it's being successful there isn't much you can say about it is there?

Interviewer: Do you think the club needs to stabilise itself in league one or do you think that it needs to keep pushing for promotion and try and get into the Championship?

Alan Rayner: We're not set up and we never could – with the crowds that we're getting, we could not afford to keep a Championship side, to be quite honest. When you look at clubs playing even in league one, a million or two million for players. We can't compete with that. We're very fortunate that we've kept the side that we've got; they're all good lads, hard working lads. One or two of the more skilful ones have gone to bigger clubs, Steve Morrison, he's playing in the Premiership now with Norwich, went to Millwall.

Years ago it was Barry Hayles who was picked up and went professional when we were in the Conference. We've had a lot of players go and that's the problem with being a lower league club with not a lot of money, that you can't hold your good players back and those that go earn you money. The actual sort of football is not that much different, to be quite honest.

Interviewer: Do you think the club has a good policy in bringing through new young players or is it trying to push players from lower clubs and bring them up?

Alan Rayner: They're trying to bring in young players. We've had one or two, but the problem is with football is that if you want success you cannot really afford to carry anybody in the side while you wait for them to improve. Youngsters, no matter how good they are, when they're up against adults, get knocked about, get knocked off the ball and it takes a couple of years for them to really adjust to senior football. Most clubs just cannot afford to carry one or two youngsters, although they try to bring them through.

I think what we're doing is quite right as well, going round the lower league, non-league clubs and seeing what's about. Even the bigger clubs are doing that now because they're finding it too dear to buy better players from other clubs. There are some good players in non-league and the lower leagues.

Interviewer: Just going back to what you said earlier from when you moved to Stevenage, how did you find the difference? You said you come from London, whereabouts in London, if you don't mind me asking?

Alan Rayner: Not at all, no, I originally came from Hackney. My father used to have a pub in the East End, then the wife and I got married and the only place we could find to live was some rooms up in Mile End, ground floor of an old house. We stayed there for a few years and then a friend that I was on the London

ambulance service with at the time as a driver, who was the other driver with me – there used to be two on the ambulance – he'd come back from Stevenage and regretted it and he said, "You ought to go there and take your family." So I came down, liked what I saw. I found out that there was lots of vacancies in the ambulance service wrote a letter to the chief fire officer and got a letter back saying there was no vacancies.

I wasn't having that, I jumped in my car and drove down to Hertford and demanded to see the chief ambulance officer and he said, "Oh the trouble with you London blokes, you come down here, get a house and shove off back to London again." I convinced him I wouldn't do that. Anyway, he accepted me onto the ambulance service, but it was so different from the London ambulance service, within six weeks I'd swapped over onto the fire brigade, which didn't go down too well with him. There you go and from then on I got quite a few promotions and I did all right for myself.

Interviewer: How was life adjusting from living in a city to living just outside of London?

Alan Rayner: I adjusted straight away. The first few years of my life I was brought up in the country. I lived in a small village called Sturry just outside of Canterbury, so I've always loved the country. My wife found it quite hard, it took her quite a while to adjust, but when she did adjust, it's like me, she just loves the place. We certainly wouldn't go back to London now. No, I won't talk about London; it's not very nice now.

Interviewer: Do you think Stevenage has become more urban over the years?

Alan Rayner: Well, it certainly has grown hasn't it? At the end of the road that I used to live in was a farmhouse and now it's a big estate of houses. The wife wouldn't go to a small area called the Chells up in Stevenage at the time, which is not that far from where we live. She said, "Oh it's too near the country," and now there's houses pushed right out almost to the next village at Walkern and places like that.

Interviewer: When you moved to the town, how was the football team doing at that point? Was it still big around the town?

Alan Rayner: It was Stevenage Athletic. The player manager was Alan Gilzean. I don't know if you remember him, he was the Tottenham centre forward.

Interviewer: Sounds familiar.

Alan Rayner: Good player. I came down here once, round about 1966, '67, to watch them. The pitch was like a ploughed field, the football was awful and I just didn't bother coming anymore. I can't remember what I used to do with my Saturdays. Mind you, I was working quite hard; I had two or three jobs on my days off in the fire service to keep the family going. Perhaps I didn't have a lot of time for sports and football.

Interviewer: Do you think that's a problem a lot of people who want to come to the club today have, they see one game, it's an awful game and they just think, "Oh I'm not going to bother coming again"?

Alan Rayner: It's quite possible because sometimes when we resort to this, well, I call it "kick and rush." They're just hoofing the ball up the field; it's boring. Even if you win at the end of the day, it's boring and people don't want to see boring football and I don't know why the manager plays that, because he's proved that he can play beautiful football. Sheffield Wednesday, Newcastle, the ball was on the ground, played lovely football, scored lots of goals, everyone went home happy and then the next game, hoof it up the field and we lose and we lost the next three or four games after Sheffield Wednesday, yet they played the most beautiful football we've seen down here.

Interviewer: Do you think the club is playing too cautiously because they've come up from the leagues fast and they want to stay here?

Alan Rayner: No, it's the manager's type of football. He's the one to blame, one way or the other, although because we're successful you can't say too much about him can you? Although the crowds aren't there and I'm convinced there's two things. One is that the prices are too dear and the second is the football isn't that brilliant, although we're winning.

Interviewer: Do you think the number of people in the crowd has improved since you've come up through the Conference?

Alan Rayner: No, got less I think. I think we had bigger crowds in the Conference than we've got here.

Interviewer: Do you think that's solely because of the ticket prices?

Alan Rayner: No, we were winning everything at the time and people like to support a winning side, which made a lot of difference. At the moment we're winning and losing and then again, the ticket prices. They don't want to come, be bored and see a losing side, so they don't come. That's my opinion.

Interviewer: As a former chairman, do you think the people around the club now are pushing the club in the right direction?

Alan Rayner: Mr Wallace is running it as a business. What I said earlier on before this interview was that when volunteers ran this club, it was run from the heart. Victor Green and Mr Wallace will run it with their business heads, not necessarily their heart, although Mr Wallace is doing a reasonably good job in steadily improving the things we've got at the ground. We've got a new stand for the away supporters. Recently we've got underground sprinklers for the water, so we're gradually improving. There are plans to build a new stand on the Broadhall Way end, to make it look a better club than it is. I'm just wondering with all that whether the bloody supporters will still come, if we don't improve the type of football that we play.

What he could do was have one or two games where he charged almost next to nothing for youngsters, as long as they bring their mum or dad with them. But he's got his own ideas,

the club is successful, or reasonably. We're not in debt, so he tells us. No, he's doing all right, but as I say, he's running it with a business brain and not with his heart.

Interviewer: Do you think he's there looking after the interests of the supporters?

Alan Rayner: The interests of the supporters. Sometimes I get the feeling that the supporters interfere with the good running of the football club.

Interviewer: How do you mean?

Alan Rayner: I don't think he takes a lot of notice of football supporters and sometimes I think he thinks they're a bloody pest in what they want. How far is this going, this interview? No, I mean the questions you're asking and the answers that I'm giving, where is it going?

Interviewer: It's just general questions about your involvement and how you've been with the club.

Alan Rayner: I don't want him knowing too much about what I feel, Mr Wallace.

Interviewer: Oh no, don't worry. If you're not comfortable saying something just don't say it. We'll just move on.

Alan Rayner: Well, I like to say my mind but sometimes I open my mouth too much.

Interviewer: That's fine; we've had that problem with other people. Some people don't want to say too much on the tape.

Alan Rayner: Yes, there are lots that people think that they don't want to talk about.

Interviewer: I've forgotten what I was going to say now.

Alan Rayner: Ken Vale was the name I couldn't think of. He was my vice chairman who was on the council and he took over from me and he did a very good job after I left.

Interviewer: Okay. Were you in attendance for the club finals that Stevenage has been in? I think it was the FA trophy.

Alan Rayner: Yes, I've been to all of them.

Interviewer: They were at Wembley I believe.

Alan Rayner: Yes.

Interviewer: How did it feel seeing this smaller club at one of the biggest stadiums in Europe?

Alan Rayner: Well the first one was brilliant because there were 50 odd thousand people at the ground. Both sides took a lot of supporters. We did, I think we took 25,000, something along those lines, then we were 0-2 down, which wasn't very good, then our players scored 2 goals and then the chap who is now playing for Norwich, Steve Morrison, he banged in a third goal, so in the second half we scored 3 goals to their 2 and they were in tears and we were all running about happy. Yes, brilliant.

The second one, I think that was York City and we beat them. It wasn't such a good game, but it was good enough. The third game, I can't think who the blooming hell it was. It was another non-league side, not very well known, but we went down to nine men and I think we lost that one. Well, I know we lost it. But then the great day was going up to Manchester, the Man United ground, had a lovely meal, watched the game and I was on cloud nine when we scored and we kept it. I just could not believe that we'd gone from division two and we were now in division one. I went back inside to the restaurant and got drunk. Well, not too drunk, I could still walk.

Interviewer: You said the club managed to take 25,000 supporters with it to Wembley. Where do you think that extra support came from?

Alan Rayner: Well, lots of people wanted to go and see the new Wembley. We were the first side to play in a proper cup game at the new Wembley stadium. A lot of people just wanted to go and see

the new Wembley stadium and I think that's what attracted a lot of them. I mean the second time we went up there, I can't remember, I think we only took about ten or twelve thousand, something like that, but they're people who just want to go to Wembley. They're not the true supporters. They will stand there singing, "Stevenage, we support you ever more," and you never see them again.

Interviewer: As the club has been in the lower leagues, how important is the FA Cup to the club?

Alan Rayner: It all depends on whether you manage to get a decent premiership side or something like that to give you some money. You get a decent crowd, once you start winning the first couple of games. Financially it is worthwhile going in and then if you pick up Newcastle like we did twice, it's well worth it financially, although you have to take all the expenses out, take the cost to pay the police out, all those sorts of things, take their travelling expenses, the opposition and then I'm not sure if you split three ways, with the FA, the opposition and yourself. But it's certainly worth having.

Interviewer: When you first started coming to the club, were the club eligible for the FA Cup? I can't remember if it's like you have to qualify first.

Alan Rayner: Virtually every club is eligible for the FA Cup and they just start weeks and months ahead and play one another in the lower leagues.

Interviewer: Were Stevenage able to make the first round?

Alan Rayner: I think we made a couple of rounds when we were early and then we got knocked out. It wasn't till we were in the Conference that we'd got through to fourth round; I think it was, when we played Newcastle. It was the first time we played – but on the way through we played Swindon and we took a good crowd away. That was away and we beat them and on the way through we beat one or two good clubs, you know. It was a good side.

Interviewer: Going back to Paul Fairclough, how do you think he inspired the squad to gain promotion, nearly to the Conference?

Alan Rayner: Paul was a very good motivator and he also knew how to play football. We played better football then than we do now, but I think his main attribute was he was a good motivator.

Interviewer: Okay, sorry, I'm just trying to think of another question.

Alan Rayner: That's all right; go on.

Interviewer: Just sometimes I think of one in the back of my mind.

Alan Rayner: And then forget it (Laughter).

Interviewer: I'm sometimes not sure whether to ask what they want me to ask, do I go for a historical focus? But it's a lot easier for me to talk about football in general, just to say, "What were Stevenage like in this year or that year?"

Alan Rayner: Well, we could go back I suppose. It was just bloody hard work when we were coming through the leagues. Everyone worked hard, getting the pitch prepared; we all mucked in on the pitch to save money because Stevenage Borough Council used to charge us for cutting the pitch. We said, "All right, well, we'll do that ourselves," so we then we had volunteers cutting the grass for the pitch and marking it. All the advertising, they were very tight with us originally, the Borough Council.

They'd had history with – I can't remember his name, [Revolta 0:36:54] or something like that. He was a chap who'd run the club before with Stevenage Athletic. He'd had a long lease with the club and when they packed up, he wouldn't give the lease back to the Borough Council. To stop anyone playing on the pitch, he dug a whacking great ditch, right the way, full length of the pitch, ruined the drainage and left it like that. The stadium was derelict for years and years until Stevenage Borough who were playing on the King George's playing field at the time, 1976 time, wanted to come back over here.

But the council would only give us a year by year lease, which stopped us getting grants and doing various things from the Sports Council. We should have had a 20-year lease, but the council wouldn't give us a long lease. Things like they kept a great big percentage of the advertising that we went and got to put on the boards all round. I got a new club – not new, second-hand I got it – clubhouse built, because we never had

a clubhouse before for people to go in and they charged us extra rent on ground we were already paying money for renting. They wanted another 4% I think it was of the gross income from the clubhouse, which I thought was terrible. At that time, sometimes they helped, but a lot of the time they didn't help us. They were very, very tight with us. They wanted to get back as much money as they could from what they'd spent on the ground.

Interviewer: Do you think the relationship has soured then since Stevenage became just Stevenage instead of Stevenage Borough? Do you think that affected the relationship with the council?

Alan Rayner: From Stevenage Borough to Stevenage? I don't think the council liked it too much, but I don't get involved with that sort of thing lately. I have no idea why he wanted to change it; apparently he wanted to go forward with the new times with Stevenage. I couldn't see a problem with Stevenage Borough and everyone still calls it the Borough, all the supporters, so he hasn't got a long way with that one.

Interviewer: Do you think some of the passion is missing from the Board? You said earlier when the volunteers were doing it, there was a lot more heart in it. Do you think that needs to be reinvested back into the Board, someone who wants to be there?

Alan Rayner: I don't know who's on the Board. I know he's put his son on the Board, for whatever reason. One chap, a very nice fellow, he lives down in Cornwall now I think, so we don't see much of him. I think he's still on the Board. I don't know what the Board

consists of. I know we had a fellow, an ex-footballer who lived in Stevenage for most of his life on the Board and they fell out so he jumped off the Board. I really haven't got a clue what the Board consists of, I really don't.

Interviewer: Do you think the football has changed in general from how Stevenage played in the '80s till now? Is it reflecting the times, sort of a lot less rough? Is it still all a sort of rough housing game?

Alan Rayner: No, Stevenage has never been like that. We used to get kicked all over the place when we went up to some of the country towns that we used to go to in the United Counties League and that's why we packed up and joined the Isthmian League. No, we've always been a good, clean side, never been a dirty side. At the moment we've got a side that are known as being robust, but they're not dirty. They're big lads, but they're not dirty. I just don't like the way they play football at the moment, apart from one or two good games they had.

Interviewer: Do you think the general ethos of the club is just a general friendly, family sort of atmosphere, just trying to get everyone involved?

Alan Rayner: It's still a very nice club to come to. There's no trouble at Stevenage at all, other than the fact that I've already said, I don't like the chanting the youngsters come out with, because that just upsets the opposition anyway, if you start telling them to F off and this sort of thing. It's not nice.

Interviewer: I noticed the ground has some standing turnstiles, do you think that improves the atmosphere here, whereas up the leagues you've got all seaters?

Alan Rayner: Standing has always given an atmosphere to a football club. It doesn't matter where you go now; people who pay for seats that are basically behind the goals all stand up. Quite a few years ago I went down the Arsenal and I had to stand because I couldn't see. Everyone else was standing up around me so I had to stand. I didn't want to stand, that's why I paid for a seat, but people like to stand at football, apart from us old devils who like to sit down.

Interviewer: Any particular away days that you can recall that stand out as being the best?

Alan Rayner: Not really, apart from going to Wembley and that.

Interviewer: Do you think in general the supporters are more passionate at away games?

Alan Rayner: Yes. Away supporters certainly seem to be more vocal, more passionate than they are at home. I went to Brentford, as I say, last Tuesday. They had 4200, we had 500 plus and we drowned them. They hardly made a peep, the home supporters; I was most surprised. But our supporters were very vocal. Yes, they're good, away supporters. No trouble, a lot of

noise, say things they shouldn't do, but no, they're very passionate.

Interviewer: Do you think the crowd plays its part in helping the squad to do better when they get behind them?

Alan Rayner: Yes, definitely. Sometimes when they haven't got a lot to shout about because the team are playing rubbish it's very quiet and it's not the same. But then one of the football side will look up from the bench and say, "Well come on, cheer them on," and I'll say, "Well, give us something to bloody cheer about then." But usually they get going again and they push them on and the team seems to start up again. Definitely having a good support helps the side.

Interviewer: When you first started following the club, did you ever think that the club would be at this level at this point?

Alan Rayner: No, my aspirations for the club were to go to Wembley and win a cup, which we did, and to get into the football league, which we did, in division two. Never in a million years would I dream that we'd be in division one the next year. I hope I'm wrong, but I think with the crowd that we're getting, we've gone a step too far and I don't know if we'll be able to sustain it.

END AUDIO

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