

File: BMD Steve Barrett

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Interviewer: Okay, could you tell me your name please?

Steve Barrett: Steve Barrett.

Interviewer: And Steve, what is your connection with Stevenage?

Steve: I used to play for Stevenage in 1982.

Interviewer: Thinking back to your first involvement with the club, how come you ended up playing for Stevenage?

Steve: I was originally playing for the Stevenage Under-18s. Although I was too old, I played as the over-age player and that... We used to play at King George's and then when Stevenage re-opened the ground, I was in the first team that played back here. A lot of the players were from the Under-18 side.

Interviewer: And so you were born and brought up in Stevenage, were you?

Steve: Well, I came to Stevenage when I was four. My dad moved here from London with his job.

Interviewer: So, in fact, you were one of the families that started the new town off in many ways.

Steve: Absolutely, yes. He worked at... It was English Electric in those days.

Interviewer: All right. So they'd moved him. Which part of London did they move out from?

Steve: North London. North Finchley.

Interviewer: Was that an area that many people moved to Stevenage from?

Steve: I think so and he originally came from Dorstone so there was a lot of people. That's why in Stevenage, a lot of people support [other 0:01:19] Arsenal, I suppose, because they're from North London.

Interviewer: Yes. I think that's something we might want to explore later on. So as a boy growing up in Stevenage then, there wasn't really a local football team to follow as such, was there?

Steve: No, there wasn't because I remember when the pitch was dug up and so there wasn't a team in my youth. I didn't come to watch Stevenage, I used to go watch Arsenal and QPR occasionally. I used to play a lot of football because in those days, there was a very, very strong youth football league, the Stevenage Minor League, which was excellent.

Interviewer: And did you go to school in Stevenage as well?

Steve: Yes, I did, yes. I went to Collenswood.

Interviewer: And was that a rugby school or a football school?

Steve: No, it was a football school.

Interviewer: Right. So is it a real football area then.

Steve: Yes.

Interviewer: Were other schools in the area all football schools?

Steve: No. [Alain's] was rugby and St Michaels, which isn't there anymore. One regret actually, that I never played rugby.

Interviewer: So you played football for your school team and then you were recruited for this youth side.

Steve: Well, yes. I used to play for a junior team called Cygnet and quite a few of the players, who played for Stevenage Youth came from the Cygnet side. The manager of the youth side at the time was Gordon Allinson. And his son and his nephew both played for Stevenage at some stage.

Interviewer: So you made your way into this team. What position were you playing in those days?

Steve: Centre-half or right-back. Centre-half for the Under-18 side and when we went to senior team, I played right-back for the first time.

Interviewer: And so you were involved in the move back to Broadhall Way.

Steve: Absolutely, yes. I was in the third team that played here when we first came back.

Interviewer: And did you play in that very first game?

Steve: I believe I did, yes. I think my mum's got the program somewhere.

Interviewer: Can you tell me what your memories are of that game?

Steve: Yes. I mean for me, I never felt I was that good so I always felt it was under pressure when I played at home, to be honest. I didn't particularly enjoy it because all my friends came and used to heckle and give me loads of stick. So I didn't particularly enjoy playing here, funnily enough. I used to enjoy the away games, but I didn't enjoy playing at home.

Interviewer: Well, it's funny, you quite often hear that about footballers, particularly when their team's not perhaps doing so well. And you played in the park before the first Stevenage group, before they moved it.

Steve: Yes, that was the Under-18 team.

Interviewer: That was the Under-18 team.

Steve: They never had a senior team playing at King George's.

Interviewer: Right. So the senior team was actually out of commission for four or five years then.

Steve: Yes, I think it was a bit longer than that actually. And when we came back, we were in the United Counties League.

Interviewer: You were you saying the manager of that time was..?

Steve: Yes, the manager was Derek Montgomery and the coach was Paul Peterson.

Interviewer: How long were they in the club for?

Steve: For quite a while, I believe. I think three or four years. I only played for the first season because I hurt my back, so I stopped playing mid-way or just after the New Year.

Interviewer: I understand they managed to get quite a lot of excitement in the town around that first game.

Steve: Yes, but to be honest, it's very vague. The game I remember clearest was when we opened the floodlights, which was against Leeds because Paul Peterson used to play for Leeds, so he still had contact with Eddie Gray. I think you may be aware of this. They brought the team down, a very strong first team, to play against us and there were some famous people playing, all of which was fantastic. It was my first game here under floodlights, so that was very good.

Interviewer: Was there anybody drafted into the Stevenage team for that game or was it the normal bunch of boys then?

Steve: It was just a normal bunch of lads, mainly from Stevenage.

Interviewer: That was when Leeds were in their pomp, wasn't it?

Steve: It was, yes. To give you some idea of who was playing, Kenny Burns, Frank Worthington. John Lukic was in goal. I remember he had to duck to come out the changing room because at the time, none of this was here and they had porter cabins, which were, if you can imagine, to the right-hand corner in the car park and that's how he had to duck coming out of the change room because he was huge, which was quite amazing.

Interviewer: So that's obviously an evening game, midweek evening game?

Steve: Midweek, yes.

Interviewer: What happened when those midweek games were in terms of your work at the time?

Steve: That is a very good question. I was doing an apprenticeship so there was no problem for me to get to work easily. It's not like it is now. I could have the full time. I used to leave work at five and go home and have something to eat and then come. We had to be here about an hour before. It was completely different.

Interviewer: And how many nights a week were you expected to train?

Steve: Twice.

Interviewer: And was that training taken seriously in those days?

Steve: Oh yes, still very serious, yes. Especially pre-season, it was very strenuous.

Interviewer: And that Leeds game, can you remember the score?

Steve: I think we lost three-one, but I only played the first half because he wanted to give everybody a game. But I know we weren't losing when I went off. So I'll always remember that.

Interviewer: You never lost a Leeds game.

Steve: No, that's right. Yes.

Interviewer: Was there a sort of All Stars game to open the ground when they first came back?

Steve: I don't think so. I think there had been such a gap. It was heavily the council were involved and, as I say, it was all youth team players who had become old enough to play for the first

team. So there was no association with people to get any All Stars to play here.

Interviewer: So you mentioned the fact that there were eventually these porter cabins. I understand that the pitch was in a pretty ropy condition when it was taken back, with stones everywhere and...

Steve: It was. It wasn't like this. This is like a carpet now, but it was awful and the grass was always too long. It was always difficult.

Interviewer: I heard that before the opening game, there were people actually crawling around on their hands and knees trying to pick flints out of the turf.

Steve: That's true. That's true.

Interviewer: So was that worrying to play on a surface like that, or did you just get on with it?

Steve: No, we just get on with it. I mean we'd been playing on park pitches so it didn't really make a lot of difference to the players.

Interviewer: And what memories do you have of the way the ground was set up when you came back?

Steve: All there was was the main stand, which is a similar size to what it is now to be honest and everywhere else there was no covered areas. So this was the only covered area. This is where my girlfriend at that time used to come and sit and watch me.

Interviewer: And where were you changing?

Steve: Well, at the porter cabins. So the porter cabins were the changing rooms, the bar...

Interviewer: So they were there right from the beginning of your return?

Steve: Yes.

Interviewer: So did that mean there wasn't camaraderie amongst the players or did they tend to shoot off after the game or were you often together?

Steve: No, because of the format of the team, and we were all young and we'd all played together for quite a few years, we were all very good friends. And I'm still friends with most of them now, actually, who I still see through golf. It was good. No, there was good camaraderie afterwards.

Interviewer: Would you stay in the porter cabin here or would you go out into Stevenage afterwards?

Steve: No, we'd stay here. We'd stay here.

Interviewer: And memories of particular people from that era?

Steve: That's a good question. Probably, well obviously, the coach, Paul Peterson, I still see him occasionally now. He's a nice chap and some of the players...

Interviewer: What has he gone on to do?

Steve: Well, he worked at British Aerospace and I think he's retired now. He plays golf actually, so I see him every now and again when he plays at my club. But some of the players were good players, obviously. As I've said, we weren't that good really.

We were just the catalyst to kick start the senior football team and eventually all the local-ish players disappeared and they brought in players from far afield, who were much better and obviously they went up through the leagues. I do remember we did get paid though, which was...

Interviewer: You did get paid?

Steve: We did get paid, which was quite incredible. We used to get £6.00 if we lost and £14.00 if we won, which in 1982, was quite a bit of money.

Interviewer: And you got paid if you were a substitute or did you actually have to go on?

Steve: If you were a substitute, you got paid as well. We didn't get many £14.00.

Interviewer: So you don't remember whether you finished that season then?

Steve: I can't remember. I honestly can't remember.

Interviewer: But you've got some memorabilia from your... Your mum's got a program, you said.

Steve: Yes, she's got all the programs I played in. I think I played about 20 games. And I've got the player's pass still with my name, signed by the manager.

Interviewer: What about in terms of your contact with the club? Once you'd stopped playing, was there any contact there?

Steve: No, not really. Once I became injured and I didn't play. I didn't play for the rest of the season so I didn't make contact at all.

Interviewer: Was the injury playing for Stevenage?

Steve: It was, yes. I did it at Irthlingborough Diamonds pitch, actually. They're now Rushden & Diamonds. But where their pitch is now, their new stadium, that is where Irthlingborough used to play and it was on that pitch.

Interviewer: So you were playing for Stevenage then?

Steve: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you have any memories of that game?

Steve: Not really. I know it was a Saturday afternoon and it was cold, but not really, no. I just remember I hurt me back.

Interviewer: Did you manage to finish the game, or were you..?

Steve: No, I didn't. I was substituted, yes.

Interviewer: Taken off to hospital then and there?

Steve: Not really, no. It was like a back strain, so I believe that even now, I suppose, people just sort of grin and bear those sort of injuries. It's having a strain and you just assume it's going to get better and it never really did sufficiently for me to play at that sort of level again.

Interviewer: In fact, in terms of your Stevenage career, it was a career finishing injury then.

Steve: It was. It was, yes. And I'd already had knee problems and then, when I did start playing again, obviously not for Stevenage because they were obviously a bit better team and I wasn't good enough to play for them. I started playing elsewhere and I then didn't play much longer anyway because I had a bad knee. So my footballing days were well and truly over by the time I was about 23, 24, quite young.

Interviewer: But you're playing golf now though?

Steve: Yes, I play golf now.

Interviewer: The back stands up to that?

Steve: The back's okay, yes.

Interviewer: You've been invited along today and was that the instigation of the club or did you see the..?

Steve: I saw Martin Gittings at my club. He was playing there in a charity day and he gave the name to... Was it..?

Interviewer: Andy Green.

Steve: To Andy yes, and Andy contacted me to come along today because Martin had a copy of the program, actually, for the game against Leeds.

Interviewer: So was he playing in those days as well?

Steve: He was, yes. So he played a bit longer than me because I think he played four or five years on after I left.

Interviewer: Well I think someone said he might have even been their all-time top scorer or something like that.

Steve: It's possible. He was a good player.

Interviewer: Have you been back to watch the club at all since you stopped playing?

Steve: Yes, I have, in the season when they won the league, but they couldn't go up because the ground wasn't good enough. Then I came to monitor every home game that year. And then I stopped coming and then I came and saw the Sheffield United game about a month ago and they won five-one, which was very enjoyable. But I tend not to come. I'm a season ticket holder at Arsenal as well so I tend to go there on Saturdays, if they're at home.

Interviewer: So you sort of transferred your allegiances or was that an allegiance you've always had, the Arsenal?

Steve: No, I was always an Arsenal fan. My family; my mum and dad are mad Arsenal fans.

Interviewer: But you've obviously kept an eye out for the Stevenage scores.

Steve: Oh absolutely. I always look. I always look and it's fantastic that the town has got a team that is so successful.

Interviewer: You must have been quite impressed by that victory over. I think Sheffield Wednesday actually, but it must have been...

Steve: Yes, Sheffield Wednesday. Absolutely, I was very impressed. Yes.

Interviewer: Any player stood out for you in particular?

Steve: Not really. I thought it was an all-round good team performance. They completely overpowered the other team. I was very disappointed with Sheffield Wednesday, actually, when you think who their manager is. They just harried and put pressure on the other team and they all played fantastic. But I think that was the last time. I think they went on a five-game losing spell after that win, which was quite contrary.

Interviewer: Oh well, perhaps a glory man. So do you think the club could do more to keep in touch with the former players?

Steve: Not really. I don't see that as a problem. Over the years, players come and go. I think some are like myself because I was in the first team and I still live locally. I still feel I've got a bit of an attachment, an affinity to the club anyway, but a lot of the players after those first few years came from far afield and I don't think that they would expect to be contacted.

Interviewer: And you say you still live locally.

Steve: Yes. Up until earlier this year, I still lived in Stevenage. I've just moved out to [New Royston 0:15:26].

Interviewer: One of the things that I think the club are finding it a challenge, or interesting to come to terms with, is the fact that you would have bet that, and if you'd have asked two seasons ago, they

would have said, well probably the crowds would at least double when they moved up a couple of divisions. Now, that hasn't happened.

Steve: No.

Interviewer: Is there any reason for that?

Steve: Well, I think part of the problem is that because most of the fans are from London, they support other teams. And although some do transfer their allegiance, they still support QPR, I suppose Arsenal, Chelsea. So they don't feel probably it's appropriate to come and watch the local team because they support...

I think that's maybe what it is because they're now in the league. You can't support two teams. I think that's basically what I'm trying to say. Although you want to support your local team, your allegiance is still with the team you've always followed since you were a boy.

Interviewer: So do you think there is anything the club can do about that?

Steve: I honestly think it's too expensive. I paid £21.00, I think, to come and I think that's too expensive.

Interviewer: And that's coming from an Arsenal fan who bought the most expensive seats in the league.

Steve: Yes, exactly. Yes, they are. They're about 50 quid, my seats. But I still think that's quite expensive to try to get local people to come and support the team.

I'm trying to think who I was speaking to the other day. It's another lower-down league and they reduced the price to a fiver and I think they had 10,000 turn up. And I think perhaps that might be an option, I think. I don't know. It's a difficult one. I don't know. I have those sort of problems trying to get people to play at my golf course. But it's very difficult, you know.

Interviewer: It is true at the moment. What do you think is more important that they get people through the door or do you think it more important that they actually have Stevenage fans here?

Steve: I think, if you get people through the door, they might transfer their allegiance. I know they'll have to really advertise it, obviously. I was quite shocked at how much it was because when I used to come... I'm saying probably when they won that league.

When was that, '80? No, 90 was it, 91? I think it was six quid. I know times have changed, but it just seemed an awful lot of money to me for watching my local town team. I can understand why they do it, but I think it's a chicken and the egg thing.

Interviewer: It is. It is very difficult. I mean, in fact, I saw Sheffield Derby about three weeks ago and that was actually £30.00 to watch. They were in the same league, obviously. So yes, football is

quite an expensive game to go and watch at whatever level you go and watch.

Steve: I think someone told me, because it was Sheffield Wednesday, they actually put the prices up a bit. So I think Arsenal would do the same. They charge more for... Again, certain games that are premium and I guess Stevenage do the same, but I don't know if that helps or not.

Interviewer: So looking back on your time as a player here, what would you say was that main highlight? What is the fondest memory you've got?

Steve: Well, the fondest memory is that I can tell my grandchildren that I used to play for Stevenage. I was never really that good and I was just a steady defender. So I'm just pleased that I actually played for Stevenage. There's no individual memory. It's just the fact that I did it. I played 20 games, so for me that's good enough.

Interviewer: And the friendships have, as you say, have stayed.

Steve: Have stayed. Yes. I think that was the beauty of the team and my junior team and youth teams. All those guys from Stevenage, and they all more or less still come from this area, so when you're having a drink in Stevenage, you'll always see somebody you know. And I think that is one of the great things about football in those days.

It's not the same now for Stevenage, the youth football, but you always see someone you know through sport, which is fantastic I think.

Interviewer: And what about shirts from that era? Did you get to keep your shirt?

Steve: No, I didn't. No.

Interviewer: And what colour did you used to play in those days?

Steve: Red and white stripes, I think.

Interviewer: Was there such a thing as an away-kit in those days?

Steve: No.

Interviewer: So it's red and white, irrespective of what the opposition had?

Steve: Pretty much, yes because you didn't have to worry about the TV cameras. Yes, I don't recall there being an away-kit, but I say, it was nearly 30 years ago now.

Interviewer: So the major changes that you noticed when you came back, in terms of the way the crowd were and on the big day of your

Leeds match, they're both Yorkshire clubs. Stevenage against a Yorkshire club, notice a lot of difference?

Steve: Not really. The crowd now is more like a professional crowd and they come and they sing and hurl abuse at the other fans or whatever. There were never enough here. I think probably 200 would have been a big crowd. When I came back to play, there was hardly anyone and most of those were family and friends of the players.

Obviously, it was in an embryonic stage, wasn't it – it took quite a while, I think, for the football fever to kick off again in Stevenage.

Interviewer: I'd like to thank you very much for coming along and I think the fact you're here is testimony to the fact that, although you're an Arsenal fan, obviously Stevenage has an important part in your own personal history.

Steve: Absolutely.

Interviewer: Maybe you'll encourage some of your fans to come along and watch then.

Steve: I will. Thanks very much.

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

END AUDIO

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