

File: BMD Dean Thompson

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START AUDIO

Interviewer: Can you tell me your name and, if you don't mind, how old you are, please?

Dean Thompson: Dean Thompson's my name and I'm 38 years old. (Laughter)

Interviewer: And what is your association with Stevenage Football Club?

Dean Thompson: Just a fan. I started coming in 1985, so I was 12 years old.

Interviewer: Right, okay.

Dean Thompson: Yes, and I've just been a fan ever since.

Yes, just a season ticket holder in the main stand. I used to stand over there on the East, until I got too old for all that.

Interviewer: Right.

Dean Thompson: So now I sit in row F.

Interviewer: Yes, so now you have a seat. (Laughter)

Can we start, really, with your family background? Were your family living in Stevenage at the time?

Dean Thompson: Yes, we lived in Knebworth.

My granddad and my dad supported Newcastle United.

Interviewer: Right.

Dean Thompson: So I didn't get to see much football. Once a season I'd probably have a trip to watch Newcastle.

And then, when I was 12 years old, the team was doing quite well, and myself and my dad came over for a game, in '85, and '86/'86 season, became regulars. So we came to every game and went to away games as well.

Interviewer: Yes.

And were your family incomers into Hertfordshire? Were they, sort of, [living 0:01:19] there?

Dean Thompson: No, my grandparents lived in Knebworth and Catfield, and Mum and Dad lived in Knebworth.

Interviewer: Yes, but there was no family history of supporting local clubs?

Dean Thompson: No, no.

Interviewer: Where did the Newcastle connection come from?

Dean Thompson: Grandad lived up there just after the war, so he got the rest of the boys involved.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: Yes.

Interviewer: What, his sons?

Dean Thompson: Yes. Yes, and then it, sort of, passes down, doesn't it, through the generations?

Interviewer: Yes, absolutely. So Newcastle is the family team?

Dean Thompson: Yes.

Interviewer: What happened when it transpired that you were a Stevenage supporter?

Dean Thompson: Well, I was a Stevenage supporter. I was a Stevenage at the time, you know. When you used to sit and watch and you become part of - it becomes part of your life, doesn't it?

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: So you just end up looking out for the other team's result, rather than supporting them, which is what I do now. I still look out for the result. And, of course, we had it all over again last year, with Newcastle, so it's... But Stevenage is my team.
(Laughter)

And I'm pleased to say it to people now, because they haven't actually heard of us.

Interviewer: Yes, absolutely.

And was that a thing that you picked up at school, do you think, from your friends?

Dean Thompson: At the time I think I was probably the first one to come to Broadhall Way.

And then, when I told people I was going to watch Stevenage on a Saturday - a lot of them didn't go and watch their Arsenal and Spurs - and I remember standing behind that goal, away to our right there, with 10 or 12 kids from school. So I think I'd managed to, sort of, bring a few with me.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: And I think some of them still come now. So it's a funny thing that, you know, once you get attached to some way, you end up coming back.

Interviewer: You certainly do.

Dean Thompson: Yes.

Interviewer: Where did your consciousness of Stevenage come from, do you think? Were you picking it up from the papers, or..?

Dean Thompson: Yes, I think my dad picked it up from the papers. I think he knew one of the guy's dads that played for the side at the time, the goalkeeper. And he regularly, sort of, saw them, and decided to come down.

So I think he knew a few people down here that worked in the old portakabin bar over in that corner. And, yes, I think it was just, literally, a parent of a player said, "They're doing quite well. Go and have a look," so we did.

Interviewer: But it wasn't your dad who brought you to your first game?

Dean Thompson: Yes.

Interviewer: It was your dad who brought you for the first game?

Dean Thompson: Yes.

Interviewer: Right. And you were about 12 at that time?

Dean Thompson: Yes. It was an FA Cup game, I seem to remember.

Interviewer: Okay.

Dean Thompson: But I can't remember who it was against. I could remember, up until a couple of years ago. I'll have to look back.

Interviewer: Yes. Well, this is why we record the memories-

Dean Thompson: Yes, I have to look back.

Interviewer: -before they go. (Laughter)

And can you remember how you felt about that first game?

Was it the first football game you'd been to?

Dean Thompson: No, I'd been to some Premier League games - they weren't Premier League games - they were Division 1 games then, which, funnily enough, is where we are now, in Division 1.

So I'd been to Spurs. I'd been to Arsenal. I'd been to Luton.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: I'd been to quite a few of the London clubs and Watford.

So I'd been to a game before, but it was a difference experience. All I can remember is, that they lost 2-1, and an ambulance had to come on the pitch, and one of the opposition players had broken his leg, and that's all I can remember about the day, really.

Interviewer: Right.

Dean Thompson: So, certain silly things I can remember. But I do remember standing behind that goal. And the changing rooms were where the irrigation tank is now. So the tunnel was, they came out from behind the goal. I do remember that.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: So, yes.

But we didn't come again that season, but the following season, we then took up and went all over the place.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: Yes.

Interviewer: And was that with your dad or with your friends?

Dean Thompson: Yes, with Dad. And we used to go with my dad's pal and his two boys as well - that was Scott, and Scott ended up playing for the first team.

Interviewer: Really?

Dean Thompson: Yes. Scott [Creighton 0:05:12], yes.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: So we used to go around in the back of my dad's van - him and Mick in the front and the three of us in the back of his van - over to Hertford and Harlow and Collier Row and Tilbury, in the old Division 2 North days, the Vauxhall local league, yes.

Interviewer: And did Scott stay a friend?

Dean Thompson: Yes, yes, still now, yes. I can see his house from my back window.

Interviewer: So, does he give you access to the other players?

Dean Thompson: No, no. I've never really been interested in that, you know. I think, when I was 12, 13, 14, I used to collect their autographs, but yes, no, he – I never really... He was a player and I was a fan. That was it.

Interviewer: Yes, and that was it?

Dean Thompson: Yes. You don't like to ask too many questions, you know.

Interviewer: No, exactly.

Dean Thompson: When we won the Conference, he was in the squad then. So it was becoming a lot more in the public eye, and what I don't know, I can't talk about. So (Laughter), if something's been talked about in the dressing room, and he's not allowed to talk about it, and then absolutely fine.

So, no, I've never hassled for inside information. I just like to see what's going on, on the pitch, and then I can comment on what's going on, on the pitch, rather than behind the scenes. Because I'm quite well known for my blunt opinions.

Interviewer: Are you?

Dean Thompson: Yes, unfortunately.

Interviewer: Yes. (Laughter)

Dean Thompson: It's got me in trouble at times, with Mr Westley, but I call it how I see it.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: I think I got friendly with a player once, and we had a, you know, a drink after the game, [with 0:06:46] myself and a pal, and [had a nice chat/a nice chap]. Not the greatest footballer in the world.

And we ended up having a bit of a to-do with someone that was giving him a hard time from the terraces. And I thought to myself, "I'm not going to be friends with footballers, because it just – they're footballers, and I'm just... So I can say what I like without fear of sounding biased.

Interviewer: Yes. (Laughter)

Dean Thompson: So, yes, so [I'm] separate. They're the guys I come and pay to watch.

Interviewer: Yes.

And when you say that you're blunt, how does that manifest itself?

Dean Thompson: In many different ways. (Laughter) We're quite well known. We sit behind Graham's dugout. And we support, we do, we support, but occasionally, you know, we're quite witty. Well, I like to think we're quite witty with it, but sometimes it does turn into frustration, and we do let Graham know how it needs to be done. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Yes. And does he listen to what you think?

Dean Thompson: Does he listen? I think you know the answer to that. (Laughter) Not at all.

Interviewer: Yes. Will he respond? If you're yelling at him - if you're right behind his dugout - if you're yelling at him, does he respond to you?

Dean Thompson: He sometimes gives me a little wink, because he knows where it's coming from. But, no, he's very focused.

The greatest times were when Stimson was the manager. And he swapped the dugouts round, so we had the away managers in front of us, and they used to respond.

Interviewer: Yes. (Laughter)

Dean Thompson: That was great fun. ___[0:08:11] baiting, we called it. Because we used to wind them up, just before the first whistle, and we

used to time it, to see how quick we could get a response from one of them.

Interviewer: Okay.

Dean Thompson: I think Sammy McIlroy was the quickest. We got him before kick-off.

Interviewer: Really?

Dean Thompson: Yes, yes, yes.

Interviewer: How did you get Sammy McIlroy?

Dean Thompson: Well, he was in his suit, and we just questioned whether he'd been in court that morning, and he turned and gave us a little wink and a smile. But some of them, we've managed to wind up quite nicely, over the years.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: And Graham Heathcote, from Altrincham's, a good example, who didn't take our banter particularly well.

Interviewer: No?

Dean Thompson: No.

Interviewer: What did he do?

Dean Thompson: He shouted some obscenities back at us. But we liked that.

Interviewer: Yes. (Laughter)

Dean Thompson: We liked that. It gives us more to feed off.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: But most of them, we do it with a lot of good humour, and a lot of good nature, because I'm not fighting them. (Laughter)

Interviewer: No. (Laughter)

Dean Thompson: If they come over the fence, I'd slip down in my chair and say, "It was him. It was Andy, next to me. Nothing to do with me."

But, yes, we do have some good fun. We come for the football, but we come for a bit of social as well. And all our friends and all our pals are in row F, and extended into row E and row G now.

Interviewer: Right.

Dean Thompson: I'm not sure if rows H and I quite like us there, but, you know, we're quite noisy.

Interviewer: And what's the best technique for getting a rise out of either the home or the away manager?

Dean Thompson: Well, it's the way he's dressed, or it's the way his team's playing, or you pick on something he's said to his players. I couldn't tell you. It just-

Interviewer: It just clicks.

Dean Thompson: -it just comes, and you can click something out, and it will come out brilliant.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: Other times, you make a complete fool of yourself, which, I'm sure, if you asked some of my colleagues in row F, they'll say that I make a fool of myself quite regularly.

You go into a long spiel, and then all of a sudden you go, "de, de, de..." You lose your train of thought.

But, yes, it's just one of those things. You listen to what they're saying to their players, and you listen to what their players are saying, and you look at reactions, and if he's in a suit and tie, you take the Mickey out of his suit and tie. Obviously, we don't do that with Graham, because he's very smartly dressed these days.

Interviewer: Oh, is he?

Dean Thompson: Yes, very smartly dressed.

Interviewer: Is that a change from..?

Dean Thompson: Yes.

Interviewer: Because he's been the manager twice, hasn't he?

Dean Thompson: He has, yes. He was a tracksuit manager before, or in his shorts.

Interviewer: Right, yes.

Dean Thompson: I think it began last season, when Newcastle came to town. He went into his Miami Vice look, as I've called it – his T-shirt and his suit – and since then he's developed into his shirt and tie.

So I think it's to do with successful managers being smartly dressed.

Interviewer: Right, yes. I can see that.

Dean Thompson: And he's on the telly every week now, so that might have something to do with it. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Yes, absolutely.

How do you dress? Is there a form of dress?

Dean Thompson: No, not really.

I do remember, many years ago, when I was young, we were six weeks from the end of the season, and I wore the same T-shirt, jumper and trousers for every game. I changed the socks and pants, but I went through, and I took it off and put it in the wardrobe, and never wore it again until the next... It wasn't washed-

Interviewer: Really?

Dean Thompson: -for six weeks. But I was young - and we got promoted - so it worked.

Interviewer: Right, so it was a lucky set of clothes that had to be worn for every match?

Dean Thompson: Yes, it worked.

But no I'm not, I'm not a replica shirt man and a scarf man.

Interviewer: Are you not?

Dean Thompson: No. I'm well known for my different coloured jumpers, but I do get the Mickey taken out of me for that. But, no, I'm too old for replica shirts. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Yes. Is that because they're too expensive, or you've just grown out of them?

Dean Thompson: No, I just don't suit them now. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Right.

How about the hats and the scarves?

Dean Thompson: No, I don't really wear my colour.

No, I must admit, last season, myself and Graham, obviously, had this little relationship going on, and one of his shirts was for sale in the shop, and a couple of my pals bought it.

So I do wear my blue shirt with GW on it-

Interviewer: Right, yes.

Dean Thompson: -but that was a present, so I wear it. And he nearly choked on his tea when he saw me wearing it, when he looked round and came out with his tea, and he saw GW on my chest.

(Laughter)

Yes, but that's just good fun. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Do you collect any sorts of other memorabilia? Do you keep the programmes?

Dean Thompson: Not now, I used to. I was sitting in the loft hatch, on Thursday night, for about an hour and a half, going through, and I've brought a few with me today. So I have a good stash of programmes from about '86 through to about '92, '93. That's when they used to cost 30 pence. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Yes. How much do they cost now?

Dean Thompson: About three quid.

Interviewer: Oh, right, so that's...

Dean Thompson: I don't go home and sit and read a programme. I think now, in the technical age of, you can read everything you need to read

on the internet. And I know about the away team before they're coming, so I don't...

And I talk too much when I'm at a match, so I don't ever read it. (Laughter) I walk through the gate and I'm chatting all the way until the final whistle. It's more something you do when you're younger, dare I say?

Interviewer: Yes, I suppose so.

Dean Thompson: Yes, so I have a few programmes. And I have a few autographs on the programmes as well. Yes, but not anymore.

Interviewer: What's the best autograph that you have?

Dean Thompson: I got Des Gallagher. That doesn't mean much to many people, but Des was a goalkeeper here for many years, and Ray Clemence. I was a goalkeeper when I was younger, so I used to collect goalkeepers. Even from the opposition team, I used to get the goalkeepers.

So, Ray Clemence played there one night, so that's probably one of the more famous ones that I've got.

Interviewer: Did you ever have ambitions to play?

Dean Thompson: No, not really, because I knew I was never any good. (Laughter) I was quite a late starter, and I played for a few seasons, and I played five-a-side, and then my back and my

knees used to ache the next morning. No, no, no, no, no. I know my limitations.

Interviewer: Yes, fair enough.

____[0:14:07] in case we lose things.

So, can you tell me a bit – because you’ve spoken quite a lot, actually, about the social side of the game – can you say a bit about what it means for your social life?

Dean Thompson: Well, you do, kind of, plan your life around it. Not so much now, because I’m not allowed to quite so much, with Mrs [Deano] and the two kids.

But, away games, you know, you’d, 10 o’clock [on a Saturday 0:14:33]. “Right, pick me up at 10.” And we’d meet at the motorway service station. There’d be a dozen of us, and we’d have a cup of tea.

It is a big – particularly for a club this size where, when I first started to come, there were 400 people in the grounds, everybody knew everybody.

Interviewer: Right.

Dean Thompson: And, you know, we went through a phase of coming here at 1 o’clock, having a couple of beers before the game, and having a chat, and it was a big social.

We used to go away for weekends. And away to Chester, We’d go to North Wales, and stay at a caravan park for a

Friday and Saturday night, and come home on Sunday. And some of the guys still do. No quite so much for me because, with the girls, but it's a massive part of a club like this.

But, a perfect size, and you can walk round the ground and people will shout, "Hello Deano," and I'll go, "Hi." I haven't got a clue who you are, but I know your face, but I don't know your name. And that's what I love about a club like this. You know people and you can have a chat with people.

Interviewer: Has it changed? Because you said, when you started out, there were, like, 400 supporters. Now there's many, many more, isn't there?

Dean Thompson: Yes, it's changed dramatically.

I mean, you just have to look out of the window. There used to be a grass bank there. We used to bring a ball with us and play at halftime on the grass bank, up to the right, there.

Small, little stands, probably either side of the clock there, was it, and it was just, you used to stand against the railings.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: The players used to come in and have a beer with you after the game. It doesn't happen anymore.

Interviewer: Right.

Dean Thompson: They're professional athletes now.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: Whereas the guys that I used to watch were, dare I say it, plumbers, electricians and, you know, shopkeepers.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: So, it's changed amazingly over the years.

But I suppose it's changed - through the 90s, it changed quite slowly – so you didn't really notice the changes.

It wasn't until, I think Graham arrived for his first spell, that he decided this club could, you know, could go on and kick on. So he changed the way the players were with the fans, and they didn't come in and drink a beer afterwards with everybody. So, yes, it's changed massively. It has.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: But you still see the same faces from 20 years ago, will still stand in the same spot where the old stand was, you know, the guys at the back of the stand there that make all the noise. And some of us have changed our positions over the years, but it's changed massively but, for me, it's still the same.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: It's the same club. It's the same place. The club will be here after Phil and Graham have moved on, and I'll still be here, no doubt. You don't get transfers for fans, do you?

Interviewer: No, you don't, I suppose.

Dean Thompson: I shouldn't think anyone would put in a bid for me, anyway.
(Laughter)

But, yes, I mean, I still see it as the place I used to come 20 years ago. So, yes.

Interviewer: Yes.

What are your rituals? Do you prepare for a game? Do you do research into the other team?

Dean Thompson: No, not particularly. I think, when we were in the Conference, for many, many years, you knew the players, and you knew the teams, and you knew the managers.

I'd have a quick look to, you know, to see who was still there, so I knew who I - I was picking my victims for the Saturday - who I was going to shout at.

But, when you were in the Conference, you knew everybody, and you knew everything. Now it's a little bit different. We're coming up against players that a) I've never heard of, or b) used to be Premier League players that I know.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: So it is a bit different now.

I did some research for Tuesday night. Steve, from BBC Three Counties, had asked me to sit with him and summarise the game on Tuesday, on Three Counties Radio. So, I thought, as I was going out live on 95.5, I'd better do a little bit of research.

Interviewer: Yes. (Laughter)

Dean Thompson: So I did do a bit of research for Tuesday night's game, I have to say. So, yes, I did. But if it's a game that I'm not going to be summarising on, I just turn up. (Laughter) I take it with the flow.

Interviewer: So how did this association with Three Counties Radio come about?

Dean Thompson: No, I just know - Steve, who's the commentator - we've known each other for many years.

Interviewer: Right.

Dean Thompson: And when he gets stuck for someone to sit next to him, he shouts for me.

So, yes, I got involved last season, in some pubcasts on the website. And I used to sit with Steve and Mark Venables, every Sunday evening, and chew the fat, and talk about the previous week at the club, and the football matches in the news. And we'd just sit and talk for 45 minutes and make a pubcast, as we called them.

Interviewer: Right.

Dean Thompson: And Steve's just asked me a few times to summarise the games.

Interviewer: Do you enjoy doing that?

Dean Thompson: Yes, I do. It's really difficult.

Interviewer: Is it?

Dean Thompson: Yes, because you have to sit and concentrate and watch the game. Whereas, when I'm sitting in row F, I'm talking to him behind me, and him in front, and, "Oh, I've missed a goal."

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: So, it's really different. And the first one I did, I got home and I was, like, "Oh, my goodness, I'm drained."

Interviewer: Really?

Dean Thompson: Because I had to concentrate so much on watching a football match, whereas, normally, I'd probably only watch 60 minutes of the 90, whilst I'm chatting. (Laughter)

But it's certainly different. Something I didn't enjoy, to start with, but as I've done it more times now, and I like to think that me and Steve have a good rapport, and he, kind of, knows when I'm going to butt in, and I know when to jump in, so I'm quite enjoying it.

Interviewer: Yes.

Why did you persist then? If you didn't enjoy it, why didn't you knock it on the head at that time?

Dean Thompson: It's something that, in one way, I, kind of, looked forward to doing, and then I was a bit nervous about it, which, you know, I was a bit worried about, because I'm quite a confident person. And I was, like, "Why, why..?" I'm just talking into a microphone. No one could be listening, – they probably weren't.

But, I don't know, I didn't enjoy the first couple, but I didn't know what I was doing. Now I know what he's looking for and what we want to talk about, and it's a bit more interesting.

We enjoy a little bit of banter and, I don't know, I've always been interested in radio, and the media, so it's something different.

Interviewer: Absolutely.

Can I talk a little bit now about, you say you have daughters?

Dean Thompson: Yes.

Interviewer: How many daughters have you got?

Dean Thompson: Two.

Interviewer: Two. No sons? (Laughter)

Dean Thompson: No. That's good.

Interviewer: Oh, is it?

Dean Thompson: Yes.

Interviewer: Right. You like having daughters?

Dean Thompson: I've seen some of my friends with sons, and my girls are a lot easier to manage than two boys, yes.

Interviewer: Oh, I see, right.

So, do the girls come to football matches?

Dean Thompson: I've brought the eldest a couple of times. But the answer is no, they don't come.

Interviewer: Right. No interest in football?

Dean Thompson: No, no. [Joley 0:21:42] came to the Newcastle game, and she'd been one or twice before. But, as much – I have tried to get her interested - but she doesn't want to come. So that's all right. That's fine. This is daddy time.

Interviewer: Yes.

Do you view it as personal time, you know, me time?

Dean Thompson: Not really, no. Well, no, not really. Maybe boys' time.

Interviewer: Yes. (Laughter)

Dean Thompson: But then there's a lot more girls in and around us now, so they'll probably give me a slap for saying that. But I suppose it's friends time, you know.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: If my beloved would want to come with me, I'm sure I'd agree to that.

Interviewer: Has she ever come with you to games?

Dean Thompson: She's been to the big games. She's been to Wembley, yes.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: But you wouldn't see her down here on a Tuesday night, at home to Wrexham, or anything like that.

Interviewer: Can I ask – and you don't have to answer these questions – but can I ask how your football going habits changed, or if they changed, after you met your future wife and then got married?

Dean Thompson: Yes, they became less. (Laughter) I think one season, out of the 46 games, I probably went to 30 or 35.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: But, I probably now, will only take in – so I come to all the home games - I have a season ticket. I probably only go to three or four away games a season now.

Interviewer: Right.

Dean Thompson: But that's just because it's an all day job. If you're leaving at 9.30, 10 o'clock, and you're back at 8 to 8.30 - I don't know - even in the Conference winning season, I didn't go to many away games. I'd probably go to three or four. But London games, yes, I'll go to, the local games, I'll got to.

But yes, demands of running a busy household, and I've been to the gym this morning, and I've been in the pool with one this morning. So, horse riding tomorrow morning. There's lots of other things to do.

Interviewer: Yes, lots of things to do.

Dean Thompson: But I'll always be home for five to three-

Interviewer: Right, for the kick-off.

Dean Thompson: -so I can listen in to Steve and do what I do, with Steve in the background.

Interviewer: Yes.

And, when you got married, did you get married on a Saturday?

Dean Thompson: No, we got married in the middle of December, at the end of December, the 29th of December we got married. And we got married in Knebworth Park. I had an Aston Martin, and I drove it myself. I drove past the ground, came in the ground, and I had my pictures taken, with my best man, in the dugout.

Interviewer: Did you? (Laughter) So those were just your pictures, not the [rest of 0:24:29] them?

Dean Thompson: Not the wedding photos, no.

Interviewer: No.

Dean Thompson: So, yes, I was in the dugout on my wedding day. How about that? I should have brought them with me, shouldn't I?

Interviewer: Yes, you should. (Laughter)

And was that all planned? Was the wedding all planned around the season, and having to avoid Saturday?

Dean Thompson: No.

Interviewer: No?

Dean Thompson: No, not really, no. Because we'd got engaged at Christmas the previous year, and I said, "Well, I'm not getting married in six months, and I'm not waiting 18 months." So we went (claps hands), "We'll do it in 12." Just to annoy everybody, around Christmas time. (Laughter)

So, yes, no, not really. But it was one of those things, I was driving, and I said to Mark, I said, "Come on, we'll go and have our picture taken in the grounds." So there we were in our suits and, yes, that was quite fun.

Interviewer: So was it impromptu rather than planned?

Dean Thompson: Yes. Yes, yes, yes.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: [Oh, well 0:25:15].

Interviewer: I mean, presumably, things changed more [with] the children starting to come along, but was it a negotiation between you and your family, do you think? Or was it something, you know, the decline in the football going, or was it something that just happened naturally?

Dean Thompson: I think it happens naturally. In the lead up to Amelia's birth – and Lucy tells this story quite regularly – she was quite poorly in her pregnancy, and she was in hospital. I think it was in –

Amelia was born on December the 7th, and this was in November, so she was in hospital, and they weren't sure if she was coming home.

This was on a Wednesday. I went in on the Thursday. We were booked on a train to Newcastle, to go and watch Newcastle -v- Birmingham, myself and my dad.

Well, that particular Saturday, I said to the nurse, I said, "What do you think?" She went, "Well, she could hold out for another couple of weeks, or it could come Saturday." I said, "Right, okay."

So, as I was on the train up to Newcastle, I said to my dad, I said... So we went. I'm not proud of it, but I had a gut feeling. And we were safe for another four weeks, as it happens, so-

Interviewer: Right, your gut feeling paid off.

Dean Thompson: Yes. I said, "Well, just ring." I said, "I'll get off the train at York and I'll get back. Just keep your legs crossed for a bit." So, yes.

Interviewer: Was she impressed?

Dean Thompson: I don't think anybody was impressed really. I don't think even my dad was impressed, as I was sitting on the train with him, and everybody was shaking their head in disgust at me, but-

Interviewer: Were they?

Dean Thompson: -[hey ho 0:26:54], I got away with it. Can you imagine what would have happened if I'd have come back and the bay was in her arms?

Interviewer: Oh, you'd have been in trouble.

Dean Thompson: I was thinking about that on the way up. I was confident, completely confident.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: But I used to manage a kids team on a Sunday, and when Amelia came along, I did stop that. I've just recently started again. So I manage an under-17s side at the moment.

Interviewer: Right.

Dean Thompson: So I do nip out for it on a Sunday morning. Because I haven't got boys of my own, I look after other people's boys. Well, boys, 17, they're not kids.

So I enjoy developing kids and helping them improve their football that I never really did. So I like to think I know a little bit about it.

Interviewer: And how does that development work? Are you encouraging scouts to come in and watch these kids?

Dean Thompson: We do it how we run – I've run three teams over the last 10 or 15 years – and we just want them to enjoy it. We've never won anything. I don't think we've finished any higher than fourth in a league.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: I don't really look for superstars. I, kind of, look for kids that haven't quite fitted in at a better club, and we pick them up and put them in, and become a group that enjoys playing football. And I want to enjoy going to train them.

I only took this team on – the manager left last December – so we took it on through until April. And I said to Steve, who asked me to take it on, I said, "I'll do it until the end of the season," because I can't do it.

But they're great kids, so a lot of them come here. And I enjoyed the five months we were with them, so we decided to give them another year.

Interviewer: What do you think football does for kids?

Dean Thompson: I think it builds friendships. It certainly has for me. I've made many amazing friends here. I have many – that's why I'm sitting here, I suppose – great memories.

It gives you something to look forward to in the week. If it's Monday morning, and there's a game on a Tuesday night, you look forward to tomorrow night.

You look forward to seeing your pals for a beer. You look forward to a bit of banter and a bit of a laugh, and it's part of your life.

And, you know, the guys I'm managing at the moment are giving me a real problem. The teams I've always managed in the past, a couple won't turn up on a Sunday, but these guys (claps hands) turn up religiously, all 14 of them, every Sunday, every training session. And, in the year 2011, when teenagers get a bad press, I can't fault them.

So there's a bond there. They're all from different schools and you, kind of, just make a little group, and there'll be-

Interviewer: Yes, sure.

Dean Thompson: -teams that I've been with in the past are, you know, all still connected, and they're all still pals.

So that's what I see it as. It's a good social activity, and it's a good thing for kids to, sort of, plan their futures.

Interviewer: Yes, absolutely.

Can we talk about memories now? Because I think the intriguing thing about you is, the fact that you've got this family history of support of Newcastle, and your personal history of support for Stevenage. What happens - because Newcastle's been in the big games, hasn't it?

Dean Thompson: Yes.

Interviewer: So what's happened during those games, where do your allegiances lie?

Dean Thompson: Oh, I mean, and Dad still sits with me now, so he's more of a Stevenage man as well. And as, I think, more money goes into the Premiership, and more, the modern day footballer is more detached from the normal fan, this is why people have come here, I think, because these guys that play here are more normal men in the street.

So, it's never been a problem for me. It's never been a problem because this is where I sit every Saturday, so I've always had my allegiance with Stevenage.

And, yes, the Newcastle games are the biggest memories, in the public eye, but I've got some much different memories. And being away at Purfleet, on a Tuesday or a Thursday evening, when we've won promotion from Division 2 North of the Vauxhall local league.

And our first big cup tie, up at, when Cambridge were a big side in the football league, and we went up there and drew, and we brought them back down here and beat them.

Getting into the Premier League of the old Diadora League. Then getting into the Conference and, you know, if you were to say me, "What do you prefer, then or now?" I used to love the old Diadora League days.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: All the fans were together, the home and away fans. So if you wanted a row with an opposition fan, you could argue the toss with him, without him being locked in behind a goal.

And one of my biggest memories is, being at Leyton Orient, in that cup run, when we won at Leyton Orient, when Peter Shilton was in goal for Orient.

That Swindon, away, when the rain was sheeting in to our face. Hail was bouncing off our foreheads. The goalkeeper kicked the ball out, and it just came back and went out for a throw, down by the corner. It was in those days.

Away to Scarborough, we stayed in a bed and breakfast, and were playing cricket on the beach, you know. Different from the glamour of a Newcastle situation.

Interviewer: Right.

Dean Thompson: And although those big glamour ties tend to [clicks fingers], sort of, pass you by almost, I think when Paul Fairclough was here, the first time Newcastle came, that's embedded, because that was just a ridiculous time.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: That was two weeks of build-up, the game. Then another 10 days for the replay, and then a few more days after the replay. So that is embedded.

And I suppose I was at an age then, when I was a bit more of a fanatical, sort of, fan, where I used to stand over in the middle of the old Barmy Army, as they called themselves, whereas now I'm a bit more, "Aah, well, Newcastle again. That'll be nice. I'll think about that next Friday evening," you know.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: So, I suppose, as you get older, and your enthusiasm, it doesn't waiver, but it just comes in different ways, I suppose.

Interviewer: Right.

Dean Thompson: But, yes, it's nice to have the big boys in town, and it's nice to upset them.

But the most strong memories are of the promotions that actually got us here in the first place, and those first little scratches of glamour.

Interviewer: Right.

Dean Thompson: Although Leyton Orient's not particularly glamorous-

Interviewer: No.

Dean Thompson: -but when you're in the position we were in, it was, it was amazing.

Interviewer: Yes. Can you say more about that Leyton Orient game? What was the score?

Dean Thompson: We won 2-1. I think we scored a goal in... The kick-off was delayed. Now, this is Leyton Orient, an established league club, that couldn't get the amount of Stevenage fans in the ground quick enough.

Interviewer: Right. (Laughter)

Dean Thompson: Because, as I said, this was a big game for us, 30 miles down the road into the East End.

So everybody in, still people coming through the door, and Corey Browne scored after about 45 or 48 seconds. I think the newspapers described it as the quickest goal Peter Shilton had ever conceded in 998 games.

Interviewer: Yes. What was that goal like?

Dean Thompson: I can't remember it particularly well, because everybody went... It was not a pleasant experience to be standing in.

Interviewer: Right.

Dean Thompson: The only thing I do remember – there's just two things I remember, and that was: Barry Hayles breaking through, and Peter Shilton coming outside his area, and actually pulling him down outside the area, and the referee (whistles), yellow carding him, and not red carding him. So I remember that.

I remember Neil [Caplin 0:35:12] scored the winner, but if you ask me how that goal was, I couldn't tell you what it was like.

And the celebrations afterwards, that the players were ecstatic. And Scott played in that game, and I've said this to him many times, he broke through the stewards' barrier, and he came and gave me a big hug, at the final whistle. Because that was probably the biggest game he'd played in at that time, and, yes.

Interviewer: What got said to the referee when he yellow carded Shilton, apart from..?

Dean Thompson: Yes, it was a noisy situation. It was a noisy situation. I mean, even to this day, I can't explain how he didn't get sent off. I remember looking at it afterwards, and looking at it, and looking at it. "How on earth did that not happen?"

It was because it was Peter Shilton, and it was in the first 20, 25 minutes of the game, and there was no way any referee

was going to send him off, against a non-league side like us. So, had I been the referee, I'd have probably done the same. (Laughter)

But, yes, that was more – because I knew Scott was involved at the time - it was all a lot more exciting, I suppose.

Interviewer: And what was it like going to work on the Monday morning after that?

Dean Thompson: I've always worked in a situation where I don't really work with people that follow the club. And, you know, people I'd work with, would be talking about their Arsenal and Spurs and Chelsea, and I'd say, "Oh, we won." "Oh, right, okay. Shut up."

Interviewer: Yes. (Laughter)

Dean Thompson: So, yes, you try and talk to them, but it's different now. When you're on your holidays now, and, "I follow Stevenage," and you talk to people, and people want to talk to you now.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: But back then, "Who? Where? What? Who's Stevenage? What league are you in, then?" And you'd have to start from the beginning. Whereas now people know about us, and people know about Stevenage, and it's a lot easier to talk to people

about. But in those days, people didn't want to talk to you about it.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: The only people you could talk to were the people that you came with. Yes.

Interviewer: Tell me about that game with the hail in your face.

Dean Thompson: Oh, Swindon?

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: I can't remember the year. And, again, we were all, sort of, - I couldn't tell you too much about the game, because I didn't see very much of it. But I think we were in with a shout at halftime. I think it was one all. I think Swindon had got ____ [0:37:37].

But as we turned around, the weather then just – I think Fraser Digby was in goal for Swindon – and he could not kick the ball more – well, he could kick it up, he could kick it 30 or 40 yards, but it came back 20 or 30 yards. And we just nicked a win.

And I think Swindon were in Division 1 at the time, and we were in the Conference. And we weren't the best Conference side there was. We were probably mid-table at that time. So it

was a massive, massive shock to beat a team two divisions above you.

It took a long time to dry out in the car, I can tell you.

I can't remember who [scored 0:38:16]. Jason Soloman was playing. I remember him playing. But I have all the newspaper cuttings. So, now I can't remember it, I can look back and, "Yes, okay, I remember that day."

But, yes, he did. He had a goal kick on the edge of his six yard box, got it to there, and it must have gone out somewhere around where the KFC man's face. So it travelled about three yards. (Laughter)

But in the first half the weather wasn't there, but as soon as we came out for the second half, and we were shooting that way, literally, the wind and the rain... It was an open terrace, so it was something like that, but it didn't have the roof on it.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: And, well, I don't think I've ever sat in anything like it. But good fun, good fun.

Interviewer: Yes, it sounds like good fun.

Have there been any really disappointing games?

Dean Thompson: Oh, I'm making it sound like it's been a dream over the last 20 years, haven't I?

We've had more disappointing games and times than you can care to imagine. Ten years in the Conference, after you win the damn thing, and you end up in it for another 10 years, was hell, at times.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: When people say, "Aah, that chap, he was the worse player ever to play for Stevenage," I've got 10 that are worse.

We had some really, I mean, really poor times. And even with Paul in charge, we had a couple of average seasons. And then Richard Hill took it over, and we thought, "Okay, he ____ [0:39:49]. This'll change," and we won six out of six, and that didn't work.

And we had our friend Victor Green, as chairman, who took us to the brink of not being here today.

A couple of other managers have come and gone. Graham, in his first spell, saved us from relegation. We were bottom of the league, and his style of football got us out of relegation.

It would never have filled the ground every week, because it was dull and boring, and one dimensional, but it got us out trouble and kept us in this league. And had we got relegated, who knows? We may never have got back in the Conference. It's so difficult to get into, with only the one team going up.

So, for five or six years, it was terrible. And then we got an FA Trophy final, which we lost.

Graham was here for a couple of years. He took us to a play-off final, but we weren't great. It was pretty dull. It was pretty boring.

And that was at the time when I stopped going to away games, because you knew it would be a nil-nil draw, a 1-0 win, or a 1-0 defeat. It wasn't worth a day of your life at the time.

Interviewer: Right, yes.

So there is a point at which you can be driven away from..?

Dean Thompson: Yes, not from – I couldn't...

There was one time when we were playing so badly – and I think we were at home to Forest Green – I was in there. I had a couple of beers. And I said, "Right, I'm going home," and I didn't come in the ground. At 3 o'clock I was walking down the cycle track and went home.

Interviewer: Does that happen often?

Dean Thompson: That's the only time it ever happened.

Interviewer: The only time ever, yes.

Dean Thompson: I was so... And I do think Paul Fairclough was the manager at the time, who, of course, is everybody's idol.

Interviewer: Yes, God. (Laughter)

Dean Thompson: Yes.

It was getting towards the end of his reign here, and I said, "No, last week was awful." So that's the only time it's ever happened. And I never leave the ground before the ending, unless I'm absolutely disgusted. And I think, in 20 years, it's probably happened three times.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: Yes, and one was quite recently. (Laughter) I can't remember. I think I was going somewhere straight after. But I never arrange to be somewhere, where I know I need to leave early, but I think that was one time. And I don't think it was because we were terrible, but I think I had to go somewhere. That's what I'll tell Graham, anyway, if he ever listens to this.

So, yes, it hasn't been great over the years, but the last – then Mark Stimson came in, changed the whole attitude of the club. That was when Graham had gone for the first time.

They played fantastic football. He bought in players with flair and skill and took us to Wembley, and it was brilliant. And had he not left in that October, after we'd just beaten Aldershot 4-1, or 4-1, who were the ultimate champions, we'd have gone on and won the league that season. I'm convinced that he had the squad of players in place.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: But who knows if they'd have been good enough to get through the second division, into the first division? And, you know, with what we've got now, is, you know, if you'd have asked us this three or four years ago, we'd have laughed in your face, probably, but, yes.

Interviewer: What makes the team, do you think? Is it the players? Is it the manager? Is it a combination?

Dean Thompson: I think it's a bit of everything, isn't it? I think, you know, for the 90 minutes on a Saturday afternoon, it's the players. For the bits before that, in the week, it's the management and the set-up, and the tactics, and the efforts that the players put in. And, you know, I'm not sure what players think of supporters, in this day and age, I don't know.

But the supporters have a – it's a big part of the town, and the PR of the club, I suppose. How your fans are during the 90 minutes. Do they make enough noise? Do they sing enough songs? Do they behave themselves outside the ground, before and after?

I like to think that it's everything, even the guys that look after that pitch and make it look as marvellous as it does. And the guys that, you know, answer the phones and wash the kit.

Interviewer: Yes.

What are Stevenage supporters like? Are they a good set of supporters?

Dean Thompson: I think they're okay. And I think it's, like, every club has a few that rub people up the wrong way, and I'm sure people have said that about me in the past, you know, "He's a right plonker."

But, ultimately, I think they're a good bunch. There's probably two and a half thousand hard core fans that will come to this ground every week, come what may. You've probably got another thousand floaters in the town that will come and go, as and when.

Being so close to the north of London, where Stevenage is full of Arsenal, Spurs, West Ham and Chelsea fans, it's difficult to build your fan base, and to get to four or five thousand every week.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: But this is what we are, probably, and this is, we're probably a League 1 side. If we got into the championship, I still don't think we'd get too many more people in the ground.

They're pretty much a good bunch. I don't think I've had too many falling outs with too many people. But, yes, we have our disagreements between us, but they're a good bunch.

Interviewer: Have you ever encountered any violence?

Dean Thompson: Yes, we've had a couple of... Yes, but not initiated by myself, because I'm the first one to hide from that kind of thing. But there's been a couple of times in the past. I think Kettering was

a game, and there was a little bit of needle. But I think it was pretty much organised that it was going to happen before the game.

Interviewer: Right.

Dean Thompson: And that was before this. The smaller stand was there, and there was some punch-ups. And I think Nuneaton, before that, in an FA Cup qualifying game, there was some on the pitch, fighting, which, I don't know. If it's going to happen, just do it outside the ground, ___[0:46:19], you know.

It was people that wanted to come and have a punch off, basically, and they weren't regular supporters. And, yes, a couple of times over the years we've seen it.

Interviewer: Yes.

Can we now talk about what the football club means for the town? There's obviously a hard core of Stevenage supporters, as you said, but there also appears to be a hard core of supporters of London clubs, particularly.

Dean Thompson: Yes. I think the Stevenage people have an interest in the football club. If something like the Newcastle saga's going on, or being at the top of the league, people I talk to, that don't come to the games, will always talk to be about it in the town.

So, I think the local people have a local interest in what's going on here, but don't come, which is sad, really. But they may not enjoy football, they may not want to watch football, but they

have an interest in Stevenage, as what it is. So I think there is a big interest in the town.

A lot of people – there's some new developments in Stevenage, in Great Ashby. There's lots of people moving into the town that have no affiliation, and probably don't even know where the ground is. They probably go home, go to the station, go to London, and have no affiliation with the town.

But I think the club's doing everything it possibly can, at the moment, in the community, to get kids interested. There's no point in going for guys like me, at my age, to come to the ground, because they've had their affiliations. But they're trying to catch the kids early now, to get them in the ground, which is great. And in 10, 20 years' time, that will show, you know, what a good project it's been.

And I know Alex and his team work really hard, and they always have kids on the pitch at halftime.

So, it's a good thing that they're trying to get into all the schools, and even outside of the town now, and going into, yes, the surrounding areas. It's got to be done.

It's the biggest club in Hertford. Well, Watford would disagree with that, but they're 45 minutes from us. So, in this area, in East Herts and North Herts, and over into Essex, you've got to try and nick supporters and get them in this ground, to boost the funds, to boost the playing budgets, to bring in better players, and to get us up into the next division.

So, there's all sorts going on, and I think it's doing a good job. They've tried it previously, but it's being done in a much more professional manner now.

Interviewer: Is it a good place for families to come?

Dean Thompson: Yes, I think so. I've got no problem. And, as I've said, I've brought my little one a few times. I wouldn't have a problem with it.

Interviewer: Do you see lots of families on the terraces?

Dean Thompson: There's lots of kids, I think. I wouldn't say Mum, Dad and two kids. I think it's Dad and one, or Dad and two. I'd suggest that this side of the pitch is probably better than that side of the pitch. That's a little more... Well, mind you, the language in our side is sometimes a little ripe.

But, yes, I think it's a great place, and the ticket prices for families is much improved. Phil's done a lot of work to reduce the prices. Stevenage is not an ultra-rich town, so people don't have a lot of money to spend. And if you're spending 30 or 40 quid to get three of you through the door, it's too much money. And he's reduced that price, so that's good.

Interviewer: Yes.

What's the price of a season ticket, and is it worth it, do you think?

Dean Thompson: Oh, I don't know how much it is.

Interviewer: Never mind. (Laughter)

Dean Thompson: "Dear Mr Wallace, here's my cheque." I can't remember. When we went up, I put a price in my head of what we would have to pay, and it was less than that.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: So, I think it is, for Division 1 football, in this day and age, it's worth it. It's maybe £20 ____ [0:50:20], I don't know. I couldn't even guess it. I couldn't even guess what it is.

I do remember paying three quid to come through the door, when I first came, and 30 pence for a programme, as I said.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: And now it's 20, and 3 quid for a programme, but that's life, and you pay it wherever you go. You look at, Leyton Orient's price is 23 quid, that's what you pay. But I pay it because it's part of my life.

Interviewer: Absolutely.

Dean Thompson: Yes.

Interviewer: And you said there were more women on the terraces these days, than ever before.

Dean Thompson: Yes, there is, yes.

Interviewer: Why do you think that's happened?

Dean Thompson: I might say something that'll get me into trouble. (Laughter)

Interviewer: No, no, carry on.

Dean Thompson: I don't know. I just think it's changed over the years. I mean, if you go back to the 70s, and you had 50,000 crowd at White Hart Lane, there'd probably be 49,900 men.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: But at Stevenage, you know, I don't know, there's lots of ladies, and a lot of them know more about football than the men.

I sit next to a very knowledgeable lady at the moment, and she does happen to be a partner of a player, and she knows more than a lot of guys.

So, yes, it's, I don't know. I mean, maybe it's society, [and if 0:51:43] everybody works hard, everybody's working lots of hours, then maybe you only get to see your husband, wife, partner, boyfriend, girlfriend, at football.

Interviewer: Yes.

Dean Thompson: “So, if you’re going out for two hours on a Saturday afternoon, I’m not staying at home. I’m coming with you.”

Interviewer: Sure.

Dean Thompson: Quite right.

Interviewer: Quite right too.

Okay. I think we’re running out of time. So, is there anything else that you want to add? Anything that we haven’t covered, do you think?

Dean Thompson: I don’t know. I just - I think supporting this football club, in the last 20 years, has probably, if you put yourself in the position of a Hitchin Town fan, or a Slough Town fan, or even a Rotherham fan, you wouldn’t have had what we’ve had in the last 20 years.

Hitchin have stayed where they are, even dropped down a couple a, you know, a couple of times, and that’s where we were 15, 20 years ago.

Rotherham have always been in the second or the first division. They might get a promotion every 10 years. They’ve never been to Wembley.

We’ve had two play-off finals, a play-off semi-final, a championship, another play-off win, three Wembley trips. You go to any football league fan and say, “How many times have

you done any of that?” And the supporters of some clubs will say, “I’ve never even got near a semi-final.”

So, we haven’t had a bad time.

Interviewer: Excellent.

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