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Bob Sage: I'm Bob Sage. Did you want my age as well?

Interviewer: I'd be delighted to have your age.

Bob Sage: [I thought 0:00:03] you're collecting people's ages. I'm 64 this year.

Interviewer: Thank you for that, okay.

Bob Sage: Connection with Stevenage, used to live with my parents in South London, where they ran a Post Office. For many years, I went to Chelsea and, sort of, got involved selling the half-time tickets down there. Liked the buzz, went to Athens for the Winners' Cup Final, things like that. Then got married in the early '70s, trying to find a place to live was virtually impossible with rocketing house prices, so eventually we found this place 30 miles out of London, in a town we'd not really ever heard of called Stevenage.

Ended up up here, started to raise a family, and I was hankering for the football again. I'd vaguely been aware that there'd been problems at the club, and some evil fly-by-night had gone and dug up the pitch, and it was in rack and ruin, and the club had folded. So, this would've been the old Stevenage Athletics days, and I wasn't really aware of those as such. Then, a friend of mine said one year, "Bob, you ought to come to the football down at Stevenage." I said, "Well, okay, when, where, how?"

She said, "Well, I'll give you a lift down. There's a match on..." I think it was Boxing Day or the day after, against Hitchin Town, and that was the year we got promoted into the Conference. We lost that game, full house, cracking atmosphere, good game of football, and so I was hooked again.

So, that's how I started to watch Stevenage Borough, of course, as it was then. I've followed them very much on a regular basis, certainly on the home games, every season since, and done quite a few away games, but there's still a lot I want to do, but it's just the time and other commitments that get in the way, that stop you doing every game, and, of course, the cost.

Interviewer: Okay, and I heard Andrew say something about you've been on the microphone?

Bob Sage: Yes, well, Andy has this habit of disappearing off to Australia from time to time, and they were casting around for somebody else to do the microphone, and somebody suggested me, so I had a trial. Did a few games, I think Bob Makin thought I was a bit near the knuckle when I, at one point, said, "Oh, some bugger's gone and done

something or other,” and I got a complaint about that, for using the word ‘bugger’. I caused a ripple of amusement when I was announcing the half times and said, “It’s Luton nil, Hayes & Yeading one. No, correct that, it’s Luton nil, Hayes ones, and Yeading one.”

That proud the East Terrace into fits of laughter. So, yes, I did do a bit, but I think Bob Makin was always worried about what was I going to say next, so I think I’ve been more or less permanently replaced now. But, I did have one day which I shall always remember. I even got reported in The Telegraph, which was the first day as a football league club.

I’d spent days just working out what I was going to say as the teams came out, and I think I got it down to something like, “The waiting is over, the dream has come true, destiny has taken over, this is the Football League, this is Stevenage Borough.”

Interviewer: Excellent.

Bob Sage: Yes, The Telegraph reported the game and said, “As the announcer bawled out, ‘Bla, bla, bla’.” So, yes, that was lovely, to do that. I felt sorry for Andy, that he couldn’t be there to do it, but fair credit to him, he had a charity commitment that he felt he couldn’t let go, much as he would dearly have loved to see our first game in the Football League.

Interviewer: Yes, so you’ve seen this whole progression, yes. You said you started coming back-

Bob Sage: I've seen it from pre-Conference days, yes. I think it was the [Diadora 0:04:15], the last season in the Diadora that I first started coming to the Borough. Then, yes, seen the progression, seen the Conference win in '96. I'm not going to give my personal opinion about Victor Green, nor what happened, perhaps, to a lot of the money we earned from the Newcastle games and things like that. Suffice to say, Victor's no longer with us, and we've got Phil, and the club seems to be on a fairly even keel.

Yes, it was hugely disappointing that we didn't get that promotion, and there seems to be good merit in fighting the case that... The rules in those days were that you had to have your ground up to League standards by 31st December. Now, what club is going to invest all the extra money on the infrastructure if they're going to finish 8th or 9th, and not get promoted? They've upgraded the stadium and, you know, like Woking, they could be languishing several leagues lower now.

But, I suppose the one thing Victor did manage to achieve was to get the rules changed, that you had until 31st March in the season prior which, by then, you've got a fair inkling whether there's a chance you're going to get promoted, not finish in the top half. So, there was that, but I don't think we made too many friends along the way, ruffling feathers. I just don't remember being overly upset, for some reason, that we didn't get promoted. Yes, I was upset, but not overly so.

I think there was this, sort of, dark territory that you hadn't explored before, up in the Football League. It was going to take away, perhaps, some of the family feeling to the club. You know, with the big, big boys out there. I wasn't sure whether it would do the club a

lot of good, but I'm not even sure, really, whether we were ready for League football then, in hindsight, of course.

Interviewer: How do you mean?

Bob Sage: I'm not sure that we had the nous, the professionalism required to take that League forward. Yes, we had a very good side, and it hinged on the likes of [Sodgey 0:06:46], Smith, [Hales], those three running through the middle of the team, they were the backbone, but, you know, if the backbone starts to get a bit rickety then the whole thing can go off-kilter. I think, you know, it was fun watching Conference football. I enjoyed Conference football. I'm enjoying League football now, mind.

Interviewer: Can you tell me the difference between Conference and League football, when you're watching it, like, from a spectator's point of view, if you see what I mean?

Bob Sage: We've seen one or two games here that you'd think it still was Conference football. League football, I think you've got to think a lot quicker. The good players are distinctly a lot better, especially up in League One. I mean, that was so surprising, that we've come up two promotions in successive years. It was beyond everybody's wildest dreams, I think. Yes, you've got less time on the ball.

You've got to be able to think faster, and act faster, and you do need a better quality of player in League One, certainly. League

Two, we always perceived, I think, that there wasn't much difference in standard between the top end of the Conference and the bottom end of League Two, and so it proved to be. There was virtually no difference, apart from the fact that there were perhaps a few old journeymen out there in League Two that weren't in the Conference. Certainly, it's a much sharper level here, and of course, we've got some big teams in League One, as well.

Interviewer: Yes. What about from the point of view of..? Well, tell us where you normally stand if you're not doing the mic. You're in amongst the crowd?

Bob Sage: I've got a season ticket in this West Stand.

Interviewer: Okay, so I'm wondering-

Bob Sage: Same seat for years now, right in front of the press box, so I've been heard on Radio Liverpool, Mersey Radio, before now. Yes, I've had that seat for a long time. My legs aren't too good, so I've got to be careful about away games, whether I can manage to stand for the hour and a half, and getting a bit rickety at my age.

Interviewer: So, I'm just wondering about the experience as a supporter, the difference in the crowds, the difference between Conference and League, and the difference in..? Do you see what I mean? I mean, there must be a tremendous difference between when you were in

the Conference, old ground, talk us through how that experience for you has changed.

Bob Sage:

Now, that's an interesting one, and one I've not really thought about. In terms of crowds, certainly, there are more clubs now who are going to bring a full allocation of away support and fill the South Stand, which is good for the atmosphere in the ground. I think our fans, particularly on the East Terrace, have raised their game. They've got some new chants going, and that's really boosted the atmosphere within the ground. There's always been a problem with the acoustic over there on the East Terrace.

Things have been to try and solve it, but as long as the sound can disappear out through the gap at the back and, indeed, that television [game tree 0:10:10] just above the middle, where the main focus of supporters are, that meddles with the sound as well. But, when they're in full voice, there's no stopping them.

In terms of numbers, well, we're not seeing huge numbers of additional supporters of this club, and I think a lot of the blame lies on the fact we're too close to London, too many Arsenal, Tottenham, [arm chair 0:10:39], Manchester United, and Chelsea supporters, West Ham supporters. I know two Wolves supporters who live in Stevenage, you know?

Yes, I think it's going to be very difficult to overcome the fact that we're still thought of, perhaps, by many as still a little non-League club, and we've got to really make people sit up and take notice before we start bringing large additional numbers in. It's happening very slowly, it is. It is happening, but very, very slowly.

Interviewer: Okay. Let's go back to the beginning: You told us the first game, if you like, I mean, Stevenage has almost been a continued great story of... Well, a lot of triumphs and a few disasters.

Bob Sage: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: What stands out for you in that long sequence of, sort of, ups and downs?

Bob Sage: Well, I certainly can't really identify one particular thing, although perhaps I can in a minute, but if you want me to look at the highs and the lows?

Interviewer: Yes, talk us through it, because [crosstalk 0:11:53].

Bob Sage: Certainly. Well, this is where the comments are going to come thick, and fast, and random, I think. I mean, I'm never good on stats.

Interviewer: Okay, no worries.

Bob Sage: Two days after a game, I'll have forgotten exactly what the result was, but I'll probably remember whether we'd won it, drawn it, lost it, and maybe even who scored the goals, but unlikely. So, I'm not

very good on that aspect, neither can I remember the sequence of things now, but obviously after we'd won the Conference that first time, there was this period where the club was never quite back at that peak, because the best players had gone.

Hales had gone, Sodgey had gone. Mark Smith was getting on a bit, and he should've been picked for the England... Well, what's now the C Team. Could've made more of a career. I think he was a good enough player to, but for some reason people didn't seem to want him in the Football League. He should've been there. Of course, then, we struggled up and down over many, many years in the Conference. Paul Fairclough was here.

Paul has probably been here this morning, I haven't seen him but if he's locked away in interview room, then I know he's got a lot of good memories. The thing I remember about Paul, as much as anything, was that itchy brown jumper he used to wear. I respect a lot of people would make reference to that. He had done the club proud, bringing the club right up through the leagues. I think he got us three, four promotions in about half a dozen years, so he'd done a superb job. There has to be, I guess, again, with hindsight, a point where he almost reached a peak, or, to be unkind, a plateau.

But, I don't want to be unkind to Paul, because he was a tremendous servant of the club. Things were gradually not going anywhere. They were just, sort of, drifting and meandering along. So, the club decided to part company with him. Then, we had a succession of managers who, for various reasons, did or didn't do a good job. We found ourselves languishing near the bottom end of the table, and all of a sudden we found that the existing manager, I forget who it was then, had been sacked, and this guy called Graham Westley had been brought in.

He'd come from Farnborough, they'd had a degree of publicity by playing Arsenal in the FA Cup, and I think they got a draw, as is traditional when you're a little club at home playing against a Premiership club. So, they had the public awareness, and Phil Wallace persuaded him to come here, which he did, bringing about seven of his team with him, and I don't think that went down too well in [quarters 0:15:08]. He brought a certain aggressive style with him. He had a job to do, he did that job.

He prevented us getting relegated. It wasn't pretty football, but what he brought in and how he reshaped things, play ugly, win ugly, and we survived that season. Things were looking up, and it's obvious that Westley was unpopular, both with some of the crowd here, and in the wider football circles, possibly because of the manner in which he'd left Farnborough. I think a lot of people found him very arrogant, supercilious, didn't have time for people or anything.

Then, of course, he went, Stimson came in, total different brand of football: Pretty football, passing football, exciting football, some of the best football we've seen, Broadhall Way, the Lamex, call it what you will, for many a long season. It was a, sort of, exciting football. You're liable to score four but concede three. You know, it was always nervy stuff. Some pretty good footballers in the side that he put together, including some prima donnas, and some people who were trying to run the club from the dressing room, I think, would probably not be too much on an untruth.

Then, of course, he got us to Wembley and that first fantastic trophy final against Kidderminster. Wonderful showcase for football and for non-League football in particular. 2-0 down, we were dead and buried at half time, came back to nick it 3-2. Huge crowd, record trophy crowd. Great day and, of course, he was the world's

favourite, but still not achieving a lot in the League. Eventually, he's been poached by Gillingham, and so we're looking for a manager again.

Back comes Graham Westley, a different Graham Westley because I was privileged to be in a very elite group of fans who were permitted to sit and interview him, and talk to him. There were about a dozen of us, was all. I'd been told by somebody who was close to the club in those days... He still does do work for the club, but he's living in Spain, so it's a bit more arm's length now, although he was over here for last week's game.

He said that he had had quite a lengthy one-on-one with Graham Westley, and that he was a different man, and he genuinely believed he was a different man. It wasn't just show, and we had this meeting, then, as fans, and he explained his philosophy, and what had gone wrong last time. He agreed that he'd been arrogant, and pushy, and didn't want to talk to people. His PR was bad, and it was all going to change. A lot of the fans on the East Terrace still have not come to see Borough because Westley is here. Still the case today.

Not a huge number, but there is a number that will not come until he's no longer with the club, which is a shame, because what the club has achieved under Graham Westley is... Here's the great debate: Who was the better manager, Paul Fairclough or Graham Westley? Paul Fairclough did so much to get us and, of course, did get us, technically, into the Football League, but it was Graham Westley that finally achieved it, and then a second promotion. Of course, two more trophy finals.

So, you know, they were both, to my mind, very, very, very good managers for this club. Of course, we've been solvent ever since

Phil took over. Runs a very tight ship, he's a tight-fisted so and so, but then I'd rather have that than one of this profligate chairmen who are just thinking throwing money that isn't his at an exercise will be the be all and end all of cures for any problems you've got.

Then, when it all goes tits up, almost like Luton, who've spent huge amounts of money, most of it parachute money coming out of the Football League... They're still struggling, and I'd hate to be in that situation. I've lost track of what the question as now, but it-

Interviewer: It doesn't matter, really.

Bob Sage: It doesn't matter, does it?

Interviewer: Just keep talking, we'll be fine. Yes, yes.

Bob Sage: Yes, okay.

Interviewer: Tell us about those trophy finals. You went to all of them?

Bob Sage: Yes, of course.

Interviewer: Can you tell us, sort of, what the feeling was amongst the crowd? Sort of, what the day was like?

Bob Sage: Yes, I can summarise all three of those very well: The first one, utter despair. James Constable really taking the mickey out of the Stevenage fans when he scored his second to put them 2-0 up, and we were so deflated. Yet, we kept going, and trying to support the team. A couple of changes in the second half, and we pulled back one, and we thought, "Oh, we can pull back another one here. We've started to play the right sort of football, Stimson-type football."

Interviewer: Right.

Bob Sage: We drew up to 2-2, then Craig Dobson appeared, and then all of a sudden he's just through on goal, and bang, it's in. We thought, "It's got to be offside, there's going to be something wrong here." No, 3-2. Just couldn't believe it, so it was a wonderful rollercoaster of emotion: You've got this huge excitement at being at the first Wembley competitive game since the stadium was newly refurbished. Then, into the game, down into the doldrums of being 2-0 down, and dead and buried for all intents and purposes.

It was like the previous trophy final against Yeovil at Villa Park. It was like the game against Carlisle. Where the heck did we play that? We played that... It was Stoke City's ground, the Britannia Stadium. That's right, sorry about that little interlude. Both of those, we lost, and we thought, "Well, here we go again. Another major game lost." Then it was just this huge surge in emotion, and at the end, we just couldn't believe it, that we'd actually nicked that game and won it 3-2, from being so far down.

The next one, York, was a strange game. I wasn't in with the main bulk of fans. I decided to treat myself to the luxury package tour that the club put on, which is luxury coach, breakfast at a hotel on the North Circular, then to the ground, in the Bobby Moore suite, where you've got the bars, and the food, and good, comfortable seats. You know, those plush seats at Wembley, just above the player's tunnel. I was so close to the centre line that I was there, and the York City supporters started at the seat next to me.

Had great chat and banter with these guys. You know, there's no animosity in most of this level of football. But, as a game, it was a non-event. It was as though York hadn't turned up, and we won it easily, but the sense of victory wasn't as great, simply because it wasn't the huge contest that the Kidderminster game had been previously. The less said about the Barrow game the better, I think, because it was a huge disappointment.

It was a bit of a rough and tumble. We had Charlie Griffin seriously injured when we'd already used all our substitutes. Although their player got sent off, we were down to nine men, because we'd already had a man sent off, David Bridges. We lost that feeling very hard done by, a great sense of injustice. Charlie had a very serious injury as a result of that, and most of the supporters have not forgiven Barrow that game, so I'd rather forget that one and pretend it didn't happen, like we pretend a lot of games didn't happen.

There was a game at home to Macclesfield, the season that they got promoted out of the Conference into the Football League. We were winning it 3-2, they had a man sent off, and then they won 3-2. That game did not happen. I assure you, that game did not happen. Games that did... I mean, I remember silly little things, you

know, from the year's that I've been supporting Borough. I remember going to Carshalton once. We were playing them...

It must've been in one of the very early rounds or preliminary rounds of the FA Cup. We got in the vicinity of Carshalton and the driver turns round and said, "Anybody know where the ground is? Where are we going?" So, I said, "Well, it's the Memorial Ground." "Well, anybody know where that is?" So, there was a general canvassing up and down the bus, "Anybody know where the Memorial Ground is?" I said, "Well, no, but I think it's just in there, because we've just gone past the war memorial."

"No, it can't be there." Carry on down the road, a mile and a half, get to a dead end, almost, turn the bus round, come back...

"There's the memorial, there's the Memorial Ground. It says so up there." "No, it can't be in there. Go on up there," another mile. We went past that memorial three times, and eventually the driver said, "Oh well, we'll try in here then." Sure enough, there's the football ground. I remember we went...

Again, it must've been a cup game, because people will tell you about when we went to Runcorn and won 8-0 on their pitch. I remember a cup game which we drew. I think it was a ___[0:26:07] 0-0 draw, but we piled into the supporters' coaches down here, and off we went up to Runcorn, whose ground seems to be in a strange place, because you come off the main road, and you're following specialist bus roads. I mean, they are roads dedicated to buses.

Why, I don't know, but we were going through this maze of bus lanes, and all of a sudden, there's their ground. It's about midday. (Laughter) They're not exactly geared up for two coach loads of visiting supporters at midday, but there were staff in the clubhouse. Boy, did they get that bar open quickly. I remember drinking an

awful lot of alcohol before the game that day, and I don't remember much about the journey back. You know, it's the silly little things like that that stand out. Huge, crushing victories over Woking were always popular, because Woking were the big rivals in those days.

The cup games, of course, we had a wonderful run of FA Cup games. The first big one was Leyton Orient away, no doubt Peter Shilton should've been sent off, but as it was his... What was it, his 1000th game or something the following week, and they had a big celebration planned. Had he been sent off, he'd have missed that game and it would have all gone a bit flat. So, referee was under instructions not to send Shilton off that day. I'm convinced of it to this day.

Interviewer: What did Shilton do?

Bob Sage: Oh, he just completely took Barry Hales out in the penalty area and prevented him scoring a goal. It was as simple as that. Actually, it wasn't Barry Hales, it was one of the other forwards, whose name escapes me. Corey Browne, I think it was, but my memory gets a bit hazy on these things. That was a lot of years ago now. My brain cells are dying faster than I'm talking to you.

So, there was that fantastic victory, at the end of which, on the supporters' coach, somebody lobbed a brick at the driver's window, and smashed his side window. He got cut by flying glass, so that was an unpleasant end to that. Then, of course, we had the famous day at Swindon, in arctic conditions, and they were arctic. We got to the ground an hour and a half before kick-off, and they wouldn't let us into the away stand, which was an open... It wasn't even a

terrace, it was open seating, facing due west, so we were on the east side of the ground.

You could just see the wave after wave of weather coming in. We were sitting there completely wrapped up, little peep holes for our eyes. Hail, snow, rain all coming virtually horizontally at you throughout the afternoon. Wonderful memories of their goalkeeper trying to take a goal kick and the ball going halfway up the field, whipping round and going back over for a corner, because the wind was so strong.

Somehow, probably by playing more intelligent football than Swindon did, we won that. Of course, we had Newcastle. Great days, they were. I don't remember much about the game down here, to be honest, but it was a huge occasion. I remember probably more about the game up there.

Interviewer: I was going to ask, why don't you remember much about the game down here? Did you just not..?

Bob Sage: I don't know, it was just surreal. You know, us little tin pot part-timers playing a mighty club like Newcastle. It just didn't seem to have that reality that it should've had. There'd been all the hype beforehand, which I think more or less exhausted everybody before we even got to kicking a ball. There was a lot of wind-up going on between the two clubs. Newcastle, as is famously known, didn't want to play the game here because they thought our stadium wouldn't be safe.

They sent a delegation down to inspect the ground, Victor Green refused them entry, made sure the place was locked up so that they were reduced to peering through the gates, and the fences, and so on. We built a temporary stand, they played the game down here against their wishes, got the draw, Kenny Dalglish claimed that, "Well, they use different balls in the Conference. They had an advantage over us because we weren't used to that type of ball," and then, of course, it all went to town because the ball we used was one that he had his signature on.

He'd endorsed the product and didn't realise, so there was an awful lot of... Not in-fighting. What's the right word? There was a lot of digging at each other, and, of course, we had the publicity as the part-timers. People's lives were perhaps exposed a little more than you would ordinarily expect, but it happens with any little, small club. You know, "This one's the postman, this one's the fitter, this one's the joiner, this one's unemployed."

That was what this team was in those days. Des Gallagher, who was our goalkeeper at the time, he did have a penchant for wearing tights under his tracksuit. Helped him keep warm, but, of course, the word got out. "Goalkeeper wears his wife's tights, ohh. Watch him." You know, things like that, but yes, there was a lot of unpleasantness between the two clubs.

Interviewer: Was that reflected also at the level of the supporters, or was it just at the level of the clubs?

Bob Sage: Their supporters were actually fine. I honestly think, alright, whether you like the Northerners or not is neither here nor there. I think, as

a group of honest, passionate supporters, you can't get any better than the Newcastle supporters, and it was unfortunate that because there was such an invasion of them expected down here, that most of the pubs in Stevenage refused to allow them entry.

Interviewer: Really?

Bob Sage: Yes.

Interviewer: Right.

Bob Sage: My local pub did, so long as they had a match ticket, but then, those that didn't have a match ticket were coming down here, hunting high and low for a pub to watch the game in, and just, sort of, be near the game, and be part of the atmosphere. It was a shame that... I think it was largely misguided police advice, which is always erring on the side of caution. The majority of pubs were just being very, very cautious, and having bouncers on the door, and if you sounded as though you came north of Watford Gap, you wouldn't get in, which is a shame, but...

Interviewer: Yes, it is.

Bob Sage: But, I didn't know of any trouble. I spoke to several Newcastle supporters during the course of the day, and again, going up there,

because we didn't lose that game. The ball was never over the line, I don't think, anyway. I was pretty well in line with the goal line, but that was a long, long day, going up there, because we got stuck in traffic, and then we had to be escorted up to St James' Park, where there were hundreds of coaches. We had to walk about a mile and a half to the ground, from where the coach ended up parking.

We got into the ground at 7:40 for a 7:45 kick-off, so there was a huge scramble just to grab a programme, pile into your seats, and the teams were already out on the pitch. So, you didn't have the chance to get the build-up, which was a shame, you know, to absorb the atmosphere for a while, which I always find is a huge part of any big football match, especially. Yes, disappointment, coming back from that, and yet, such pride that we'd acquitted ourselves so well, and should've got the extra time out of that one, but...

Interviewer: Did that make the second Newcastle game here all the more sweet, or do you see it..?

Bob Sage: Oh, did it heck. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Revenge is very, very sweet. They came down here, I am sure, convinced that they should just be turning over a small club like us, stroll in the park, mere formality, boom. No, we played some of our finest football that day, it has to be said, and they were perhaps off-song, just as Sheffield Wednesday were, earlier this season, coming down here. We slaughtered them, the best 45 minutes football I've ever seen a Stevenage side put together, that game. Yes.

Interviewer: Jack, do you want to throw some questions in?

Jack: Yes, I just wanted to ask you about away games.

Bob Sage: Yes.

Jack: What's the difference between going to the away..? Do you find it's more passionate, a different level of support, is there?

Bob Sage: You always get the core of die-hard supporters going to away games, and therefore, they are relatively far more vocal. I mean, if you've got 300 supporters travelling to an away game, 230 of them will be singing. If you've got the game at home, and you've got 3,000 home supporters, 500 of them will be singing. So, you know, it's proportional. No, there's always great... As the Irish call it, 'craic', with away games.

There's a group, to which I loosely belong, called Borough Gents. We go on tour, probably anything between 12 and 24 of us at a time, block booking on the train, and we just get up there as early as we can, have breakfast. I think the day we played up at Chester in the last game that never was because it got expunged, we were having breakfast in Chester at something like 10:30.

Interviewer: What time did you leave Stevenage to do that?

Bob Sage: Well, it was quite easy, because it was the inaugural run of the fast service from London Euston, Milton Keynes, Chester.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Bob Sage: Next stop, so, you know, it was a very fast journey, and yes, we got on at Milton Keynes, find half the Borough supporters already on the train. Well, we were staying up overnight, so we just went and found a hotel, dumped the bags, and yes, as I say, we were having breakfast at 10:30 in a Wetherspoon's. Now, Wetherspoon's are very good places, because they open at 9:00 in the morning, you see, so lots of alcohol can be consumed to top up the levels that have evaporated during the train journey, and believe me, some of these guys can drink, and drink, and drink vast quantities without it appearing to affect them too much.

There are some who think they can, but can't, and then they just get wrecked and don't remember the game of football, or coming home. But yes, away games, I always enjoy away games. I used to enjoy Morecambe away, I did that one three years running, just coincidentally, because the away fixture at Morecambe for those three seasons coincided with either my collecting my daughter from uni in Lancaster, which is only two miles away, or having to take her back.

So, we timed it so I drive up to Lancaster, either drop the family in town to do shopping, and do their own thing, and I nip over to Morecambe, or we'd get up there early, drop all the furniture, bags and belongings, I'd leave them sorting it while I went to Morecambe to watch the football, and then pick them up somewhere pre-

arranged afterwards. There was one wonderful year where... Well, it wasn't wonderful from the supporter's point of view, because there was a major crash on the M6, and the team coach didn't get to Morecambe's ground until 02:20, the supporters' club coach was stuck miles behind it, because, of course, the team had set off a lot earlier.

Kick-off came, and apart from the directors who'd been on the coach, I was the only Borough supporter in the ground. I saw Neil Trebble score 2 goals in the first 15 minutes, before the Borough supporters all filed in late to watch a 0-0 draw.

Jack: He [didn't 0:39:42] mention that, Neil.

Interviewer: Yes.

Jack: We were just interviewing Neil.

Bob Sage: Yes?

Jack: Yes.

Bob Sage: Did he remember that?

Jack: No, he didn't mention that.

Bob Sage: Oh, didn't he? Well, he wouldn't, because he probably didn't realise that there were no supporters in the ground at the time.

Interviewer: Yes.

Bob Sage: I mean, there are some lovely places to go. Dover was always a nice ground to go... Morecambe, certainly, was one of the most welcoming, friendly, hospitable little clubs there was. Forest Green, another lovely club to go and visit, although they've gone all veggie now, so I'm not sure you can get a decent sausage roll or a pie down there now. I don't want to say that was, but they said, "No, we're going green, so we're not having any meat products and ___[0:40:23]."

Yes, lots of little places we've been to that've been great fun. Then, of course, you go to the bigger places and they just, sort of, try to over-awe you, but as Graham Westley is very fond of saying, this season particularly, forget your Charltons, forget your Sheffield Wednesdays. They might've been big clubs once, but they're on the same level as us now. It's 11 hearts, 11 minds, and 11 pairs of legs pitched against one another. End of.

Interviewer: Yes, yes.

Bob Sage: I think this is why we have done so well last season, and why we're holding our own this season, that that attitude is there amongst the team itself, the self-belief.

Jack: Andrew said earlier-

Bob Sage: Sorry, that was a long answer, wasn't it?

Jack: Yes, that's fine. That's what we like. Andrew said earlier you had a really loud voice, one of the loudest he's ever heard. You're particularly well known in the stands.

Bob Sage: I think a few people know when it's me, yes. Yes, I have got a loud voice. I sing, so I've got a good projecting voice, I think, as anything. It's not necessarily stronger vocal chords. I think it's just the way I can project. I can go, for example, to the Gordon Craig Theatre here, where I will refuse to use a throat mic, because I know I can reach the back row with no trouble, even in a quiet sentence in a play, because it's about the way you enunciate and project.

Even when I was, oh, fairly young, my mother always used to say, "Shush, shush. You've got a voice like a foghorn." So, I've always had a naturally loud voice, so yes, I've put it to good effect sometimes.

Interviewer: Who decides if you're singing as well, Bob? How do you work out the chants, because [crosstalk 0:42:36]?

Bob Sage: Oh no, no, I'm talking singing outside of the football club.

Interviewer: Oh okay, sorry.

Bob Sage: I don't know how they work, I'd love to find out one day, who starts it off, because it seems to be a spontaneous starting of a song, but somebody must pass the word or just start it on their own, and then they all pick up the next time around, or maybe just repeat the first... I don't know.

Jack: I remember at Watford, it used to be, sort of, the [contingent 0:43:01] at the back would start off the songs, and you'd, sort of, pass down to the front.

Bob Sage: Yes, yes. It needs to start at the back.

Jack: ____.

Bob Sage: Otherwise, if it starts at the front, the people behind won't hear it so well.

Interviewer: Yes.

Jack: How do you think the club is integrating itself into the community?
Do you think it's improved?

Bob Sage: I think it's doing quite a good job. There's this new affinity project going on, where they're trying to get out into all the schools. It's always difficult to reach an entire community, particularly when half of them are Tottenham, and Arsenal, and West Ham supporters, but it's important. It's important that the club does maintain good relations with the wider community in the town, because maybe not everybody in the town likes football, and feels that they've got to tolerate some rate payer's money, perhaps, being diverted or used towards the football club.

I mean, we're on a fairly low rent here, as I understand it. Now, perhaps if the council charged a more realistic rent, the football club would be in more financial trouble, may not survive so readily, may therefore bring problems to the club which might have to fold, which therefore has a, sort of...

Interviewer: Well, does it have a knock-on effect on the town, is that..? It seems to me it's-

Bob Sage: Yes, but I don't think to any huge extent.

Interviewer: Right.

Bob Sage: So, I think it's quite possible that some people think, "Well, why should the council put money into this football club? I'm not getting anything out of it, because I'm not interested in the football club." I think it's important for a town, because it raises the town's profile, and it is a means to get out to the kids in the town, to get them playing football, and not just playing football on a school playing field under the supervision of a master whose natural bent is, shall we say, geography.

So, he knows which is left and right and which is north and south, but in terms of how to kick a football, he may not have quite so much the idea that the people at the club going out there and doing little training sessions with the kids, getting them involved... Of course, hopefully that will rub off on the kids, and they'll want to come here and see the club playing, which is, again, a good upwards cycle.

Interviewer: Yes. Do you have another one?

Jack: Do you want to ____ [0:45:41]?

Interviewer: I've got a query, yes. Is there a Mrs Bob?

Bob Sage: Yes.

Interviewer: How does Mrs Bob feel about Bob and football? How does that work for you, because it sounds like you're going to be away from home an awful lot?

Bob Sage: No, I'm not. No, as I said very early on in this little session, I don't get to all the away games, partly because of the cost and the time. You know, you go to somewhere a long way up north on a Saturday, say Carlisle, you can't get back that evening, so it's an overnight job, and who wants to stay in Carlisle overnight? Not many people that I know, so I, sort of, mix and match. I spend some of my Saturdays at home, and I spend some of my Saturdays at away games, tending mainly, but not always, to be the ones that are that bit closer to home, or if not so close to home, very easy to get to.

So, Scunthorpe, in January, is going to be an easy one, because you get a train straight of Stevenage, and it's a cheap ticket. So, you think those in front... You know, Gillingham would've been... Except that they're still languishing below us, that was an easy one to get to. Back in the Conference days, Ebbsfleet.

Interviewer: Right, yes, sure.

Bob Sage: Now, is ever so easy. Down to King's Cross, walk across the road to St Pancras, get that HS1 train, you're there in 15 minutes. What?

You know, it's less than an hour ground to ground. So, yes, I don't push it too far, but I know where the boundaries are, and the fact that I can stretch them a bit when I want to. I mean, we went up to Port Vale last season. We won that game, somehow. So, that was about as far as I went for a football match last season. We do our share, but we don't overstep the mark, you know? I was talking about the Borough Gents on tour.

I mean, we tend to have these, sort of, big, organised outings, otherwise we all make our own way to various games, but when we have an organised party, we have an organised party. A couple of years ago, we played down at Eastbourne. The game was being televised. Now, that must've been on either Setanta, or Sky Sports 3, or something like that. Some bright spark decided, as it was Eastbourne, and it was full of old grannies, we would all dress up as old grannies, so we did, 22 assorted old ladies, supporting football shirts, and a lot of beer, climbed onto the train at Stevenage in the morning.

Got hopefully lost in Sussex, because there were engineering works, and they put us on a bus. We hijacked the bus and got it to go off on a detour to get us near the football ground. We were there far too early, had a few beers, somebody produced a football, so all these grannies are having a kick around outside the ground. Well, one guy had a pair of split crotch bloomers on, underneath this dress of his, and he kept falling over, so of course, that was revealing all and sundry to the general mirth and merriment of everybody.

We all got totally slaughtered, but a fantastic day out, and their stewards at the end of the day, when we all piled into a fleet of taxis to get back to the railway station, they just applauded of because of

the spirit in which we turned up. You know, the friendliness, and there was no trouble, whatever. Borough are very good at not causing trouble, I'll say that for this club. We very rarely get any troublemakers, or banning orders, or arrests, or anything.

That's just as a little aside, but their stewards, they were just so overwhelmed that this lot had just taken the trouble to turn up dressed as we were, playing football. It was a great day out, you know? So, we do do silly things like that. I mean, the other night at Brentford, a lot of them went dressed in Halloween gear of varying types of scariness. Yes, they do things like that, because we're still a small, grassroots club. Little fish in a fairly big pond, but we're surviving, because we've got a little bit of streetwise now.

Interviewer: It's blown my mind, that vision. (Laughter) ____ [0:50:49]. [Crosstalk].

Bob Sage: There are photographs out there, there are photographs out there somewhere.

Interviewer: I hope they're going to go to the memories people. Just on that thing that you said, you know, there's very little 'aggro', as it were, do you think there are particular reasons for that, that it's [crosstalk 0:51:10]?

Bob Sage: We've grown up from being a small, family club that's always had family values. We've never learnt 'nasty'. There are some clubs I suppose I could name... When we were playing in the Conference,

we never liked going to Aldershot, because there was a teenage element there that were out to cause trouble, and would easily pick a fight with anybody if they could get away with it. Woking had a great rivalry, and had a very small minority who were troublemakers.

My old club, Newport County, who are now in the conference, they've got a hooligan element and always have, since before the club folded as a Football League club. I don't know where this hooliganism comes from, or why. I mean, this is a whole new subject that we could talk about for hours. I'm just very pleased that we have got a reputation for being a trouble-free club, and a friendly club.

People come down here, having a preconceived idea that we're little upstarts, and that we're above our station, and we're snotty, and snooty. When they come down here, you invariably get the reports, "Had a great day out, really friendly people, lovely club," and that's the way I'd love to see it stay. I love this football club, otherwise I wouldn't come here week in and week out, and be a season ticket holder for as many years as I have been.

Jack: Can I just ask you, how has the attendance improved since going up through the League? Has it improved, or is it [crosstalk 0:53:08]?

Bob Sage: It has improved, not by that many hundreds of home supporters. I think we're getting a more consistent 3,500, where we were getting 2,500. The economy has not helped, and I know, I read time, and time, and time again on the fans' forum, people saying, "Well, I'm

going to go to so and so game because it's a big game, but I can't therefore afford to go to so and so." There's a lot of that financial pressure around at the moment.

As I remarked earlier, there are a lot of bigger clubs, like the Huddersfields, and the Sheffields Wednesdays, and the Sheffield Uniteds, and Charltons, who are going to bring their full 1,400 allocation, and indeed, in the case of Charlton, we sold them an extra 250 seats in the main stand, so they brought 1,650 out of a crowd of 4,300. So, that still brings us back to 2,700, which is probably about our core support.

Go back to 1996, and I think we were getting 3,500 to 4,000 then, but I think it's the economy and the pressures on people socially nowadays that have caused those numbers to wane somewhat. But, they're being off-set, to an extent, by away support this season. It's still not ideally enough from Phil Wallace's perspective. I know he'd like to see average crowds, 4,000, 4,500, 5,000, if he could, but it's a question of how do you achieve it? You can't make people come to a football match.

All you can do is [exalt 0:54:54] your existing supporters to try and persuade a friend to come along and try it. All too often, that's happened and they've seen a dire game of football. They say, "Well, that was rubbish. I'm not coming back there again." Once somebody's got a negative slant on something, it's going to take a huge amount of work to switch that back round to a positive.

Interviewer: Yes. It's gone completely out of my head. No, I've lost it. Sorry, do you have another one that you were about to throw?

Jack: Yes, is there a particular squad that you remember as being your favourite? I don't expect you to know all the players. Is there a particular one?

Bob Sage: The team that won the Conference in '96 was a good squad. The team that won the Conference in, was it 2009, 2010? I can't remember. I've lost track now, when we won the Conference at Kidderminster. That was a very good squad, but then, we've got a superb squad out there now. They work damned hard, they work for Graham Westley.

They do a long, hard, physical day that they wouldn't do at other clubs, necessarily, but they're prepared to put in the hours because it's serving their game, and their ambition, and reminding me of Kidderminster away, when we won the Conference. I remember, after the game, texting my wife, and my text said, "We've done it. There are grown men here crying, and I'm one of them."

Interviewer: That's wonderful.

Bob Sage: Yes.

Interviewer: That's great.

Bob Sage: Have you remembered your question yet?

Interviewer: Yes, and then I forgot it again.

Bob Sage: (Laughter)

Interviewer: I actually was going to ask a question about that, which was about the difference in the way that you feel between when you've won a game and lost a game, if you find it easy to cope with or..?

Bob Sage: The journey back home is half as long when you've won a game. It's twice as long if you've got a sense of injustice about the result, and the man in black in the middle. Sometimes, you go to an away game and it's just numbing if you've lost heavily and you didn't think you ought to. Thankfully, there was one game at Accrington that I couldn't go to, and this is hearsay, but all my friends went and I remember them saying that the journey back was the worst journey home they'd ever had, because we got trounced 4-0.

Interviewer: Yes, that's a long way to go back when you've-

Bob Sage: Yes.

Interviewer: Yes.

Bob Sage: But, when you're winning or doing well... I mean, I remember my boss who sits next to me in the stand here, she couldn't make that first Newcastle cup game in '98 because she'd gone out to Thailand to meet her daughter, who was travelling the world. So, she'd taken a holiday out there while we were playing Newcastle. I mean, what timing is that? But, they found The Bangkok Times, which is an English language paper out there, full of the story of Stevenage, little Stevenage against Newcastle.

Then, they found a video café that was going to be showing the game, and I've just shown the guys out there photos of the little placard outside the cafés, trying to, sort of, advertise Stevenage versus Newcastle, but they've mangled the name so much that you could almost be forgiven for not thinking it was this game at all. Then, just to prove it, there was a photograph of the television screen, with the Borough players on it as well.

Interviewer: Oh, right.

Bob Sage: So, she did get to see that game, albeit at 10:30 at night or something, out there. Then, missed the replay, because she was travelling up-country on one of these overnight trains and, of course, didn't have a television at all, so she didn't know the result until, oh, a couple of days later, I think. Yes, she eventually emailed and said, "Oh, great result. Unfortunately, we lost but it sounds as though it was a bit of a controversial decision to allow Shearer the goal that wasn't proved to have crossed the line," but yes.

END AUDIO

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