

**File:** BMD Harry Gibbs.mp3

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Interviewer: Can we just start by you stating your name?

Harry Gibbs: It's Harry Gibbs.

Interviewer: What's your involvement with Stevenage Football Club?

Harry Gibbs: I'm a programme seller for the football club. I also have attended matches since I was a young kid, about ten, from '98 season onwards.

Interviewer: Do you remember the first match that you came to?

Harry Gibbs: The first match was, actually, away. It was a game in the FA Cup against Birmingham and I was really young and quite small at the time. I only have two standout memories from that game. One was getting stuck behind a line of coaches that had no idea where they were going and we ended up queuing outside some random mosque in Birmingham and we had no idea where we were. I think, eventually, we managed to find our way to the ground and I only have one memory of that.

We had a really good player at the time called Barry Hayles, who went on to do really well, who went on to much bigger and better things and I just remember him standing out for me and being a standout player. My first game at home, which was, obviously, the first game we played against Newcastle in the FA Cup, the one that got all the big media interest. My first memory from that was just \_\_\_\_ [0:01:01]. I was quite small at the time so I could only just see above some of the heads on the East Terrace.

I remember they'd give loads of abuse to Newcastle players, in particular Rob Lee, when he came over to the touchline. I remember Shearer rising up and scoring and I thought, "Oh no". We turned it round and it was incredible and the atmosphere... I think that's what attracted me back all the time since and I haven't stopped coming since. It's been great.

Interviewer: How has the stadium changed since 1998?

Harry Gibbs: Blimey, yes. At the time, the East Terrace didn't even have a roof on and, as you can see, it's now got a nice roof. The away end is unrecognisable from the way it was then because it's been turned into lovely seats, like it is now. The work's on-going. We're going to have a new North Stand soon, hopefully. That will make it look, when we finish off the stadium, really nice and make it a nice focal point from Broadhall Way. I think it will make it into a really nice ground, not too big but with a bit of character. It will be a really nice venue to play football in, hopefully.

Interviewer: Where was the club between before the side that came up through the ranks, before 2007/08, around that time, that ten-year gap between 1998 and 2008?

Harry Gibbs: We've always been quite an ambitious club here and we've progressed slowly. We were sitting in the Conference for a long time playing, being there or there about but never quite having enough to kick on. We played quite a few trophy finals, which have just been fantastic. The real spur was Graham Westley coming back to the club, which I was really not a fan of at the time. It turns out that it was the right thing for the club and we've just gone onto bigger and better things.

I think the trophy win against Kidderminster was a stepping point for kicking on and really progressing and we just haven't looked back since. It's just been phenomenal, the rise. When you think how small our club is and, realistically, the size of our club to be playing in League One is just something I couldn't have even contemplated at the time.

Interviewer: How come some fans still haven't warmed to the idea of Graham coming back?

Harry Gibbs: I think because he was perceived to play football in a certain way with certain things. We see that still a bit today and I think he was perceived as being quite arrogant at the time and he didn't have a lot of time for the people here. He's turned it round. I'm still not 100% keen on him but he's certainly brought winning football and no one can argue with his results. He's brought stability to the club, which is a really important thing.

It's been really encouraging and I think he's won a lot of people round who were a bit sceptical at the time.

Interviewer: How do you think the football club has integrated itself into the community?

Harry Gibbs: That's a tough one. They've obviously benefitted from being in the football league from the schemes they do, like they set up the Academy. They've got a lot of community coaches and, obviously, Alex Tunbridge is a community support guy that works at the club and to help that but I still think the club could market themselves better within the town for the young people.

The really struggle for the club is to try and get all the Tottenham and Arsenal fans that live in the town from, historically, it being a new town when everyone moved out of London. The key thing is to get that new generation to come through and be thinking this is their club rather than they should support Arsenal and Tottenham. This is their club and it's their town and they should really turn up. Obviously, this is something Stevenage have got to keep working for but it's going the right way on the pitch so it's just a question of keeping up with that off the pitch.

Interviewer: Does Stevenage need to improve its image from being regarded as a non-League club to being a League One club?

Harry Gibbs: I think so but, obviously, that's going to take time. It's not something you can just flick a switch and it's done. It's just about getting people here and the results will, hopefully,

encourage people. I don't want us to lose that small club image, in a way, because I love the feel the fact that we still feel quite family-orientated here and it's a little community. Yes, obviously, it would be great if we could convince some people we're not just a small club and we're going to be here for, hopefully, the foreseeable future.

Interviewer: Do you think the standing terrace is important to football, particularly in the lower leagues, because it's a part of the game that's been lost in the top level?

Harry Gibbs: Yes. I think it is. You look at Germany and, even in their Premier League, they do a thing called safe standing, which I think is a great idea. They only allow a certain number of people into the grounds for the capacity in that stand. It still enables them to have a terrace and it really does help to improve the atmosphere, particularly on the big games, the big night games when the terrace is really buzzing.

It really creates a good atmosphere. I would like to see a return of that because nowadays we've got all this soulless bowl stadiums and I think terracing really does add something to the occasion and to the games so it would be nice to see a return to that.

Interviewer: Have the numbers of people attending games drastically improved since Stevenage has come up?

Harry Gibbs: Not as drastically as I would like to see. The price of going to football, especially if you've got a family, is still quite

expensive. I know we're pretty much on par with the rest of the League One clubs with our prices but I just think it would be brilliant if we could try and attract some of the better family deals that could bring in more young people and, again, help strengthen these ties so they see themselves as this is their club rather than being an armchair Premiership fan.

Interviewer: Stevenage have managed to take more than 20,000 supporters to the Wembley game, do you think there's floating supporters out there who need to be brought in to boost the average attendance?

Harry Gibbs: Yes. Definitely. Again, you've got the people who will only come out for the day trips. You see that with every club. There's the sort of people that will go, only because it's Stevenage playing in big events so drags all the people from Stevenage. The key is to get them on the Saturdays to come out to the game every week. I don't see an easy way to doing that, really.

Interviewer: Is there a particular favourite player you've had since watching Stevenage?

Harry Gibbs: One of my most favourite players ever was George Boyd just because of his natural skill and ability and the way he came through. Although he played in Charlton's youth team, he was still part of our youth team and he progressed through the ranks. His ability on the football pitch was unbelievable for the level we were at, at the time. Obviously, he's gone on to bigger and better things and he's represented the club at both

England C level and also Scotland nationally, which is just fantastic for the club to have someone like that.

We're still getting money back from him from selling fees, which is brilliant. Another player that sticks out for me that some people might remember is a player called Dean Martin. He was a little winger we had. He came from Iceland and he went back there eventually. His ability, I don't think we've had someone that can cross the ball as well as him since his departure. It just meant so much to him playing out there.

That's the kind of player, as a fan, you want to see, the players that give 100% all game. I think, from the current crop of players, probably my favourite would be Laird because he just cares so much about the club and you can really see it in his performances and, at the final whistle, how much it means to him, which is brilliant. That's the kind of player that I like to watch.

Interviewer: Do you think the club can hold on to their current crop of players into the next season?

Harry Gibbs: I don't see why not because I think our players, as a strength, is the way they play in our team. We haven't got a big star name \_\_\_[0:08:29] or anything like that. We've got a group of players that work really well together and the key is hard work and commitment to the cause and I think, if you put them in another environment, they might not be as successful.

There is a worry that, if we keep progressing, people are going to start looking at Bostwick and Roberts but I think they know they're on to a good thing here at the moment. I really hope that we can hold them, particularly if we keep progressing the

way we are, there's no reason why they wouldn't want to be here.

Interviewer: The club's come up quite rapidly from the Conference into League Two and into League One, do you think it's now the time to try and stabilise this club in League One or is it better to keep pushing forward?

Harry Gibbs: I think, as a football club, you want to win every match you play. I'm sure Graham Westley would say the same, you've got to keep striving for the win. Off the pitch, I think we're falling a bit behind in our structure but I certainly think that just staying in League One this season would be a fantastic achievement. If we can maintain that for at least four or five seasons then that would be fantastic.

At the same time, we won again today and we're tenth in the table, as long as we're not overstretching ourselves and staying within our budget, which is the important thing as we've seen clubs going out of business recently, I think that we could keep focusing doing what we do within budget and see where it takes us.

Interviewer: How do you think Graham has managed to inspire the team to achieve so much over the past few years?

Harry Gibbs: I think one of Graham's strengths is certainly his motivation skills. He's a fantastic motivator. When you go in that dressing room, I think he makes average players think they're great,



which is absolutely fantastic when you see... It's quite a close squad of players as well. We don't chop and change too much.

We don't stick to the same 11 players on the pitch all the time but, within the squad, he picks players with a similar mentality, a similar work ethic, if you like. He won't tolerate flash players who are only here for the money or only here to progress their career for three months before moving on. It's the core Westley player, if you like, that keeps us going, keeps ticking over.

Interviewer: Has there been a change in atmosphere as the club has gone up through the leagues? Is there more reason for the crowd to be singing and getting behind the team? Is it generally more positive than it was than say five or ten years ago?

Harry Gibbs: I don't know. I think we've always enjoyed success at the club so we haven't had that many negative experiences so it's hard to tell if it's improved or different. I think we've always generated quite a good noise, not so much at home but particularly away with our core following. I think it's stayed the same really.

We've attracted a few more fans, if anything, and that's probably slightly helped the atmosphere but not to a great extent, I would think. I think the most positive thing about the club is the real family feel we've got and the closeness of everyone. You walk around the club, I'm a programme seller, and you know everyone and it just really feels like a close community, which is great.

Interviewer: How long have you been selling programmes?

Harry Gibbs: Originally I used to work on the SA Hub with my dad between the East Terrace and the North Stand and then there was a vacancy that came up for the programmes and they I asked me if I wanted to help and I was like, obviously, “Yes, I’ll do that”. Especially as it means I can get paid and get into the games for free as well. It’s a really good thing for me, being a student, I haven’t got much money so it’s fantastic to have that thing. You arrive at the ground early and you see it build up slowly towards kick off and it’s a really good thing.

Interviewer: Would you say the programmes are part of the club’s identity? They become memorabilia.

Harry Gibbs: Yes. Definitely. Everything like that is memorabilia. Shirts, you see all the different shirts on display at every home game. We’ve got a massive collection of programmes. The SA has got a massive collection of programmes. It’s really good to look back over that kind of thing in future years just to remember.

There are so many games and you forget the scores and events. I can’t even remember the score from last week, to be honest, so it’s a really good to have that resource to fall back on. You’ve got other memorabilia, the SA pin badges to commemorate the rise up through the ranks and things like that.

Interviewer: Would you say the fans at away games are more passionate or a more passionate following?

Harry Gibbs: Yes. Definitely. I would definitely say that but I think it's because we get a hard core and they're all grouped together and they travel. If you travel 300 miles to watch a club, you're going to generally be either more drunk, in some people's cases, or just more committed and you're going to get behind them and you're not going to be so critical of them. It's easy to come down the road for five minutes and moan at the players and not get behind them.

Interviewer: How would you think the club can get in more fans?

Harry Gibbs: It's really tough. The only thing I can advise is maybe promotions and marketing around the town. I don't think our presence in the town centre, for instance, is very good. I think we need to do a lot more work on marketing from that point of view. It would be nice to see our club in a more prominent position in the town as well.

Interviewer: Would you say Stevenage Football Club is important to the town of Stevenage?

Harry Gibbs: I think so. I think Stevenage has got quite a proud history of sporting success. If you look at people like Lewis Hamilton. You've got footballers like Ashley Young that have come from this area. I think Stevenage [helps 0:13:45] our quite successful sporting nature of the town, really.

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