

File: BMD Andrew Green

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START AUDIO

Joe: So can we just start by you stating your name?

Andrew Green: Andrew Green.

Joe: And your involvement with the club?

Andrew Green: First of all, I'm a fan. And secondly, I work as the Public Address Announcer, a job I've done for the last 16 years. So I make the announcements in the ground and generally lark about a bit.

Joe: Okay. So when did you start supporting Stevenage?

Andrew Green: Well I think it was effectively the year that they came into the Conference, the top level of Non-League football, which was 1994, 95. And I lived in Welwyn Garden City at the time and I hadn't really been supporting any team and I just noticed one day in the local newspaper an indication of the rise and rise of the club, an article about their success. And I thought, "Well, let's go out and try them."

And I just got caught up in this idea, the romance of the idea that a club could start in 1976 or restart in 1976 and play on a public park in a roped-off ground, and 18 years later could be playing in a decent stadium at the top level of Non-League football. I think it was the romance I rather liked.

Joe: Were you aware of Stevenage before the 1990s?

Andrew Green: Well I'd driven past the ground when I was going shopping in Stevenage and the ground just looked a bit of a dump really. It was. I mean where we're sitting now in the stadium, now it's built on all four sides, and there's cover everywhere and there are loads of seats down this side and it looks very smart. But when I first came here, if we look over to the right here, there was grass behind that goal, and now it is 1,400 seats.

Looking across to the long side, the east side, there was just a little shed at the halfway line and just a couple of steps up on either side of concrete. The north end, no cover at all, just a couple of steps up. And the main stand here, there were seats right in the middle going a fair way up but then it was just a couple of steps up and that was it. And the pitch was awful, absolutely awful. Now, well I know it's fairly early in the season but it looks like this most of the season. I mean just the development of the ground is romantic.

Joe: So have you lived in Stevenage for a while?

Andrew Green: I do not live in Stevenage. It's interesting in a way, I mean I moved away from this area in 2006 and I've lived in two or

three places, at the very least an hour and 15 minutes away. But this is my club, this is my team. We all have allegiances and as long as I can get here in a reasonable time I will keep on coming because this is my allegiance. I've got friends here, I believe in the Stevenage dream, which is a dream, not just of the football club but of the New Town, and you just can't change your spots like that.

Joe: So before you moved from Stevenage how long were you living here?

Andrew Green: I lived in Welwyn Garden from 1984 and I used to work at weekends for much of the time so I just didn't go and watch football. And then my weekend work fell away and I thought, "Well, I must do a bit of supporting."

So where do we go from there? Yes. I mean it's fascinating to see. There are various examples of this now, of teams coming from nowhere and ending up as League clubs. We've got Crawley now who are in League Two who were absolutely nowhere three or four years ago and now are a real force in League Two. And so many famous names from League football have now gone down into the Conference. It's continual change now, clubs with aspiration, like this one, are coming through, and some long-established clubs are struggling.

Joe: So AFC Wimbledon only sort of started in this decade, or the last decade, and now they're in League Two.

Andrew Green: It's absolutely brilliant. This happened before you were born, Joe, but to remind you of what it used to be like before there wasn't promotion from the lower Leagues. That you could get to the top of non-League football and you could win the Championship.

You could win the Championship six years in a row but you very likely would not go into the Football League, because it required the votes of the chairman of the Football League to vote you in. And that meant voting somebody out and very often they were loath to do that, they didn't want to vote people out, it was like a club. And it's healthy, you know, if people do well they should be able to progress.

Joe: So how long have you been around the Stevenage area?
What year did you first recall being in Stevenage?

Andrew Green: Well I arrived in Welwyn Garden City in 1984 and I didn't used to come to Stevenage all that much, and even though history is one of my passions I knew very, very little about the whole New Town thing. I didn't realise that here was a bit of living history.

Welwyn Garden City is also a place that resonates in history from a previous period of New Town building. And of course, that's one of the great bits of historical romance, the idea that a former tiny town, Stevenage Old Town, which still exists just north here, population about 6,000, was suddenly transformed into a post-war New Town catering largely for people coming out from the slums of London and built themselves a new life.

I didn't know about this and I think probably coming to watch Stevenage helped me learn about that. And I could talk you

through different members of the crowd here who are my friends and I know that they can tell me about aspects of the town's history that really do bring it alive. It's a place of aspiration is Stevenage.

Joe: Have you noticed any differences in Stevenage over the past 20 or so years?

Andrew Green: It's not changed a huge amount but it's in the process of undergoing a great deal of change now. I don't know just how far the plans have been carried out but it's one of the areas in the country which is supposed to be growing very rapidly under Government planning and the other side of the A1 is supposedly going to be developed and 30, 40, 50,000 more people are going to be living in Stevenage.

What you hope is that that means more support for this club. I mean to some extent, or to a fairly large extent, the club suffers from the fact that it is still very easy to go down the railway line to support Arsenal or Spurs or West Ham.

And lots of people who come here just occasionally come here because their big team is not playing on that particular day. The more this club has success and the more Stevenage grows the more support hopefully this club will get and help it to climb still further. It would be great if it could climb further and further, we wouldn't stop just here.

Joe: Has there been a growth in attendance since Stevenage have come up through the Leagues?

Andrew Green: Yes. It's not dramatic. What tends to happen of course is that there's a core support, which perhaps is 2,000, that you can always be sure is going to come. And then how many you get above that depends on your position in the League, the sort of football you're playing and who you're playing.

So this winter already, yes, the average gate is higher, but the big gates have been when Charlton Athletic came here. When Sheffield Wednesday came here, when there's a name that attracts people. Because if you're not in the core supporting group you're in the group that says, "Well, I'm not doing anything on Tuesday evening, I think, yes, let's go down and watch Stevenage, it's an attractive game, let's go to that." Which is not the same as being a passionate supporter. But that's a problem with many, many clubs. You've got your core support and the people around it.

Joe: Have you noticed any differences when you first started coming to Stevenage Football Club between the supporters there were then and the supporters there are now?

Andrew Green: Well, it's an interesting thought. I guess with the growth in crowds, the average age possibly has come down a bit. I don't know, it's difficult to say. Probably people who can think a bit further back would answer that better, I mean it's not very long ago that the core support was two or three hundred, going back twenty years, and it's not very many at all. So it's actually a difficult one, it's a difficult one to answer.

Does Stevenage have a particular feel to it? Well I could say, yes, interesting thought about Stevenage fans. They're the sort of group of fans who respond well when things are going well on the pitch. But if things are going badly on the pitch they go

all quiet. Okay, that's similar to lots of clubs. But there are clubs who support their club and make noise whatever's going on on the pitch, and of course that's what you want. If you're down you want something to lift you. And I always think it's fascinating that fans can be like that, when the first thing they should be doing, if a team is in trouble in a particular game, they should be shouting all the louder, but they don't, they go into their shells.

So I mean crowd psychology is absolutely fascinating, it's absolutely fascinating. And of course you get such a feel in a football crowd of emotions becoming uncaged, you get this feeling that people who have been doing their jobs all week and they've been kowtowing to their bosses and they're working nine till five, and there's a release on Saturday afternoon, and they come here and let it all out. And that's one of the beneficial things about football of course; it is a sort of release.

And it's also a very tribal thing, it always amazes me that football can bring out the worst in rival sets of supporters, and in this ground, like so many others, players have to be segregated. And it's very, very sad. Very, very sad. So you'd better ask me about being a public address announcer, because that's my job, yes?

Joe: Okay.

Andrew Green: Ask me about that.

Joe: I was going to ask you about something else.

Andrew Green: Go on.

Joe: I've forgotten it now.

Andrew Green: It'll come back to you.

Joe: Yes, I'll go back to it. Let's do about the public address. So when did you first become the announcer, public addresser?

Andrew Green: Well, it's interesting. I used to stand over there on the East Terrace as a fan and at the end of the season, the first season in the Conference, the guy that used to do the public address up here, I forget his name now, he died while referring a football match that his son was playing in. Actually, it's quite a good story.

At the end of the season the chairman of the club, Victor Green, asked in the programme for somebody to write the club a new song, a distinctive club song, and I thought, "I'll have a go." And it was pretty awful. But it ended up that I came into the boardroom to meet the chairman and he just listened to it and he went, "Well, yes." And then he said, "Well, what do you do?" And I said, "Well, I worked in broadcasting much of my time." And immediately he said, "Oh, we need a public address announcer, would you like to come and do it?" I said, "Well, please, who would not want to do that?" And I've been doing it ever since. That was 1995, so that's 16 years, and 16 absolutely terrific years.

Joe: So when you're doing it do you have a responsibility to lift the crowd at half time and before the game?

Andrew Green: If you can. If you can. I mean usually if you scream at the top of your voice, "Come on the red and whites, come on," usually you get some sort of response. But it's quite amusing because it's a sort of running gag I have with the crowd because I actually stand out there on the pitch while I'm doing this.

Now the East Terrace, that's where most of the noise comes from. The season ticket holders on this side tend to be much, much quieter and much, much older. And I spend most of my time trying to get them to respond and it's a very long, slow haul, you don't like to insult them but at the same time you want to try and goad them into making more noise. Yes, it's interesting.

The other thing of course that can create an atmosphere in the ground, apart from the players on the pitch and my voice, is the quality of musical production and the public address system here is fine, but it's not Hi-Fi.

Joe: Okay.

Andrew Green: If you go to most Premiership grounds they'll have these super-duper sound systems and you'll be sitting here in your seat and you can feel it shake with the noises being made and that, I reckon, transmits out there to the players and gets the crowd going.

So in an ideal world, if we were ever able to afford it, I would love this ground to have that, it just makes a lot of difference. I mean I'm not somebody that likes a great deal of noise normally in my life but, you know, if you're thinking about what actually makes a crowd make more noise, well one thing is to create noise around them and to sort of incite them. I can probably go a bit further on the public address thing, I don't know what you're going to ask me.

Joe: I was going to ask you about the East Stand here. I know that you said that this is where most of the noise comes from. Is this because it's a standing terrace? Do you think that's a part of the game that's been lost with the highest level now?

Andrew Green: Let me just think. I don't know that it necessarily affects the noise, I mean the away fans here at the South end, they can make a hell of a lot of noise and that's a seating stadium. Actually you've got fantastic acoustics at that end that throws sound out. And you can get 300 away fans in there making more noise than 1,500 over there.

Joe: There's some gaps at the back, so a lot of sound must escape.

Andrew Green: It's something like that. But what was the original question?

Joe: Do you think that having a standing terrace makes a difference?

Andrew Green: I suspect it doesn't necessarily make a great deal of difference. I suppose it's possible. I mean there's a group of dedicated screamers and shouters and chanters over there on the halfway line and I suppose they can sort of pack themselves quite closely together, which gives a body of sound out. But I don't think it necessarily makes a huge amount of difference. As to whether or not I think terracing is preferable to sitting down, absolutely. I am a stander at football grounds.

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