

File: BMD Lloyd Briscoe

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Interviewer: Could I have your name please, sir?

Lloyd Briscoe: Lloyd Briscoe.

Interviewer: Thank you.

In what capacity are you involved with Stevenage Football Club?

Lloyd Briscoe: I'm the Chairman of the Football Club Supporters' Association, and on match days I generally help out in the PA section, and the scoreboard and whatnot.

Interviewer: Okay.

So, [if I may 0:00:19], I'll start about asking you about the Supporters' Club Association?

Lloyd Briscoe: Yes.

Interviewer: What does your job in that respect?

Lloyd Briscoe: Being Chairman of the Supporters' Club? Okay.

Well, the Sports Association represents about 900 members, which is about one in four of the supporters who come in to watch Stevenage.

We raise money on behalf of the club, from the supporters. We'll put on social events. We facilitate getting our own Stevenage supporters to the away games.

And I'm also the delegate on the Football Supporters' Federation. So, it's a national collective of supporters' clubs. So, it means meeting up with those guys from time to time. Usually about once every other month.

Interviewer: So, the supporters you represent, what do you do for them on a, sort of, an everyday level?

Lloyd Briscoe: Okay.

Well, we maintain the website, and we're quite interactive with that. So, on occasion, members will email us with the various queries and goodness knows what, and we'll try to answer them, where we can.

But the Sports Association is effectively deemed as the conduit between the supporters and the football club. So, we represent the supporters to the football club, whenever we need to. It hasn't happened lately, it has to be said, but in the past, in the early days of Stevenage Football Club, that was certainly the case.

Interviewer: Can you elaborate on how you would represent them, and what you would need to do, when dealing with the club?

Lloyd Briscoe: Sure, okay.

Well, by virtue of the fact that we raise money on behalf of the club, when we put the money across to the club - which is once or twice a year - we will return shares from the club, in recognition of the effort, if you like. So, effectively, the Supporters' Association is a shareholder of the football club.

How we represent the supporters is, as I mentioned to you earlier, through the website, and goodness knows what. We have a committee of about eight who are on hand at home games, to interact with the supporters.

And we generally gauge the opinion of supporters, about how the club is doing, and what the club needs to know from its fans, from its fan base.

Interviewer: And you said that you helped organise transport to away games for supporters. How do you go about that? Is that via coach and train, or..?

Lloyd Briscoe: Yes, basically. No, it's always a bus. We use a local bus company. And it has to be said, since we've been promoted to the Football League, that the away support has increased markedly.

But it's my ___[0:03:14] that our own supporters tend to, in the main, make their own way to away venues and such like. But we still contribute to that by taking the odd bus now and then.

Interviewer: Certainly.

So, when did you first start supporting Stevenage Borough, or any of the previous clubs?

Lloyd Briscoe: Well, Stevenage Borough, right since the inception, effectively. My father, Jim, is one of the founding members of the club. And prior to that he was a manager with the previous club, Stevenage Athletic.

And it was football that brought myself and my family to Stevenage. My father worked for Stevenage Town Football Club, back in 1967, so it's been since 1967 that I've had an involvement with senior football in the town.

Interviewer: Fantastic.

And have you seen any parallels between the growth of the town, or improvements to the town, and the football club, as it's made it's made through the leagues?

Lloyd Briscoe: Yes. When Stevenage Borough Football Club started off, in 1976, it had an ___[0:04:23] period, whereby, between '76 and 1980, it was playing in very low league stuff.

Come 1980, when it actually moved back into Broadhall Way, here on site, the fan base increased. They were getting about 1,500, I suppose, an average home game.

Then, certainly when we were promoted to the, what they called the Vauxhall Conference then, back in 1994, we were getting good gates: 3,500 – 4,000, and it's peaked at that level.

Sadly, and we haven't even - despite the fact that we've been promoted to the Football League - we still haven't been able to maintain that kind of attendance, and we're all struggling to understand why, you know.

But the thinking behind getting the supporters through the gate is part and parcel with the Sports Association. So we, kind of, promote the club wherever we can.

Interviewer: And it's often said that the kids, and the younger adults, [are 0:05:20] the future of football clubs throughout-

Lloyd Briscoe: Supporters?

Interviewer: Yes.

Lloyd Briscoe: Yes, the fan base.

Interviewer: The fan base. What does the club do to encourage the younger generation to come and see games?

Lloyd Briscoe: Well, the club does an awful lot. It's got an outreach facility. The club actually has a charity, of which I'm a trustee, which involves engagement with the youth of the town, doing a

variety of things. And it abides by FA guidelines, so it's looking at disabled supporters, it's looking at women, diversity.

And from the football charity, and from the football club itself, it's doing an awful lot, because it has the wherewithal, and it has the resources to achieve that.

Our problem is, here at Stevenage is, that it's a new town. The first generation of people who moved to the town, in the 50s, were, in the main, from London, North London. So they brought with them their loyalties towards Arsenal and Spurs.

That's obviously translated to their second generation, their offspring, and it looks like it's happened to the third generation as well.

But, with the state of football at the moment, we're quite optimistic that, in the fullness of time, and given the success of Stevenage lately, that, hopefully, we'll be able to generate our own fans, born and bred in the town. There's certainly a lot more Stevenage shirts being worn in the town now, than there has in the past.

Interviewer: Excellent.

So, the club is now, it's hoped, an established member of the Football League?

Lloyd Briscoe: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: How do you see the future of Stevenage going, you know, looking at the club as it's run now?

Lloyd Briscoe: Sure, okay.

Well, we've got the chairman, Phil Wallace, and Phil's been in charge of the club about 11 years now, 10 or 11 years, and he's stuck with it.

He came to us from Borehamwood, a small club. And he's brought this club, effectively, from the [pinnacle 0:07:33] of non-league football, to, as you mentioned earlier, an established football club, which we're not yet, but that's obviously got to be the intent.

In order to maintain that status, it's important that the chairman stays, and it's my understanding that he's got no intention of selling the club on for a profit. So, he's clearly, the chairman himself, is a big fan, of that I'm fairly convinced.

He's got a son who is also a board director, and you can see the passion in his eyes when the goals go in.

So, I'm comfortable about the fact that Stevenage Football Club isn't a commodity to our chairman, but it is his passion. It's his hobby, if you like, which is no bad thing.

How do we maintain the status in the Football League? Well, we need more people to come through the turnstiles to support the club. And it's a question of keep on doing what we're doing.

We have the catchment. Within a 20-minute car drive, in any direction of Stevenage, there's a million people.

You've had Luton Town, a league club for very many years, who are now non-league. You have Cambridge United. The same again. They are now a non-league club, haven't been in the league.

So, effectively, we're the only league club in the area, in the manor, but we're still not getting more people to come and watch us, which is a concern.

So, providing we can maintain the continuity, and the team keeps on winning and establishing itself in that respect, then I'm sure that it's a self-fulfilling prophecy, and we'll be able to maintain the status of football league.

Interviewer: So, going back to-

Lloyd Briscoe: ____[0:09:03]. (Laughter)

Interviewer: -going back to the days previous to the current chairman and the current manager. The name Paul Fairclough is often spoken in very revered terms.

Lloyd Briscoe: Yes, indeed.

Interviewer: What was his impact on the club [Crosstalk]?

Lloyd Briscoe: Okay.

Well, yes, until Paul Fairclough came, the club was just treading water, and it was always subordinate to the other big club in the area, which was Hitchin. Hitchin, since – oh, gosh, in the 1870s - has been the big club in the area, and that's always had the capacity to drag people to come and watch them.

Stevenage are the new kids on the block really. And the chairman at the time, was a guy called Ken Vale. Ken was a local politician who – and the Stevenage Borough Football Club was run as a committee – of which Ken Vale was the chairman.

And it was he who persuaded Paul Fairclough to leave Hertford Football Club and come to Stevenage. And, effectively, from that one decision, the club's never looked back.

Paul Fairclough was immediately successful. We were in what was the 3rd Division of the Isthmian League when he came, sponsored by a company called Diadora.

So we went from 3rd to 2nd to 1st to Premier, kind of, back-to-back promotions, all bar a couple of years, in quick succession.

And then, in 1994, we were promoted to the Football Conference. Within two years Paul Fairclough had won the Conference, but we were denied our right to join the Football League, on account of the fact that the ground wasn't up to the standard, and ___[0:10:45].

So, Paul Fairclough's influence has been – I'm trying to choose my word carefully here – but it's been very dramatic, and it happened in a very short space of time. It's, like, it wasn't gradual, it was very, very, very fast. And to such an extent that, as I say, whilst Paul Fairclough here, in 1996, we were getting 3,500, 4,000 through the turnstile. So, most influential, yes. And I'm pleased that he still maintains a link with the club as well.

Interviewer: So, from that period, can you tell us about any memorable games that you attended, and great players that shone in those games?

Lloyd Briscoe: Paul Fairclough's era? He was learning the trade of management as well. Because Paul used to be a school teacher in St Alban's, a PE teacher, and he took over Hertford on a part time basis.

He was offered a full time job here at Stevenage, although it wasn't a full time club. So, when he came, he looked for help, and got help from various sources, about how to compose a team, and how to get it together. And he learnt his trade whilst he was doing it, and he was very successful.

Some of the memorable games that I can remember would be, I remember us getting promoted to the Football Conference, from the Diadora. We'd, I think, from the Diadora, we'd built Harrow Borough, I think it was 3-0. And the current manager of Stevenage, Graham Westley, was playing for Harrow Borough at the time.

So we built them 3-0, but we'd won the Conference anyway, because Enfield didn't make it. We won the Diadora – I beg your pardon.

So, we were promoted to the Conference, and our very first game in the Conference was away to Stafford Rangers. And I remember going up there, it was a nice sunny day in August, and we beat them comfortably, 3-1. I thought, "Aah, that's fantastic. It looks like the roller coaster continues."

But after that we lost quite a few games, right until Christmas. In fact, we were struggling in the Conference, you know, but he managed to turn it round by Christmas. And I think we

finished, it might have been 16th, I think, in the Conference, that first year. So that's 1994. But two years later we won the Conference, you know, as I mentioned earlier.

And there was these pinnacle years, during the mid-90s. So, in '94 we were promoted. In '96 we won it. In '97 we were drawn at home to Birmingham City, in the FA Cup, but we had to play it away, because this ground wasn't up to standard, you know. And '98 was the Newcastle game, the big Newcastle game.

So, I particularly remember '97, and I particularly remember the Birmingham game. And the reason I say that is, because it was the third round of the FA Cup. It was our home game, and we couldn't play it at home, so we played it at Birmingham, as our home game, which sounds daft, but there you go.

And the two weeks before the game, we'd had snow and goodness knows what, so there wasn't any football played for a while, and we really wanted this game to be played.

So, I don't know at whose expense it was, but certainly... The ground at Birmingham is called St Andrew's, and it had a thick layer of frost on it, and whatnot. So I think the club, either us or Birmingham, arranged for this great big air balloon to be put over the pitch at St Andrew's, yes, in order to defrost it. And this was put on there on the Wednesday or Thursday, before the game on the Saturday.

And it's like a big, you know, these tennis court thing, you know. I'm trying to just gesticulate what we're talking about here. It's like a big balloon over the top of the football pitch, and just hot air is pumped into it all the time. So it defrosted the pitch, basically, so it was playable on Saturday, because it was televised on Match of the Day.

I remember that vividly, going up there on the Thursday, two days before the game, with a guy called Clive Abbrey, who's the club's commercial manager.

And because it was our home game, we were entitled to have our own advertising hoardings round the side of the ground. So we went up in this lorry with our own advertising hoardings, you know. So it covered all Birmingham's advertising hoardings, at St Andrew's, because it's our game.

And so once we'd done that on the outside of the peripheral of the ground, Clive and I went into the big balloon, the air balloon, you know, because it was a clear day, but it was perishing cold, as I remember.

And it was very, very surreal, because I had this football, and there's me kicking this football to Clive, on the ground at St Andrew's, just me and him, under this balloon, you know. (Laughter) It could have been anywhere, but this is Birmingham City football ground's pitch, and we were, kind of, kicking a football around. Anyway, and that particular memory sticks in my mind significantly.

And, come the Saturday, anyway, we were coming [home 0:15:40] on the Saturday we went up there, and we'd had a great day out. We lost 2-0 but we had a fantastic day out.

And the year after that there was hope for better things, and sure enough, we drew Newcastle, yes.

Interviewer: How was the support that you took to St Andrew's? Was there a good deal that went up there?

Lloyd Briscoe: Yes there was. I remember, on the morning, on Saturday morning, you had several bus loads. Because when we take big crowds away, we get the buses across the road here, in the big car park, in [Fairlands Way 0:16:09].

And there's a guy called Keith Berners, who used to be the Chairman of the Supporters' Club, and he's a big fan. He was the previous chairman of the club. And I recall his marshalling the troops, if you like, with a big megaphone, you know, telling people where to go.

So there's all these red and white scarves and everybody was up for it. It was a really exciting day, you know. And, as I say, the bus is going up the M6, a big convoy of Stevenage buses going to St Andrew's.

I remember after the game as well, because they're very organised in Birmingham, the police, and they got us in there, into the ground, okay, where we were supposed to be, and marshalled us accordingly.

But after the game they got us straight on the buses, and we had motorcycle outriders taking us from the ground, back to the motorway, you know. And that felt quite special, as we felt like royalty, you know. (Laughter)

Interviewer: And like you say, it was the start of bigger things to come.

Lloyd Briscoe: Yes.

Interviewer: And I think everyone involved in the club, supporters and members of staff, feels very strongly about the Newcastle game, and what it meant for the club.

Lloyd Briscoe: What, back in '98, you mean? Yes.

Interviewer: In '98. Can you give us your memories about that day?

Lloyd Briscoe: Well, yes, I ___[0:17:18], along with thousands of others, I think. Because we played Newcastle again this year, as you know, but it wasn't the same. Despite the fact we beat them, convincingly, it wasn't the same as what it was in '98. And I can't put a handle on it as to why. Perhaps I was younger in those day, I don't know.

But, no, we played Newcastle United on a Sunday afternoon, and it was live on Sky. And I remember coming here at 9 o'clock in the morning, because, in those days, I was responsible for – I was front of house – I was at the front door, so I had to wear a shirt and tie and meet and greet, if you like. And the stadium was much smaller in those days.

And I can remember coming here and wondering where the Newcastle team were staying overnight. And one of them was running round the pitch, at 9 o'clock in the morning. So I thought, "Crikey, he's keen," you know.

And so, there was lots and lots of press here, from round the world, you know, and we'd never seen the likes. It was such a big occasion. And it had been built up, as well, because of the controversy before the game, that the Newcastle Chairman, Freddie Hill, I think it was, had with – oh, Freddie Shepherd – had with our chairman, Victor Green.

So, there was a big build up to it in the media. We were the underdogs, you know. And, come the day, everything was

special about it, you know. There were queues outside the stadium before the gates opened. We had a special stand built at the away end, just to accommodate the Newcastle supporters. And my son was the mascot. So that made everyone's day in the Briscoe family, basically.

So, come the time of the kick-off, I was downstairs in the tunnel, with my son, before the two teams come out together, you know. So I'm down there with Adam, my son.

And Alan Shearer comes along and ____ [0:19:18]. (Laughter)
But he was so focused, he looked through everybody, you know. You couldn't talk to the guy.

And what struck me was that, the Newcastle team, as they're coming out of the tunnel, alongside the Stevenage players, they looked so lean and fit and strong, you know, muscular, compared to our lads, who looked like they'd just come [off a] Sunday park, you know. Quite spindly in comparison. The fitness regime was very much different, I think.

So the teams went out on the pitch, and a big roar went up. And there were special lights along the East Terrace, for the cameras, and they were better than our own floodlights, you know. Because it was turning dark, it was in January, and I remember that.

So, everyone's sitting down, and the game kicks off, and I think Shearer scored within eight minutes, and I thought, "Crikey, we're going to get hammered here."

But then we had a goal disallowed, and I got so excited, I jumped up and ripped my coat, you know, about that.
(Laughter)

And then, obviously, [Gratsio/Grazio 0:20:23] scored his goal as well.

And the game went very – it was probably the quickest game of football I've seen in my life, you know, because it just, the whole emotion of the thing.

So, we drew 1-1, and then we had to go up to Newcastle for the replay. And that was quite a journey, because I think we set off, late morning or early afternoon, I think it was. It was a Tuesday night game, and I think about 10 or 12 buses from Stevenage went, and a lot of supporters went on the train as well, because it's on the direct railway link.

But, because I was part of the sports club, you know, each of the committee members had to go and take charge of a bus, which we did. So my bus made the long journey to Newcastle.

So we get to Newcastle, and it was called the cauldron of hate, I think, or something like that. We gets up there, but they made us very welcome, it has to be said, and it's a fantastic stadium, St James' Park.

And, well, as you know, we lost that game 2-1. That was the longest journey I've ever made in my life, coming down the A1. And we got home about four in the morning, I think.

But that was the end of the fairy tale, I suppose, as far as that was concerned. But we'd done extraordinarily well in that year - as everybody will tell you - and we played...

We struggled in the preliminary round against Kingstonian. That was home and away ____ [0:21:52] because [we/they] had to go to a tie, here at Stevenage, and we actually beat them down at Kingstonian.

Then we played – who did we play? We played Cambridge United and we beat them. Then I think we went down to Swindon, in the next round, Round 2, and somehow we beat

Swindon, in a storm that was something out of the Bible, it was that dramatic, you know. (Laughter)

Their goalkeeper was taking goal kicks and it was going off for a corner, it was that blowy, you know, down there. So we beat Swindon.

And then there was the Newcastle game, obviously. So, I beg your pardon, it was Round 4, Newcastle was Round 4, not Round 3, yes.

But, anyway, '98 was an exceptional year, and no doubt, high up on everyone's list of memories, that one, yes.

Interviewer: You said, the game last season, against Newcastle - when you, to be fair, absolutely spanked them here-

Lloyd Briscoe: Yes. (Laughter)

Interviewer: - I mean, you said it didn't feel quite as special. I mean, how did it feel, though, to get a little bit of - revenge is maybe a strong word – after such a long period of time? And, I mean, it must have felt – well, how did it feel, really?

Lloyd Briscoe: I don't know. Well, the first time we played in '98, I had a funny feeling, because Newcastle were going through turmoil, with Kenny Dalglish, and Alan Shearer, who'd been off injured, I think it was his first game back.

Interviewer: Yes, I believe it was, yes.

Lloyd Briscoe: Yes. So ___[0:23:13].

But this time round, we drew Newcastle and, you know, but we're a League club, we're not a non-league club anymore, so it wasn't as special, I suppose, as the previous time.

We were League 2, newly promoted. Quite successful. There's an atmosphere about the club and you can sense, you know, everyone's positive, and there's a chance we might pull it off, which we did, but I didn't think we'd beat them 3-1.

[Telephone rings]

Interviewer: Sorry, [that] rudely interrupted. I do apologise.

So, getting back to the recent Newcastle United FA Cup tie, and you're saying how there's a positive vibe at this football club.

Lloyd Briscoe: Yes. Yes, because we'd just got promoted, and we'd been to Wembley four times. Three times, four times? Three times.

Anyway, we were the first club to win something at Wembley, so that, kind of, made [it/us 0:24:12] special. Well, I'll feel special about the club, you know, because we were the first team to win a competitive trophy at the new Wembley stadium.

Then we went again and we won the trophy again. Then we went for a third time and we lost to Barrow. Then we got promoted to the Football League.

So there was all this success, you know, Wembley, the trophy. We're getting silverware in the cabinet, for goodness sakes, you know, and it was a good feeling. And you're getting a buzz about the place, you know.

There's this confidence, an air of confidence that, particularly the chemistry, everyone has got the feeling that the chemistry is right between the chairman and the manager, you know, and that's not always the case at all clubs all the time. So, you sensed that something was going right here, you know.

And when we drew Newcastle United in the FA Cup this year, well, last season, I, kind of, went, "Oh, good," you know, but, "Oh, it could have been Manchester United," or someone, or another club of such stature, you know. But I was comfortably pleased with Newcastle. Well, I wasn't disappointed with Newcastle, anyway.

But, once again, Newcastle were in a state of flux. They'd just sacked their previous manager – what's his name - he was always the number two at Spurs?

Interviewer: Chris Hughton.

Lloyd Briscoe: Chris Hughton, yes.

So they'd only just had a new manager. So he probably hadn't got his act together, or his head around, what he was up against. And for Stevenage to win 3-1, that was quite special, yes.

But, you know, history has proven that Stevenage went on to get promotion that year, although we got knocked out of the FA Cup in the next round, by Reading. And that was a good game of football, and Reading were all psyched up and really prepared for that game, and that was played here.

We then went on to concentrate on the League and, you know, they worked wonders. It's the cyclical thing. Stevenage always

do well after Christmas. I think what it is, personally, is that the manager senses what the league's all about, has rumbled the opposition by Christmas, and knows how to turn it on, you know, with the players that he's got. And it's been proven for two or three years now, you know.

So, I think the fact that we got promoted made up for us getting kicked out by Reading.

Interviewer: Can you tell us anything about the most recent play-off final victory?

Lloyd Briscoe: What, at Old Trafford? Well, I can't remember the second half very well, because I was in hospitality. (Laughter)

I remember setting off early in the morning. Because I'm in the FSF, the Football Supporters' Federation, one of my closest friends is my counterpart at Gillingham.

And our back-to-back play-offs - I think it was against Accrington - I could be wrong on that; my memory's not what it used to be.

But we had the play-off semis, if you like, before the actual play-off final, and so were Gillingham. Gillingham were the other qualifying play-offs, you know. And I kept getting these text messages from my colleague at Gillingham, and I was, sort of, reciprocating as well, and we were, kind of, winding each up, really, of who were...

But Stevenage got through to the final comfortably, so we played Torquay United. So, I remember setting off early, in my finery, shirt and tie, and goodness knows what, and setting off for Old Trafford. And getting there – there was a car load of us

– but some of my party went with the main Stevenage supporters, but I was up in the Gods in the hospitality side.

And I can remember being at Old Trafford, and it's not Wembley, it's not the same as Wembley, you know. And it's a fantastic stadium, and we parked very close to the ground, and goodness knows what, and we met lots of Torquay fans, and they were quite chipper.

But at the back of my mind I'm thinking, "It's Torquay United, who back in 1996, should have been relegated, and we should have got promoted, but it didn't happen."

Interviewer: That's right.

Lloyd Briscoe: And there was this business about some cash being offered to Torquay, or vice versa – no, from Torquay to Stevenage, if we...you know. And that was at the back of my mind.

But knowing my counterpart at Torquay's Supporters' Association, Supporters' Club, that didn't come into it at all. So there's that, kind of, history between us and Torquay, basically.

But I didn't expect us to win. I really didn't. I thought last season it was Chesterfield, they ran away with it, and we couldn't catch them. So to get into the play-offs was special anyway, but to win the play-off final was absolutely fantastic.

And I would have been very, very happy – I was deliriously happy, the fact that we won – but I would have been satisfied if we'd have lost as well, because we still retained our League status for the first season, you know. But to get promoted in the first season, it's absolutely astonishing, you know.

And coming back, after the game, somebody else had to drive for me. And we cut across the Pennines, because I come from South Yorkshire, so my brother lives over there, so we popped in to see him on the way home, as it were.

And, funnily enough, there was a Champions League game that night - I think it was Manchester United – and we popped in the pub to watch that as well. But I couldn't concentrate on the game, because my head was still spinning about the game against Torquay. So, yes, a unique occasion. (Laughter)

Interviewer: How well placed do you think the club are now, to survive in the Football League?

Lloyd Briscoe: I think they're very well placed, providing that our chairman and [footballers 0:30:02], retains the services of Graham Westley.

If Graham Westley was to move, I would be quite concerned, because I know for a fact that our playing budget isn't as high as a lot of other clubs in our league. So it's purely, the chemistry between - that was mentioned earlier - the chemistry between the chairman and the manager, that is able to make this thing work.

We've got a good manager, who has proved his worth. This is his second time round. His first time, he saved us from certain relegation, Graham Westley. He was with us for two or three seasons, and he did very well each season. But he moved on and he came back.

And it wasn't the fans' best favourite, because his style of football that he demonstrates wasn't very attractive, and he's

done fantastic to rebuild the trust and faith of the supporters and team, I think. Now he walks on water, you know.

So, an object lesson, in how to deal with people is that, is Graham Westley can prove a lot of things to people, yes.

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