

**File:** BMD Bill McManus.mp3

**Duration:** 0:11:04

**Date:** 29/07/2016

**Typist:** 705

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Interviewer: Can you please tell me your name, age and how you're related to Stevenage Football Club?

Bill McManus: Bill McManus. I've been watching Stevenage since April 1980, 61 years of age.

Interviewer: In April 1980, what made you first come to watch Stevenage?

Bill McManus: I had a shop up in the Chells area. I moved down from Bedford, and because I enjoyed playing ball, it was just obvious to watch local football, and it's progressed from there.

Interviewer: I hear you've obviously got an accent. How did you end up in Stevenage?

Bill McManus: I moved down from Edinburgh in 1964, at the age of 14. Then, early years, work was hard, and father was offered a house with a job in Bedford, so the whole family moved down. Then, from there, I joined the army on my 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. As I say, in

1980, I got a shop in Stevenage, and everything's gone from there.

Interviewer: Do you remember much about the first game that you came to watch?

Bill McManus: No, no. The ground, very, very few people here in those days, 100, 200, at the most.

Interviewer: What was the ground like?

Bill McManus: Nowhere near as nice as it is now. They had the old seating area which would seat 200 people, grass banking and small standing areas.

Interviewer: Since being a fan, you must have seen Stevenage go through some trouble with liquidation and stuff like that, and starting up again. How did you feel?

Bill McManus: Well, that was all before I actually started watching the club. Since I've been watching the club, it's had its ups and downs, but I've not seen them in liquidation, that I can remember.

Interviewer: What do you think about the current manager and squad to get to the level that they're at? They must be quite a team.

Bill McManus: They've done very, very well. They've got a good manager. I was first to admit that I was wrong. I didn't agree with him coming back, but he certainly proved himself more than adequate for this position. All respect to them for what they've done.

Interviewer: Have you been to see any of the cup games at Wembley or anything, big games like that?

Bill McManus: I've been twice, watched them at Wembley and...

Interviewer: What was it like going to see Stevenage Football Club at a ground stadium like Wembley?

Bill McManus: Very proud, the first team to play at Wembley, and to achieve what they've achieved, yes, fair play.

Interviewer: Do you remember what your favourite ever game was, or what's one that stands out to you the most or...?

Bill McManus: There's no real game that stands out for any specific reason. I enjoy watching football. I enjoy coming down here, and I enjoy watching the team.

Interviewer: Whereabouts do you stand in the ground?

Bill McManus: In the '80s, as I say, it was in a little standing area by the seating area. Then, as the ground started developing, the other side of the ground, yes, I stood there.

For many, many years now, my son and myself have had a season ticket, and sit in the main stand. Hopefully that'll continue for many more years.

Interviewer: Great. What do you think the fans do for the club, the atmosphere on match days, how do you reckon that affects the team?

Bill McManus: Sometimes, well, I feel that the criticism given by fans is very unfair. Some of the comments that are made, with regard to the opposite team's players and decisions. I think a lot of people need to know the rules of the game before they can criticise. Now, I think when the team is playing well, the fan reaction down here is fantastic.

Interviewer: Any players over the years that have stuck in your mind, of great players for Stevenage Football Club?

Bill McManus: Been a few, Nurse, Boyd, the two that really stand out, Sergeant [Drebbel 0:05:17], God bless him. Now there are Goodliffe, Berry, Richard Wilmot. Yes, there are a good few players, Venables.

Venables actually grabbed my son from the crowd, put him on his shoulders when we won the conference, and carried him all the way round the grounds with the other players, in celebration.

Interviewer: Was that the first time that they won the conference?

Bill McManus: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: Yes, yes. What about, over the years, the managers? You said previously you didn't agree with Westley coming back the second time. What manager has stood out for you?

Bill McManus: Oh, the only manager that's really stood out for me is Paul Fairclough. We are where we are now because of that man.

Interviewer: What do you think he did for the club? What was it that made him so special?

Bill McManus: He built this club up, the players, the promotions, just the way the club has progressed. I think it was wrong when he came back the second time, because circumstances weren't there for Paul. His management here, his techniques, the way he went about it, is fantastic.

Interviewer: What did you feel about him going and managing the rivals, Barnet? Any hard feelings against that or still a great manager in your eyes?

Bill McManus: Paul is like any man in this world, or women, if they're out of work, you've got to go and get work, and whether it's Barnet or whoever, it's the man not the club. It's the man himself.

Interviewer: Were you there for the famous Newcastle match, the first time round here? I would have thought—

Bill McManus: Oh, yes, I was here.

Interviewer: Yes. Do you remember much of the game?

Bill McManus: Only it wasn't a goal by Shearer. The atmosphere was out of this world, the way the club built the temporary stand, with their ways. No, it was an excellent day.

Interviewer: What do you think the club can do to be in League One, and probably be getting the lowest crowds of any team in League One? What do you think the club can do to bring people in, and get the crowds, and get a support base that will last for many years?

Bill McManus: Only carry on what they're doing. If people don't want to come and watch Stevenage borough, it's their loss. There's not much more the club can do. Fine, if they're going to develop and build another stand, seating area, great. It will just finish off the club. It's not a case of just building it, you've got to get people through the doors to use it.

Interviewer: Would you ever have imagined, when you first started watching Stevenage that, all this time later, they'd be as high as League One and also get a promotion twice in a row to make it to League One? Would you ever have imagined that?

Bill McManus: Never, in my wildest dreams, have I dreamed that Stevenage would do what they've done. It's always been an ambition to watch Stevenage play in a football league, and that was taken away when they won the conference.

I think, if the club then, the chairman, etc, at those stages, had gone with the original plans for the development of the club, we would have been in the football league then. The dilly and dallying, and the change in minds, and really applying for planning permission, I think, in my personal opinion, stopped us from having the development done before then.

Interviewer: What was it like to get so close in your grasp, to get the football league, and just have it taken away from you? What did that feel like?

Bill McManus: The words I could use, I wouldn't speak, but very disappointed.

Interviewer: Yes. I'm sure many of the fans felt the same way. Do you remember much from the following season after losing out on promotion?

Bill McManus: Not really, other than the fact it was another season watching Stevenage Football Club.

Interviewer: Had the fans changed in any way or...?

Bill McManus: I don't think the fans had changed. I think it was where the club had changed. It's taken us all those years to get back to where we were. Since getting back to that date, that year, just shows what this club can achieve.

Interviewer: Just on a last note, what do you hope for the future for Stevenage Football Club?

Bill McManus: Well, certainly this season to consolidate and stay mid table, and then move forward from there. We can only move forward if we've got the support and the finances there to do it.

END AUDIO

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