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Interviewer: Can you tell me your name, age, and how you're related to the football club?

Jimmy Hughes: My name is Jimmy Hughes. I'm 44 and I played for Stevenage on a couple of occasions, a couple of seasons, back in the late '80s and early '90s.

Interviewer: How did you start playing for Stevenage?

Jimmy Hughes: I used to play for a number of local clubs. Hartford Town was one of those. Paul Fairclough was the manager of there and he became the manager at Stevenage, so he pulled some of the players from Hartford into Stevenage.

Interviewer: What kind of a manager was Paul Fairclough?

Jimmy Hughes: Well, he was very successful. I didn't see eye to eye with him quite a lot of the time, but that's because we had quite a lot of players that he wanted to get in the side and I didn't always

play. Yes, he's very successful and he went on to do much greater things after the season that we had here.

Interviewer: Do you remember any of your favourite players that you played alongside with?

Jimmy Hughes: I still keep in touch with a lot of them, so people like Tony Ward, Martin Gittings. I still see them regularly. Yes, those are really good players for Stevenage as well.

Interviewer: Do you remember your first match in a Stevenage shirt?

Jimmy Hughes: I can't actually because it was the back end of the 1980s and I played for a few games. I can't even remember the manager, but then I went off and played at Hartford and then I came back. I do remember that first game. I can't remember who it was against, but it was an away game and we won two-one. It was in Essex somewhere, but I can't remember who it was against. I remember the following game, the first home game, which was against Collier Row. I scored my first goal that day, so that was quite memorable.

Interviewer: What was it like scoring your first goal? How did you feel?

Jimmy Hughes: It was great. It was great because Stevenage always, even in those days, had a big following, a good crowd. There were probably about 400/500 people there that day, so it was really quite satisfying.

Interviewer: What position did you play? You said you scored your first goal.

Jimmy Hughes: Yes, I was centre forward.

Interviewer: Centre forward, yes.

Jimmy Hughes: Yes, I was centre forward. It was a frustrating time for me. That season, I scored over 30 goals, so it was a very successful season. It was successful for the club and for me. We won the league that year. The frustration came from the fact that there were 3 forwards, who Paul Fairclough rotated the forwards every week. Every other week I didn't get a game, which was quite frustrating, but especially the fact that I scored 30 goals. If I'd played more games I think I'd probably have scored well over 40 that season.

Interviewer: Did you agree with his tactics then?

Jimmy Hughes: (Laughter) Obviously not, but you couldn't argue because we won the league and we were winning almost every week. It was very successful, so you couldn't really argue about it.

Interviewer: Was that the year that they got denied promotion, was it?

Jimmy Hughes: No, it was quite some time ago. It was probably over 20 years ago now. We were in the- I can't remember what it was called now. The Vauxhall League. Division 2 I think it was. We won that season, went up into division 1. Yes, it was quite some time ago.

Interviewer: What did it feel like going up in the next league?

Jimmy Hughes: Oh, it was great. Yes, it was really good, a really enjoyable season. The only down side I suppose, we won the league by miles, and we won it with about six or seven games to go. The frustrating thing was we had a brilliant team that year, probably the best at that level in the country. We'd failed to make any progress in the FA Vase, which we played at Wembley, so it was quite a disappointment I suppose, looking back on it.

Interviewer: Did you play at Wembley in the-?

Jimmy Hughes: I didn't, no, no. No.

Interviewer: Were you there watching?

Jimmy Hughes: I've been there a couple of times when they've been in the trophy. I've watched a few games, Stevenage games, but not ever played, unfortunately.

Interviewer: Can you remember any great home games that you've played here?

Jimmy Hughes: (Laughter) I was thinking about this, this week and it's quite difficult because it's such a long time ago, so it was quite hard. I haven't got any of my old programmes and stuff to look at the match reports. No, so it's quite difficult. There were a couple of occasions where I scored hat tricks here, so that was quite satisfying. I can't remember who against. There's one game in particular about Billericay, where they were battling with us for the top-of-the-league spot. I remember it was a Tuesday night game. We beat them one-nil and I scored the winning goal there. That was quite interesting, quite exciting.

Interviewer: Any opposing players that really stick out to you?

Jimmy Hughes: Not really. It was such a long time ago. It was quite interesting. A lot of the lads who played in this area, they all play for and move around different clubs, so I ended up playing with a lot of the players that I'd played against. There's people like Tony Martin, was a really good centre half. Noel Blackwell was quite a tough person to play against. I ended up playing with him at Stevenage though.

Interviewer: Was it welcoming or was there a bit of rivalry? What was it like when you used to play against your old-?

Jimmy Hughes: Yes, there was a lot of rivalry. In the position I played it was quite tough. Yes, it was hard work. The guys that I used to play

against were generally quite, yes, hard centre halves really, so they used to kick me about a bit. It was interesting. I used to give them a bit back as well. Yes, it's all good fun.

Interviewer: When you were playing, could you ever imagine that Stevenage would now be in League One? Could you ever imagine that for the club?

Jimmy Hughes: Not as far as they've done. When I left Stevenage I went to play for Borehamwood. The Chairman at Borehamwood I got to know fairly well, was Phil Wallace, who ended up at Stevenage. He was doing a great job at Borehamwood, so it didn't surprise me that he went to a bigger club with a bigger catchment that he was trying to do and went to Stevenage and made it into the success it has been because that was his ambition. I'm not surprised from that level, but I'm quite surprised how quickly they've done it and to where they've actually got to in such a short space of time.

Interviewer: Well, after you left the club you still followed the matches and the scores.

Jimmy Hughes: Yes.

Interviewer: You might be quite fond of Stevenage as a club then.

Jimmy Hughes: Yes, course. Yes. I played here for a while. I've lived in the town almost all my life, so I've known lots and lots of players

who've played here. I've come down to watch a lot of the games previously. It's a bit different now because as they've become more successful they're not so much local guys anymore, so they're all anywhere around the country, basically, to get the best players. Ten/fifteen years ago, everyone was local, so it was quite interesting. I used to read all the reports. If I wasn't playing here we'd hear what they were doing, who was scoring goals, who was playing well and those type of things. I've always stayed interested in that.

Interviewer: Do you think it's a good thing for the club that now it's broadened and players are coming from all over the country or is it a bit more nostalgia that everyone was from around the area?

Jimmy Hughes: I think that goes with the territory. Because they're more successful that's what happens. There are not enough players locally who are going to be able to get in the first team. It is sad I suppose, but part of that success that they've had lends itself to that kind of process I suppose. It is a shame because everyone did used to be fairly local, so it was quite interesting. A lot of people knew all the players. You used to know the people you'd come to watch. It was quite interesting, and it is much different now.

Interviewer: You say that you've lived in Stevenage most of your life. What do you think the football club has done for the town?

Jimmy Hughes: I think previously, let's say until 10 years ago, it was not too much I don't think. I think it was only the people who used to be

really interested in football used to come to the games or were as interested in the games. I think a lot of my friends who played Sunday football and Saturday afternoons for [a lot of 0:08:44] clubs, they used to always play the finals here. That was good for them, but I think the recent success has been absolutely fantastic. I think it's going to continue and it'll be even better for the town going forward.

Interviewer: What was it like playing [abroad/away 0:09:00] and what were the fans like?

Jimmy Hughes: It was quite interesting, in that I was looking at the pitch today. (Laughter) When we used to play, some of the teams we played against, their pitches were awful. Stevenage always had, and always has had a really fantastic pitch. Not as good as it is now, but it wasn't far off. It was the best playing surface by a mile. All the teams we played against didn't have as many fans either. We used to get 500/600/700 at each game, whereas we'd play away and some of those teams would get maybe 50 or 100.

It was always really good for us to play here. The pitch was fantastic, the fans were great. You'd always get a crowd, so it was really good.

Interviewer: Have the stands and that changed much since you-?

Jimmy Hughes: Massively. People who come here, and even yourself, you probably wouldn't remember this, but when I used to play we used to have this bar over at the opposite end of the stand. It

was a pre-fab wooden building. They used to hold a lot of events in there, weddings and stuff like that. I'm sure that still goes on now. That was interesting. The biggest change that people won't remember is the stand where the scoreboard is because that was just a grass hill. It was. It was a complete grass hill and people used to sit up there. I remember at training we used to do a lot of training up and down the hill, so that's a massive change.

The rest of it hasn't changed too much in terms of the structure, a couple of new stands and what have you, which is great. The layout was exactly the same, apart from the backend where they had the green-grass hill. That was quite interesting. (Laughter) That's massively changed.

Interviewer: You mentioned that you used to run up the hill as part of your training sessions. What else happened in training and how often a week?

Jimmy Hughes: We used to train twice a week. Everyone was part time. We all had jobs and what have you. We used to train Tuesdays and Thursdays if we didn't have a game on Tuesday. In actual fact, one of the interesting things, Stevenage used to play the evening games on Monday nights, which is completely different to everyone, so that's quite interesting. We used to either play on Monday or train on Tuesday and train on Thursday and have a game on Saturday.

Interviewer: What was training like? Is it anything like it is nowadays? How has it changed?

Jimmy Hughes: Well, because it was only twice a week they had to cram a lot in, in terms of the fitness and what have you. It tended to be quite hard and lots of running and what have you. I'm not sure what it's like now, but people were less fit I think than they are at the moment. It's all about the diets and monitoring their fitness. When we were playing they didn't really do that. I suppose it's symptomatic. The level of football we were playing at was much lower than at the moment.

Interviewer: Finally, what would your greatest memory of your time at Stevenage be?

Jimmy Hughes: There are a few. I scored a lot of goals at this particular ground, so it was really good in that season. There was one particular goal. It was quite foggy, so I don't think many people saw it. I picked ball up- someone threw it to me from just by the halfway line. I looked up and the keeper was just not sensing any danger, so I just smashed a shot. It must have been about 45/50yds, and it sailed in the top corner, so that was quite good. Unfortunately it was so foggy I don't think many people saw it. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Do you remember who that was against?

Jimmy Hughes: I can't. It would be quite interesting to look back at an old programme and look at the records for that season because I did score a lot of goals. Who they were against, now I really can't remember. It's over 20 years ago.

Interviewer: Do you remember if you won or not?

Jimmy Hughes: We did, yes. We won that game. I think I scored another probably one or two that game. Yes, it was a really good time. As I said, I scored quite a lot of goals. It was really quite exciting at that time, but unfortunately I can't remember much about who they were against.

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