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David Palmer: David Palmer, I am 67 and it happens to be my birthday today so I go back quite a lot of years following football in Stevenage. My earliest memory is when I was probably around 10 years old my dad taking to me to the old football ground which was close to the present day station. I can remember that ground really clearly. It had a little wooden main stand which seated about 80 or 100 people and a small stand opposite with the words 'Supporters Club' written over the top of it.

I used to watch them playing some pretty obscure sides from a very low level. It was called the Delphian League, which was a totally amateur level. I used to sometimes go to away matches at places like Ware, Bishops Stortford, Tufnell Park seems to come to mind, Hornchurch and Hertford. They were my earliest memories. I watched Stevenage struggling mainly, they were never very successful and we were always in the shadow of Hitchin. We usually used to play Hitchin more or less once a season usually in the Herts Senior Cup. They always used to slaughter us somewhere around 7-1 on average. I have a feeling that the great Paul Fairclough the first match that he took in charge of us was also at Hitchin and we also got hammered. Then things obviously took a massive turn for the better.

Stevenage Town struggled for a long time and then sadly after they had gone into the Southern League and had turned professional they probably grew a little bit too quickly and sadly

the club went out of business. That was a great shame because we had some fabulous days in the old Southern League. I remember crowds of well over 3000 here on a Monday night in murky conditions playing on mud against Cambridge United, Chelmsford, Wimbledon, Cambridge City and Romford. They were good days, but sadly that club went out of existence. Stevenage Athletic came in for a short time.

Interviewer: When it came to an end was there always the feeling that a new football club was going to start?

David Palmer: Was there what sorry?

Interviewer: Was there always a feeling, did you know that Athletic was around the corner?

David Palmer: No, I didn't. It was very sad because I had got some good memories. The first Southern League game where we played against Folkestone here and I think we had a massive crowd, I think not far short of 3000. We beat them 3-2 and we thought, "This is going to be easy." The following Monday night Dover came to us, completely outplayed us and won 3-0 I seem to remember. We had some good memories then and I was very sad.

I had no idea that Stevenage Athletic would be formed. I guessed maybe a new club would start eventually, but you have lost all your history and you are starting from scratch. I went to a few matches in-between. I went to Baldock actually because Baldock were one of the local sides that didn't really bother me

much one way or the other. Just to watch the odd game I would go to Baldock, but I really missed it.

Then Stevenage Athletic started. They never really reached any great heights. Probably the most famous thing about Stevenage Athletic was they had Alan Gilzean as their manager who was a very good football, Scottish international and probably one of the greatest headers of the ball there has ever been but because of legal and insurance reasons he couldn't play for us. To put it kindly I would say he wasn't as good a manager as he was a player and that club got into difficulties and disappeared. Then eventually Stevenage Borough started in very humble surroundings at the King George playing fields and gradually worked their way up to the success story that we have got today.

Interviewer: Two football clubs folding, did fans just accept it? What did fans do?

David Palmer: We had no choice but to accept it. Let me tell you that seeing your football club go bust is heart-breaking, it is absolutely horrible. I feel very much for people who are supporters of clubs that have gone by the wayside in the past. I feel for people who are supporters of clubs like Plymouth Argyle at the moment whose future is in the balance. The supporters are the life blood of the club and it takes a long time for the new club to really get to you and you regret the history that has been lost forever. You are a little bit envious of clubs like Hitchin up the road who have got a lot of history and have managed to survive.

Interviewer: The switching from Town to Athletic and the new ground, can you describe what Broadhall Way was like then?

David Palmer: If you ask me describe it in one word I would say mud. We had a lot of teething problems with the ground. I think it was laid in a bit of a hurry and every match for the first six months was interrupted by players having to go off with cut knees because of the amount of flint in the soil. It was really bad and it took a long time. It was a source of great embarrassment to the club that all these players were getting their knees cut and having to get patched up before they came back onto the pitch. The playing surface was horrific, it was like playing on a swamp it was so muddy. Probably I would say it was actually worse than Luton's pitch at the end of the season, which is as bad as it gets.

Gradually it was sorted out, the drainage system was sorted out. It has developed over the years and now we have got a pitch which is by a mile the worst in League One and probably one of the poorest in League Two, but we are proud of it because it is ours and it is my favourite ground. I have been to Barcelona, I have been to the Emirates, I have been to Wembley and I have Old Trafford. I am very fortunate that I have been to some beautiful grounds, but this is my favourite.

Interviewer: Are all your memories of old Stevenage and the two clubs that are no longer all good?

David Palmer: No, I have got some sad memories amongst them obviously apart from the usual defeats which were fairly frequent. I would like to relate a sad story about each of the three clubs. Stevenage Town when we were in the Southern League we played

Merthyr Tydfil one Saturday. Merthyr Tydfil in those days were quite a good Southern League side. In their team was one of the greatest British footballers there has ever been a Welsh international called John Charles. I am pretty sure I am right in saying he was certainly over 40 when he came to play here and it was one of his last ever matches. He was overweight, he was slow and he was just no longer up to it. The pitch was ankle-deep in mud and just after half time he got taken off. The reaction of, not all, but a section of our crowd was laughter and jeers.

I thought that was really sad that a player who had been one of the greatest British players ever produced who'd had so much success finished up playing for a side like Merthyr Tydfil probably for not much money, but he obviously needed it I suppose. I had seen him play at Wembley and I then saw him play here. I thought it was so sad seeing him traipse off covered in mud having contributed nothing to the game, I thought he deserved more than that.

As far as Stevenage Athletic is concerned my saddest thought was probably going up to Bromsgrove. Because the club was skint I took two players in my car, I knew that was going to be towards the end of the season and it was going to be one of our final matches. Several of us had a whip-round and contributed towards paying the electricity bill here because the club couldn't afford to pay the electricity and they were threatening to cut it off so we couldn't have a floodlit match and players couldn't have a shower.

The club was very close to bankruptcy and it went out of business not much after. That was a sad occasion because I knew taking these couple of players up there and I think there were even one or two of our supporters were substitutes or played. Whether or not they were registered I am not sure, but

we were so desperate for players. It was the beginning of the end and that is a sad memory that I have got.

With Stevenage Borough without any doubt the saddest memory I have got is seeing a player collapse and die on the football pitch. He was a young I think 18 year old lad. We were playing against Vauxhall Motors and this boy was lodging with their manager. He was borrowed or loaned I think from Luton Town who in those days were a very good side. He was playing for Vauxhall Motors and without the ball or anyone being anywhere near him he suddenly went down. Then we realised it was fairly serious he had swallowed his tongue, the doctor came onto the pitch, two or three other people did.

An ambulance came probably fairly quickly but it seemed like ages, drove straight onto the pitch and we just sensed what had happened. I remember going into the clubhouse afterwards and their manager was just uncontrollable, he was in tears. That was the saddest thing I have ever seen and it probably puts football into perspective. People say it is a matter of life or death and on that occasion I am afraid it was.

Interviewer: Happy memories as well of the Athletic and the Town days?

David Palmer: Yes, but it is in the fairly distant past. I suppose the happiest time was really just seeing us in the Southern League as a semi-professional club. Seeing us rising above St Albans, Hitchin Town and one or two of the other local sides.

Interviewer: Back then was that the aim?

David Palmer: I'm sorry?

Interviewer: Back then was that the aim?

David Palmer: Yes, we were certainly the biggest town. Yes, you have got to be ambitious to make progress and the powers that be felt the time was right to push for it. It didn't always work out, but it had to be done.

Interviewer: What was the goal amongst the fans, could you see Stevenage making it to the big league?

David Palmer: In the days of Stevenage Town or Stevenage Athletic, no I couldn't.

Interviewer: This is moving onto Borough, but we will start again in a minute. What made the belief change when it became Borough?

David Palmer: The name that comes up all the time is Paul Fairclough. When Paul came here we were a very small non-league club in a very low level of non-league football and we were going nowhere. Some people thought that we were going to make some progress, in my opinion we were going nowhere. Paul came in, worked incredibly hard and he had an amazing knack of turning very average players into good players. If ever he managed to get hold of a good player he would turn them into an outstanding player. He was a very charismatic, a smashing personality and he knew how to talk to people. The success that he brought to

us was absolutely amazing, we had so many promotions we rose through the ranks. When we eventually won the Conference with him I suppose the only thing he got wrong was he did it a little bit too soon. The big difference you ask about progress was Paul Fairclough. Although our present manager is doing extremely well for us Paul Fairclough I think laid all the foundations.

If I could just jump a little bit ahead when we won the Conference that was a really flat moment. We had a big crowd, it is the final day of the season. We might have been playing Morecombe, but I am not sure. I think we drew and that point made us Conference champions. It was just flat because we knew we weren't going to get the reward that we deserved. Everyone was trying to be excited and happy, but it was just a little bit flat because we thought, "Well we are going to be in this league again next year."

Interviewer: I will come back to it.

David Palmer: Sure.

Interviewer: The bust of Athletic and Town, did you feel there was going to be a new Stevenage team? What was the excitement of the Borough starting?

David Palmer: I wasn't too excited about it because they had started at such a very junior level and I thought, "I am not going to get too bothered about this because I have seen two sides collapse." I just couldn't bear to see it happen again. I can confidently say it

won't happen again under the chairmanship of Phil Wallace who I think has done wonders for this club. I know I wasn't very enthusiastic for several years.

Interviewer: Did you go and watch the first match?

David Palmer: No, I didn't. I didn't watch a match for about two seasons. I just did all sorts of terrible things like take my wife shopping on a Saturday afternoon, watch the football results or listen to the commentary on the match on the radio. I didn't feel I had a team to relate to.

Interviewer: When Athletic shut down that was one of the saddest days for you?

David Palmer: When Stevenage Town went it was worse. With Stevenage Athletic I could see it coming for a long time, so it wasn't exactly a shock. Also although I had been quite heavily involved with Stevenage Athletic I wasn't...

Interviewer: What had you been doing?

David Palmer: I was on the committee and I had contributed a little bit when I was able towards paying off a few bills.

Interviewer: Was that common back then for lots of people to be coming forward with voluntary funds to keep it going?

David Palmer: It was if the club was sufficiently skint we didn't have much choice. I am not talking about fortunes, but we chipped in. As I said earlier we paid the electricity bill I remember on at least one occasion. Can we talk about Borough now?

Interviewer: Stevenage Borough growing up as you like Paul Fairclough was... What made you go and watch Borough again because you lost the connection?

David Palmer: I did a little bit, yes. I watched them under several managers, before Paul came we had a number of managers and they all helped with the progress to a certain degree. I was certainly back as a regular fan of the team in this town well before Paul came. It was just the first couple of years when they were playing at a very junior level at the playing fields that I couldn't really muster up too much enthusiasm. I was still missing the previous clubs and thinking, "I don't want to see this happen again."

Interviewer: Paul your great manager he was what gave Borough life and basically moved Stevenage on to higher expectations. What was different about Paul?

David Palmer: He was very charismatic. I remember when he got us promoted into the Conference we won I think it was the Diadora League at the time, I am not quite sure. That got us promoted into the Conference. At the end of the game I remember Paul jumped out of the dugout and he was wearing a jacket. I don't know

where he had begged or borrowed it from and it had Vauxhall Conference on the back of it. He danced around the ground proudly pointing to the back of his jacket as if to say, "This is where we are now." That was a memory I have got that was nice. He was just so charismatic, he was just a lovely chap. We were very lucky to have him, it was just sad that we lost him. The chairman at the time thought we could manage better without him.

Interviewer: For you that was a mistake?

David Palmer: Yes, it was.

Interviewer: You felt Paul would have been capable turning things around and keeping it going?

David Palmer: There wasn't a lot to turn around we were still successful when the previous chairman decided that we could manage without him. It seemed certainly for a while that we couldn't, but that is all history now. He came back a second time and things weren't quite so good the second time. That is quite common, things never always work out the second time around. We have all got great memories of him and we all absolutely idolise the chap.

Interviewer: A great season that stands out for you? Perhaps at the Conference years and then...

David Palmer: Yes, we have only been in the Football League for just over a season and a couple of months, so I have still got great affection for non-league football. I look at the Conference results just as quickly as I look at League Two or League One results because I know all the teams there, I have been to their grounds and I am familiar with a lot of their players and managers. The Conference is still really important to me and I have got some really happy hours in the Conference. Obviously the stand out is when we won it two years ago.

I would say my stand out match was Kidderminster away. We beat them 2-0. I should think 15 or 20 minutes from the end the public address announcer assuming that Kidderminster weren't going to do us any harm said, "At the end of the match could Stevenage supporters..." There were loads of us, "Please not go onto the pitch the players will celebrate with us after the game and I would like to congratulate them on winning the league."

I felt a bit sorry for the Kidderminster players because that was more or the less the public addresser's way of saying, "We are not going to do anything against them they have won it already." At the end of the game the Kidderminster supporters and players were very generous in their praise towards us. They let us take over the ground and players were just dancing up and doing stupid things like footballers do when they get a good result.

Interviewer: Was the stupidest?

David Palmer: I can't really remember, but they were just jiggling up and down. I always think football players and football supporters do and say and sing stuff inside a football ground that they would never do down the town, they would probably get locked up sometimes.

You tend to make a bit of a fool of yourself and why not. As I say that is the standout match for me in the standout season. It was made special by the people of Kidderminster who were very gracious towards us I thought.

Interviewer: Were the goals in that game celebrated a bit special to the others?

David Palmer: From what I remember both the goals were fairly scrappy I don't think they were anything special. I think Charlie Griffin got the first one, so that probably would have been a scrappy goal. A lovely chap Charlie, great in the Conference but not quite up to Football League standard. A lovely player and I just wish him every success now at Forest Green. I would say that was probably the standout match.

Interviewer: One of the saddest times then for Stevenage in the Conference was when they were denied.

David Palmer: Yes, definitely. Some people say it was an injustice, probably it was. I heard Chris earlier use the word political and he is dead right. It resulted in a court case against the Football League or the FA which in my humble opinion we were never going to win. It cost an enormous amount of money which almost brought the club to bankruptcy and the whole thing was unavoidable. I thought the Football League were very unfair because Luton Town who we have never had any great ties with but they did say we could ground share with them for the first month or two of the season until our ground was ready up to Football League standard, but the Football League turned this down.

Something which not a lot of people seem to bring to everyone's attention was that the Football League at the time had a club called Macclesfield who used to be in the Conference and got promoted I think a year after us. Their ground wasn't up to standard either, so what did they do? They ground shared with Chester City who had a ground that was up to Football League standard.

My feeling was I was quite bitter about it. I thought Macclesfield can ground share with Chester, but we can't ground share with Luton Town albeit probably only for a couple of months. I thought that was very unfair this is where the politics came in. I think probably the chairman at the time Victor Green who had ruffled a lot of feathers maybe didn't help the cause too much. Certainly taking it to court I thought was just throwing away the money that the club had, not a good idea.

Interviewer: Did you think Stevenage would eventually get promotion again?

David Palmer: I thought we would get promoted the following year. Nearly all the players agreed to stay with us and I thought we would get promoted the following year, but it wasn't quite as easy as that and we didn't. From then onwards with each successive year I could see it getting harder. There are so many ex-Football League clubs dropping into the Conference everybody accepts it is the most difficult league to get out of. The clubs with bigger budgets than us, more history than us, bigger grounds than us and bigger crowds than us. Although originally we had been a fairly big side in the Conference when we won it as successive years went on we became a smaller club. I was beginning to think, "Are we ever going to do it?" But of course we did and that is great.

Interviewer: Have you got, not so much you could have a great team but we have talked about that. Particular players for you in the Conference years. Any favourite players, a player that stood out for you and goes down in your head as Borough legend?

David Palmer: I have got lots of players that I really admired. We had a defender called Jason Goodliffe who was a fabulous captain, a lovely chap and he gave the club 100%. He wasn't the most skilful defender I have ever seen, but he gave everything that could have been asked of him and he was a favourite. Obviously the names like Steve Morrison and George Boyd who we sold for a lot of money they were good.

Interviewer: Can you remember a particular moment Steve Morrison was remembered for his goals, is there one that was of particular class for you or a game that you can remember?

David Palmer: He got a nice one at Wembley.

Interviewer: Can you describe that?

David Palmer: No, I have difficulty describing any goals really all I know is they go in and everybody is very happy. Steve Morrison he didn't score all that many really spectacular goals, but he got a lot of good poacher's goals. Also of course who really cares, it could be a 30 yard rocket into the top right hand corner that the goalkeeper has got no chance of or it could be a deflection off

someone's backside standing on the goal line. I couldn't care to be honest, they all count.

Interviewer: George Boyd was he possibly one of the best Stevenage players, one of the players than can go on the furthest?

David Palmer: Well yes, he was one of the best without any doubt. We have all been hoping that Peterborough would sell him on so that we can get a cut of a sell on clause, but he is still there at the moment. He was certainly one of the best, yes. The best player I have seen playing in the red and white of Stevenage is Johnny Brooks who played for Chelsea, Tottenham, Reading, England and us. Probably one of the best left feet I have ever seen, a wonderful passer of the ball. Also in later years I am very pleased to say I became quite a good friend of his, we played golf together quite a lot and he is just a lovely chap and loved his football. I would say he is the best Stevenage player I have seen, but there have been loads of others. Morrison, Boyd, Mark Smith, Martin Gittings if we go back a few more years. Jason Goodliffe I would certainly say and Barry Hayles.

Interviewer: Jason Goodliffe for more leadership?

David Palmer: Leadership and being a very good defender. The sort of player you think, "I would hate to be playing against him." Barry Hayles of course who is probably the biggest favourite player we have had, Efetobore Sodje.

Interviewer: What do you remember of Barry Hayles?

David Palmer: His left foot as well, he had a good left foot.

Interviewer: Was there a feeling when Barry Hayles got the ball something was going to happen?

David Palmer: Yes, probably more than with either Boyd or Morrison. Barry Hayles was an exceptional talent and he was a typical Paul Fairclough finding. I have a feeling he might have been a defender, I am not sure. He was playing for somebody Hawkeye or something they were called, some really obscure side on the fringes of London who I think played on Hackney Marshes. They were the sort of level they would either win 15-0 or lose 15-0 each week. Somehow he managed to see something in this fella that nobody else had seen, brought him here and he just became an absolute star. I think he is still playing for Truro I have feeling in Cornwall, I am not sure. A terrific player, fabulous talent. He went on to play for Fulham of course and did very well for them.

Interviewer: Stevenage do have a bit of a romantic connection with the FA Cup. Is there a particular moment in all the drama there that stands out for you?

David Palmer: Yes, quite a few actually. I haven't always attached quite so much importance to the FA Cup as some of our supporters. Away matches in the FA Cup have always been a bit special, Leyton Orient away, Swindon away and Newcastle away I would say are the three. Leyton Orient away they had the legendary

Peter Shilton in goal who had played for England I think 107 or thereabouts times, a good goalkeeper. He was playing for Leyton Orient. He had got a gambling problem that was common knowledge so perhaps he needed the money and he should have retired a bit earlier.

He was in goal for Leyton Orient and at a fairly early stage of the game Barry Hayles was through on goal and you would put your car, your house and everything else on him scoring. Except for the fact Shilton came out, dived off his feet and grabbed one of his legs. The referee had all sorts of choices like he could have given us a penalty and sent Shilton off. He obviously thought, "Well I better not because it is the great Peter Shilton."

I have always thought that maybe referees are a little bit kinder to the more senior club in FA Cup matches. I am not knocking referees because they do a very difficult job, but subconsciously they always seem to favour the team from the slightly higher level. Shilton should have been sent off there is no doubt about it, but we finished up winning 2-1 I think so it doesn't matter. Swindon that was great, I have never ever been so...

Interviewer: How did you celebrate that game by the way?

David Palmer: How did I celebrate that game?

Interviewer: Was there a special feeling? Is there a greater feeling of achievement amongst the crowd winning an FA Cup game?

David Palmer: Rather than a league game?

Interviewer: Yes.

David Palmer: It depends where we are in the league I suppose. If we are mid-table then yes give me the FA Cup match. I can't remember really. I do remember the Swindon game we went into a McDonalds and we sat in there for about an hour and a half to get warm because we were so cold. It was rain and sleet driving into our faces. Swindon had kindly put us behind a goal with no roof and I have never ever been so cold. I celebrated by sitting shivering in the local McDonalds for about an hour and a half afterwards. Usually we will perhaps go to pub when we got back and have a few beers and all of a sudden the world is a wonderful place again until you next get beaten. Newcastle away was nice. That involved a few drinks because we went on the train. The Newcastle fans up there were great.

Interviewer: What were your expectations of Newcastle away?

David Palmer: Newcastle away, I was hoping they wouldn't beat us by more than five or maybe six. We had got several injuries, several key players weren't playing and as it turned out Alan Shearer scored a goal that never crossed the line, but the referee gave it. Maybe because Alan Shearer turned round with his right arm raised as he always does and the referee thought, "That must have gone in." There were 40,000-odd Newcastle fans cheering and yelling.

Interviewer: Referees generally get the critical edge of a football fan and aren't necessarily aren't the fans most favourite figure in the game.

David Palmer: No they are not, but I will tell you an interesting story about that. In non-league football a lot of clubs have a man of the match award. You don't see it in the Football League so much, but you do see it in non-league quite regularly. I remember going up to Southport for a match which was not very good. It was 0-0 I seem to recall. The public address announcer five minutes from the end said, "We have got the man of the match award. I don't know how this will go down with the crowd, we are going to give it to the referee."

Everybody applauded because they thought, "Actually this referee has got nothing wrong. He has handled the game well, he has had a smile on his face, he has had a little word with the players now and then and he has tried not to book anybody." He was very fair and very efficient, he didn't make any mistakes and that went down well with the crowd. We don't mind referees, we realise they do a difficult job.

Interviewer: The Newcastle trip away and knowing that it shouldn't have been a goal.

David Palmer: That was not quite that bad because we came away I think Gary Crawshaw scored for us. It finished up 2-1 to them, no disgrace at all. We had held them to a draw here quite comfortably and we had lost 2-1 away to the mighty Newcastle in front of a massive crowd. Incidentally the biggest Sky television audience at that time for a football match. The way the rivalry existed

between the two clubs, which I didn't agree with. The way it got hyped up everyone in Britain was either a Newcastle fan if they came from round there or they supported Stevenage.

Interviewer: You didn't agree with the way the rivalry was created?

David Palmer: No, I didn't agree with the way that Victor Green and Kenny Dalglish and the Newcastle chairman were having a go at each other. I didn't think it was professional and I didn't think it was correct. I thought there were too many egos flying around. I thought from this end the arrogance and the ego was just as bad as from the Newcastle end. I am not including Paul Fairclough obviously in that. Our chairman I thought the way he handled it was deliberately to get the media on board with us, which he succeeded in doing very well. I just thought one or two comments were unnecessary.

Newcastle were very arrogant. They sent a couple of people down here to look at our ground because they didn't think it was worthy of hosting a game with their club. I think that some Premier League clubs think that non-league clubs you clear the sheep off the pitch before the game starts, you put a couple of jumpers down at each end and if anyone has turned up they can referee it. I don't think they have got a clue how serious non-league football is and what a good standard it is. We put a temporary stand up, we had 8040 here and the game went by without any problems at all. I thought we hosted the game very well, but Newcastle I think felt that we were a little bit beneath them. I wasn't impressed with their attitude, but I wasn't too impressed with ours either.

Interviewer: Where were you watching the game that day?

David Palmer: In my usual seat in the main stand about 20 yards from where we are now.

Interviewer: The atmosphere at that game, does it compare to an atmosphere anywhere else?

David Palmer: It was good.

Interviewer: The biggest crowd here.

David Palmer: It was the biggest crowd we have had, 8040 with a temporary stand at that end and the atmosphere was terrific. It was funny because the Newcastle fans they never turned up until about five minutes before it started and they suddenly filled that stand. Yes, the atmosphere was good. The atmosphere in this ground now is good. It quite surprises me that teams in League one and League Two refer to this as a difficult place to come to. I have never quite worked that out because it is a very small ground. I would have thought a difficult ground to go to is a ground that has got 20,000 or 25,000 all seated stadium with a big crowd. Apparently some of the so called bigger clubs don't like coming here too much. I don't think Newcastle enjoyed it a lot either.

Interviewer: You talked about big clubs looking down at non-league clubs and smaller teams perhaps like Stevenage. Does that make it even more special when the result goes in your favour?

David Palmer: Yes, it does and I hope that we never forget our roots. I would like to think we could stay in this league for a while, whether or not we could go up one more league I am not too sure. I would like to think if we get involved against a team from three or four leagues below us we don't adopt a too arrogant attitude we remember that we were at that level not many years ago. I think some of the bigger clubs are a little bit superior.

Interviewer: Just to keep the Newcastle thing going to see it through. The rematch if you like the FA Cup game just a year ago, did that bring back any of the old memories for you? Did it feel like Stevenage had got justice and Stevenage had won?

David Palmer: Yes, it did.

Interviewer: Does that sort of thing stay with fans more?

David Palmer: When I heard the draw I was staggered that firstly we had got a Premier Club and secondly of all people it was the only Premier League club we have ever played before in the FA Cup. Yes I did think, "Well we have got our own back on them." I was amazed when the draw came up and we outplayed them. If you are going to ask me my memory of that game I can tell you quite simply my memory of that game is how poor they were. They were dreadful, I could not believe it.

Interviewer: Was it them dreadful that made us look good or was there a good Stevenage moment?

David Palmer: We played well. Graham Westley really fired our team up for it, which he is very good at. Whether or not they thought, "This will be a stroll in the park, we don't want to risk any injuries we will just put a couple of goals past them and then we will go home." I don't know. I was amazed how poor they were. Nolan was captain, the lovely Joey Barton was playing and all their superstars were out apart from Carroll who was injured, which is pretty normal for him. They had the full first team out and I could not believe, I was quite disappointed almost in them. We beat them 3-1 and it was nice.

The disappointing thing the next match we had Reading here and we had a dead cert penalty turned down which would have made it 2-2. It would have been nice to have gone to Reading. We'd probably have lost the replay, but it would have been nice to have taken that one to a replay as well.

Can I just mention one thing about the FA Cup and the FA trophy? We have been to Wembley three times, which is absolutely great. The thing I am so happy about I never thought I would see my little team playing at Stoke City, Birmingham City, Aston Villa, Old Trafford and Newcastle of course. Playing at all these fabulous stadiums it is really good. The only thing I would say about is the glory seekers who latch on and all of a sudden are Stevenage supporters for 90 minutes.

Interviewer: Do you wish you could keep them?

David Palmer: Yes, I suppose I do. It does really get under my skin when I talk to one or two people I know and they have been to one of our big games and they say, "I thought we played well and we did this..." I am like, "Who are you talking about, we?" They said, "Well Stevenage of course." I said, "You never watch them. Until you got to the match you didn't even know what colours we played in let alone the names of any of the players." Having said that it helps to improve the atmosphere, it raises a few quid for the club, so perhaps I am being a bit unkind. I don't like glory seekers.

Interviewer: For you then what is it to be a fan? How do you get the fine title?

David Palmer: Very simply it is the abbreviation for fanatic and I am a fanatic. I have travelled the length and breadth of this country. I went up to Gateshead once to watch us draw 0-0. You couldn't go much further without being in Scotland, but they were lovely people up there. That is a fan. Fans are not a lot of the youngsters you see in Stevenage going around in Chelsea shirts who a couple of years ago were going around in Manchester United shirts. Before that it was Arsenal shirts, before that it was Liverpool shirts and soon this town will be full of kids wearing Manchester City shirts because they are going to start winning things. They are not fans, they only watch them on television, they don't support them and they have got no connection with the place. A fan is somebody who supports his local club through thick and thin, especially thin.

Interviewer: A bad Stevenage result does that affect your mood on a Monday morning?

David Palmer: Yes it does actually, on Monday morning until the next match.

Interviewer: Does that affect your mood?

David Palmer: I try not to be too humpy because I am too old for that now. My wife learnt a long time ago not to ask how they got on because if they won she will know. She will know every kick, she will relive it. If they lost she can tell by how hard the front door was slammed as I walk in, so she doesn't ask. She usually has a look on Teletext. If it is a really bad result she will pop around my daughter's and have a cup of tea with her for a couple of hours. Yes it does, I think most real fans it does.

I went to Brentford on Tuesday night and we won 1-0. A really good solid away performance and I am still happy about it. I am a bit nervous about what we are going to do at Bury today and I would have gone up there of course if it wasn't for this. Yes it does, you are happy if you win and you are not so happy if you lose but I am trying to not let it. I don't phone the Samaritans if we lose, not anymore.

Interviewer: We talked about Paul Fairclough and the sadness and disappointment at him going. Not the failure, but all the disappointment surrounding not clinching promotion. This other man Graham Westley, second spell at the club and success second time around something that doesn't normally happen.

David Palmer: And a different person second time around.

Interviewer: Can you compare the two different people, the two different teams?

David Palmer: No. I thought you meant Graham Westley with his second coming. He is a different person, he didn't win a lot of friends when he was here before. He brought some players into the club that not everybody was happy with and he did upset quite a lot of people. He was at times looked on as very arrogant. A lot of the supporters were saying, "He hasn't won anything like Paul Fairclough has won." I think it is probably right to say the supporters weren't too affectionate towards him and that probably didn't bring out the best in him.

What I will say about Graham Westley is when he came the second time I went to a fans forum and Phil Wallace dropped a lot of hints that he was coming back. A lot of people were strongly opposed to him coming back. Graham Westley decided he'd have a few meetings with supporters during the close season and answer their questions, talk to him and listen to what he had to say. It was quite brutal the one that I went to.

A lot of people were very critical and said, "We are not happy with you coming back." I have got to say I was one of them. I said that I didn't like him damaging the name of our club. I said, "I go to away matches when you were here before and people said, 'You have got a nice ground, nice crowd, you are nice people and we always get a good game there. We have got no problems with Stevenage it is just your bloody manager that we don't like.'" I said, "I don't like that, I want people to like us."

He has been as good as his word. He has changed, he has matured and I was really pleased after I don't know how long it was. We were doing well and quite clearly I think he learned

from his time with us before. I made a point of finding him and saying to him, "I didn't want you to come back, I didn't like you, I was very critical of you and I was wrong. Thank you very much you are doing great." He was nice about it. I love Graham Westley now, but I didn't always.

Interviewer: Graham Westley the man to take Stevenage to the Football League, the ultimate goal. Is Paul Fairclough the man who made Stevenage and Graham Westley the man who took Stevenage to the big time?

David Palmer: Paul did the groundwork. He got us from being absolutely nowhere to the very brink of Football League and Graham Westley took it on. He did very well to get us promoted into the Football League. He did amazingly well within 12 months to get us... So many people were saying, "I can't see us being in the Second Division for long." Dead right, we weren't, but we went up and not back down as some people had forecast. He is only to be admired and applauded for the success he has brought to us.

Interviewer: Were you one of the ones who believed that promotion to League One and back to back promotions was going to be possible when we won?

David Palmer: No, I wasn't. I used words like consolidation and survival I am afraid. I didn't quite have the faith that some people had. I knew we had got a good side and I knew we wouldn't let in many goals, we have got a very good defence. It was our Conference defence that went up into the Football League that wasn't a

problem, but I couldn't see where the goals were going to come from. I just thought against more professional clubs it might be tough going, but we did really well.

Interviewer: Last year's win at Old Trafford a dream then if you didn't see it coming.

David Palmer: A surprise dream or dream surprise.

Interviewer: What was it like coming back from that game, scoring the goal in the first half?

David Palmer: It was nothing like coming back from Kidderminster.

Interviewer: Can it compare to any of the Wembley games winning the FA trophy?

David Palmer: No, because the Wembley games were completely different, they were totally different. With Old Trafford it was an occasion, it was a day out. The Torquay fans were really nice, we were chatting to a few of them before the game and I think they looked on it a bit as a day out as well. In some ways you forgot the importance of the occasion. I did fancy that we had got a good chance of beating them, but when we did I just thought, "Are we really ready for this?" I have got to be honest my feeling was are we ready to go into League One, we have only been in League Two five minutes. I suppose the answer to that was, well yes.

Interviewer: Can you describe your reaction to the full-time whistle?

David Palmer: Yes, just we were jumping up and down applauding the players who were milking the applause from the crowd quite rightly and yes it was great. Then we all got on the bus. There is nothing nicer than being on a coach going home after you have won because everybody is happy, chatty and full of it and smiling. Whereas if you have lost for the first 10 minutes on the way home everybody is moaning and groaning. Then for the rest of the journey it is more a silence. Of course the journey home is so short if you have won whereas it takes an eternity if you have been beaten.

Interviewer: Life in League One is very different to our past, is there anything you miss?

David Palmer: Yes, the friendly banter with non-league clubs.

Interviewer: Is that lost at this level or is it that we haven't had time?

David Palmer: I haven't really had a lot of chance to work out what supporters are like in League One. Whereas with the Conference I had been to all of these grounds, got to know what their supporters are like and by and large they are very friendly.

Interviewer: Have you got memories of good relations with away supporters?

David Palmer: Yes, everywhere with very few exceptions. Woking people I didn't like, I didn't think they were very friendly. I have only been to Aldershot once and that was a nightmare I didn't like them either.

Interviewer: Woking?

David Palmer: Woking.

Interviewer: Why, what is it with Woking? The Working story,

David Palmer: This rivalry with Woking is strange because Woking is nowhere near Stevenage so why should we have any bad feeling with them? Who cares about Woking? Well apparently we do. I think it goes back to the FA trophy. We played them here I think and drew, we might have beaten them here. I was a two legged semi-final I think, I think we beat them here and I think they beat us there. I think it is went to a replay at Watford. Our team could hardly stand because they had played so many games at the end of the season. We had got players in the side who weren't fit and they beat us and I think that put them through to the final, so we decided we didn't like them. They had usually got the better of us in league matches and we had to have someone to hate, so it seemed to be Woking.

It is funny this business of hating sides, I don't really hate anybody too much. Barnet tried to have a... They thought, "We are on the edge of Hertfordshire and you are up the road, so let's hate each other." They tried to get a bit of bad blood going

between the two clubs. Then Barnet I seem to recall got into financial difficulties. They came here and one of their supporters went round with a bucket collection and loads of our supporters chipped in and all of a sudden they said, "Thank you Stevenage fans you are lovely people, we are so lucky to have you as neighbours." So that fizzled out.

Luton don't like us, but there again I suppose that is envy because we have gone from nowhere to two leagues above them. I remember when they were going to Anfield, Highbury and Old Trafford to play league matches and we were going to Saffron Walden and Hemel Hempstead to play our league matches. They probably do resent us a little bit.

Interviewer: To use your words is beating Luton, beating Woking, beating Barnet and I suppose you could say beating Dagenham does that mean more to the fan than the win away to Altringham?

David Palmer: It means more to a lot of them. I did enjoy going to Luton and winning 1-0 there, Scott Laird scored right just before the end which is a nice time to score. I think there was about 8000 there, we had a really good following. That was nice. Yes, it was a bit sweeter than if we had been playing some other club away from home and won 1-0. I don't get too excited about beating sides that we apparently don't like I just want us to win matches whenever we can.

Interviewer: Is there a particular team you have a really friendly relation with from looking back? A team where you made a good connection with the fans, you wished them well and hope they achieve their goal?

David Palmer: Yes, Forest Green Rovers who have always been punching above their weight are in the Conference. They are basically a village team from Nailsworth in darkest Gloucestershire. I have been three times to their ground and they are just lovely people. They always make you welcome when you go in their club house and you get talking to them. They are just really nice people, they give you a real welcome.

There are other clubs, I mentioned Gateshead earlier. I don't know if they felt sorry for us because we had come such a long way but they were nice people. In non-league football very few places do you go to where the crowd are nasty or threatening, it is very unusual. I mentioned earlier Kidderminster their fans couldn't have been kinder to us when we won the league there.

Interviewer: As a fan do you have particularly good relations with the players?

David Palmer: It is nice that quite a few of the players we have met. At Kidderminster I took my son and my grandson. My son lives at Thrapston 50 miles from here and he has got a season ticket at Stevenage, which is good, 100 mile trip every match. His son is also now a Stevenage supporter and several of the Stevenage players made a fuss of my little grandson which was nice. There are no big egos amongst the players that I have noticed and long may it continue. I think they do appreciate the support that we give them.

Interviewer: What do you think about the chants and the cheering on the terraces? Does that make Broadhall Way special the

atmosphere here? Have you ever been involved in the crowd and singing along with one of the songs?

David Palmer: My granddaughter does, she comes with me a lot. No, I am too old and fat to sing and I have never been very good at singing so I don't. I do quite enjoy hearing it and some of the banter is quite good. Some of it is a bit unnecessary, but some of it is quite good. The atmosphere here especially for a floodlit match if there is a decent crowd it is quite good. The Charlton game was good.

You are talking about clubs feeling a bit superior. It was quite amusing a couple of weeks ago we had Charlton Athletic come down here who were a Premier League side not that long ago. We beat them 1-0 and it was the first match they had lost all season. My son said to me as we walked into the carpark, "Did you hear that Dad?" I said, "No, what was that?" He said, "That group of Charlton fans behind us one of them said, 'I can't believe we have lost our unbeaten record to a load of f-ing non-leaguers.'" Which we found quite amusing.

Of course we are not non-leaguers we are in the same league as them now. That just shows that is how they still look on Stevenage as a non-league side. It was nice, they have got to lose sooner or later and it is nicer that we take that record from them than anybody else. But they were okay about it.

Interviewer: Do you have a favourite other ground that you have been to? You have been to lots of places and this is your favourite place.

David Palmer: This is my favourite football ground by a mile.

Interviewer: What is special about Stevenage football ground?

David Palmer: Not much, not much at all. It is very basic, it is very small, it is cramped, but it is neat, it is tidy and it is where my team play. It is where I have had a lot of happy hours and a lot of very unhappy hours of course. I don't enjoy games all that much to be honest because I am always a bundle of nerves. If we are winning 1-0 I can't really enjoy it because I am always worried that we might finishing up drawing or even losing. I have got a lot of nice memories here, so it is definitely my favourite ground.

Interviewer: What is your favourite away day or favourite away ground that you have been to or is there not really one?

David Palmer: Wembley maybe and Old Trafford. I can't say, I don't know really. I have been to a lot of grounds which I think are nice. I always used to think Rushden and Diamond's ground was nice. There are some good grounds in the Conference.

Interviewer: Is there a level above League One for Stevenage?

David Palmer: Not yet. Maybe in four or five years' time. Most supporters will say to you, "Let's go for it now." Graham Westley is saying you can't talk about consolidating or surviving he is saying at least the play offs. He is very ambitious and he said the same thing last year, we didn't believe him and look what happened. I think really we need to develop the ground a bit more, build on our fan

base which is very disappointing. Try to get some more numbers through the turnstiles and then perhaps look at the Championship. You have got to have an all seated stadium for the Championship. We don't want to get promoted and then turned down because our ground is not up to it do we?

END AUDIO

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