

File: BMD John Woods and Steve Miller 2.mp3

Duration: 0:39:06

Date: 02/08/2016

Typist: 738

START AUDIO

John Woods: John Woods, season-ticket holder. Been a season-ticket holder now for 15 years, but been supporting the club for about approximately 25 years.

Steve Miller: I'm Steve Miller. I started off with Stevenage Town in the '60s before going to South Africa to live and then basically followed them from some distance before coming back to England in 1988. It's gone on from there.

Interviewer: You were both supporters in the '60s?

John Woods: Yes. Well, the first game I came to was Sir Stanley Matthews, and Steve says it was 1960-

Steve Miller: '65/'66 season I think it was.

John Woods: '66, yes. He was in his 50s then, Sir Stanley Matthews, and it was the last game he ever played.

Steve Miller: That's right.

John Woods: It was at Stevenage at this ground.

Steve Miller: I distinctly remember the game because I think he's quoted in one of his books as saying that it was like playing on Blackpool beach. The final result was a 3-all draw, but I think there were well over 4,000/5,000 there that night just because of Stanley Matthews being there. Yes, it was a great experience to see such a wonderful player grace our beach or pitch or whatever.

Interviewer: Why was it called a beach?

John Woods: Because of the state of the ground. (Laughter) It was sand, basically, because they had problems with the drainage.

Steve Miller: Yes, and it was very bad in those days, wasn't it? You could put a bucket and spade there and call it Clacton. (Laughter) That was how bad it was at the time. We always had a good side in the '60s, didn't we? Stevenage Town were always a good side. They were never a bad side. We had some great players during those days, didn't we?

John Woods: Yes, yes. How long is it, Steve, since we've been in the conference before we came into the football league?

Steve Miller: 1996 season, so well over 10 years.

John Woods: We were in the original Southern League, weren't we?

Steve Miller: Yes. Once we were in the Southern League and then it went Diadora Premiership Division. They just moved up the leagues from there, from the village teams all the way up. It was a wonderful experience because I think at the time it was a closer knit club. You used to get on the coach and there'd be just a coachload of you going to some of these little grounds, From Saffron Walden to Croydon Athletic and like that. Everybody knew everybody.

I think you were also closer to the team in those days because you got to know the players, you got to know the manager. I've had Paul Fairclough sit next to me on a coach and talk about things. That really made it. The things we used to do to try and get to a game, like drop off work or go sick to just get to a game.

John Woods: Get to a game, yes.

Steve Miller: That was just in those, basically, early days of the non-league, coming up. We've always felt that we would do it one day.

John Woods: Yes, yes. But I'm afraid now - well, it's a sign of the times - I think a lot of the clubs now, they're so commercialised and that and professional and that that I feel the supporters do get put back a bit now.

Steve Miller: Yes, I agree. I agree.

John Woods: We're not a name now, we're a number.

Steve Miller: We're a number, whereas before you were part of it.

John Woods: It's a sign of the times.

Steve Miller: Yes, yes, sure.

John Woods: A crowd of 3,000, where years ago it used to be a crowd of 200, 100, where everybody knew everybody. Unfortunately that's a sign of the times.

Steve Miller: At the time, at that time, Hitchin Town were the main team.

John Woods: The premier, yes.

Steve Miller: They were the crème de la crème of non-League football. They've got a good history behind them and I've got a lot of respect for them. I like Hitchin to do well, but coming from Stevenage, brought up in Stevenage, and it's your hometown. We can go and support Manchester United or Spurs, but watching Stevenage is something else.

Interviewer: When did you first become a fan, when you were growing up here?

Steve Miller: Yes. I remember I lived in Penn Road, which is just the other side of the- and seeing the floodlights. The floodlights in those days- and I think we got them from Everton, didn't we, these floodlights?

John Woods: Yes, they were the best-

Steve Miller: They were the biggest in non-league football at the time. I think they got them from Everton. It lit up the whole of the woods, didn't it, at the time?

John Woods: Yes.

Steve Miller: I think my first game was against Merthyr Tydfil as a kid, and I was only about seven or eight at the time. I can still remember. We used to have those planks of goalposts and the brick wall and the sand. We used to have a little hut on the left-hand side of the stadium here selling sweets and hamburgers, and listening to the Beach Boys' music blaring out and the players coming out all greased up.

John Woods: Coming out of the Portakabin, which was the Chairman's boardroom, plus the changing rooms.

Steve Miller: Yes. They had a glass one originally. They had the club area where the bar was incorporated with the changing rooms at that time, when they used to come out from both sides at the time. They were wonderful memories, of what I vaguely remember of them. Yes.

Interviewer: They sound very vivid actually, the memories.

Steve Miller: Yes. I don't know about you, but I've gone down to the library and I've gone back into the old Stevenage pictorial newspapers.

John Woods: No, I haven't. No.

Steve Miller: I've looked at some of the results and some of the games that we played over the many years and you think, "Oh, I was there." Did you go to the Arsenal game when they came down here?

John Woods: Yes, yes.

Steve Miller: We lost one-nil, but we had a perfectly good goal disallowed. They played their first full team. I think the following week or the week after, Arsenal were on the first Match of the Day with Liverpool at Anfield. That was the same team as they played against us that night. We were so unlucky and I was so upset that we didn't get- well, a perfectly good goal disallowed

against a top Arsenal team. When you're a little one you see it in a different perspective.

John Woods: Yes, yes. The game that I remember is when we played Newcastle in the FA Club 12 years ago. We drew here and then about 20 coaches went from here for the replay at Newcastle. The Chairman at the time, then Victor Green, he wasn't a likeable bloke, but I must give him his due, he paid for every coach. You didn't have to pay a penny for the coach. We went up in convoy. That's my memory, that Shearer scored a goal that shouldn't have been allowed and that's how we got knocked out of the first time at the FA Cup against Newcastle.

Interviewer: What was it like when the first game happened down here with Newcastle? What was the day like?

John Woods: The away stand now, what, it's been built now 10 years, is it?

Steve Miller: Yes, precisely, about that.

John Woods: They had to put a temporary stand up, and I think it was just over 8,000, wasn't it, Steve?

Steve Miller: Well, I've got to admit, I was in South Africa at the time and watched it in South Africa.

Interviewer: You could follow Stevenage from South Africa?

Steve Miller: Yes. It's a bit of a bizarre story because I went back to Durban, which is my other hometown, and I was in a hotel sitting by this pool, believe it or not. I heard these two guys on the other side talking about football, so my ears pricked up. I heard some guy, "Newcastle have got some team called Stevenage."
(Laughter) Of course I nearly fell in the swimming pool. I said, "Excuse me, did you say Stevenage are playing Newcastle?" He said, "Yes, they've got them in the next round of the FA Cup." Well, I was absolutely in awe.

I worked for a company called [Natal 0:07:30] Mercury at the time and I used to do the newspapers. We had TVs in the studios and I remember seeing all the fans gathered in the stands singing a song. I remember emailing Keith [Burniss] to say, "I've just seen you on South African TV." Well, there was such a build-up to it and of course it was killing me being so far away from my team. I remember watching- they had a version over there, their equivalent of Football Focus. They had a guy called Gary Bailey, who used to play in goal for Manchester United-

John Woods: Oh yes. Yes, I remember.

Steve Miller: ...and another guy, who's his sidekick, was Terry Paine, who used to play for Southampton.

John Woods: Yes, I remember Terry Paine of Southampton.

Steve Miller: That night was an FA Cup night, and of course it was Stevenage and Newcastle. There was such a build-up. Paul Fairclough was the manager. Well, he thought it was Paul Fairclough from Liverpool. Do you remember, the Supersub?

John Woods: Oh yes, yes, yes. (Laughter)

Steve Miller: I was really miffed about that. I was really upset about it. I think the most significant part about it was when the cameras panned down. My heart rate was up. I was really emotional, and you couldn't express yourself from being so far away, watching your team play. It panned on the back of where I usually stand, and seeing all those people you used to be with standing there, there were a few tears right then. When we went one-nil down after three minutes I thought, "Hello," but when the scores go-

John Woods: That's it.

Steve Miller: Well, I tell you, I walked a million miles that day. I was absolutely emotional. It was a great night, because I wore my shirt they used that night, one of the shirts they used in it. I went through Durban and people were shouting out, "Stevenage, well done, Stevenage." One Zulu guy wanted to buy my shirt. He said, "Stevenage is a great side." He said, "Wonderful, wonderful." It just went on from there. I was in awe. I watched it the following day on TV, on Sky TV over there and saw all the people that you went with and interviewing, and emailing to say, "I've just seen you in South Africa on TV." They just could not believe it.

It was such a wonderful experience, and we deserved it. We deserved it because the club deserved it. We'd always been a club that was so near but not so far away from achieving. We've always had good football sides in Stevenage in this town. Yes, it was a wonderful experience.

Interviewer: Did you see the game?

John Woods: Yes, I was at both games. My memory is that police escort at 5:30 going through Newcastle town centre. They stopped all the traffic to let us through, 20 coaches. Their instructions to the coach driver was to stay right close up to the coach in front. We just went through Newcastle town centre at 5:30, rush-hour time, doing about 55/60 miles an hour. The police said they just wanted us to the ground.

Then when Sky televised it they had all the microphones in the Stevenage supporters area, so when you watched it, as Steve probably saw it, saw it on Sky, all you could hear was the Stevenage fans. That's my greatest memory of when we played Newcastle the first time and the replay.

Steve Miller: It was very significant, wasn't it?

John Woods: Yes.

Steve Miller: When Gary Crawshaw got that goal back we thought we may be in for a chance. To see I think it was 35,000 there that night and to see my club with all these fans around was an amazing,

amazing feeling. I got a message to Paul Fairclough and I said, "Go for it." He did mention it on the radio, which really made my day, (Laughter) "I got a message from South Africa." That was something else that made- but to go down the street with the Stevenage Borough shirt in Durban and some people coming up to me-

John Woods: Some are recognising it because it's been on the TV.

Steve Miller: ...recognised it and saying, "Well, congratulations," even under the loss, even in the loss, because it was a big thing. Well, how many years later, we go and beat them three-one [crosstalk 0:11:34] in the cup. We really deserved it.

Yes, speaking to the Newcastle players afterwards when I put them on the plane back to Luton, because I had to go back to Luton for their flight back to Newcastle, and I spoke to _____. Joe Barton said to me that he didn't realise how physical Stevenage were. He said, "We were physically knackered," was the word. (Laughter) I spoke to a couple of others, but they said we fully deserved it. It was great. What a wonderful feeling. We got our just desserts in the end.

John Woods: Well, even the 12 years ago replay, as I said previously, Shearer's goal, it was proved afterwards that he had gone over the line before he score. At the time, obviously the ref and the linesman [crosstalk 0:12:24].

Steve Miller: Well, the linesman was nowhere near [them really], just because it was Shearer's goal. If you look at the line, Smudger

took that off. That makes the England goal against West Germany look normal, doesn't it? (Laughter) It was never a goal.

John Woods: No, no.

Steve Miller: When I've spoken to the Newcastle directors, some of the ones I've spoken to about the game, they said, "We don't think it was a goal." [Good to him 0:12:44], but the Newcastle fans were terrific. They were really wonderful and it was great to be in an experience with all of the big clubs at the particular time. Now we're moving up there, yes, we've got some time to go. The town deserve it. We needed a football club in this town. It's good for a town to have something like this and we fully deserve it. I think so.

Interviewer: Do you think Stevenage is unusual in having such a great club and having so many supporters and the team spirit amongst the supporters? Do you think that's unusual?

John Woods: Yes, it is unusual, but with the population, I think it's not supported enough. I think it could have 5,000 average crowd, easy. You're talking about a population of now, in Stevenage, 120, 000. I think just to add 3,000 on a Saturday in a first-division match, I'm a bit disappointed in the support we're getting.

Interviewer: Have you got any ideas about what might improve that?

John Woods: Steve might be able to answer that.

Steve Miller: I think if people listen to this in 20 and 30 years' time and if you're listening now, they're probably on 30,000 at a game. The problem here is we've got Tottenham, Arsenal, West Ham around this vicinity. Of course, like most fans that have come up from the London area to live here, they're incorporated in their own team. I wouldn't go and support Arsenal. I don't want to support them. My old man is a Manchester United fan, but that's because he was from Manchester. I'd go and see United, but my club is Stevenage at the moment and nothing is going to stop me supporting them until the day I drop.

It's up to the future youngsters that are born and bred here to get incorporated into the club. It's hoping that those dads now, the young dads now or the youngsters now that are going to have children in the future are going to encourage their children to come and watch Stevenage and they can build up from there. Unfortunately you've got established clubs that have had fans going for years, and it's there for life I think for a lot of teams. It's a new generation that are going to be born and bred in Stevenage I think that'll bring up Stevenage.

John Woods: Yes, yes, I agree with you there, Steve. As you say, with the train service and that to London and that, it's so good that this is the reason why most go to Arsenal.

Steve Miller: Yes, twenty minutes, not even twenty minutes, is it, to Finsbury Park?

John Woods: Twenty minutes. They got off at Finsbury Park. Five minutes' walk, they're at the Arsenal Emirates Stadium. I think this is the reason why we're not getting the crowd, but as Steve rightly said, as the generations go on I think we will gradually get bigger crowds as we progress.

Interviewer: Do you have links with the schools and things like that-

John Woods: Oh yes, yes.

Interviewer: ...and school children coming?

Steve Miller: We need that. That's essential.

John Woods: They have a very good-

Steve Miller: Yes, rapport with the clubs.

John Woods: ...community.

Steve Miller: Although we know that Watford have got some connection around here somewhere, which annoyed- they're entitled to [come round when 0:15:49] they like, but Watford, who are they? Barnet, who are they? Who are Luton? It's for Stevenage

people and surrounding areas. We do get fans from all over the place following us. It's a big thing and it's good because it's a breath of fresh air. I think it's a breath of fresh air for some clubs, new clubs to come into it because some of the established clubs are struggling now, aren't they?

John Woods: Oh yes, yes.

Steve Miller: There's nothing in a name anymore. Sheffield Wednesday came down here thinking they're going to murder us and get whacked five-one. Now, years ago we would never have dreamed of doing that. All of a sudden we've gone and done it. Why can't we continue this? We can prove we can do it.

Interviewer: When, for example, the club was promoted or when you had the Newcastle game and things like that, did people in the town get interested? Is there a sense in the town that something is happening down here even if you don't regularly get big crowds?

John Woods: Yes because, well, when you have a big game like that, all of a sudden your crowd goes up from 3 to, the Newcastle one, 8,000. They just brought 2,000, so you've got 3,000 people coming because we're playing a big club that don't support us regularly. Since the Newcastle game 12 years ago I know for a fact that there's 3 guys that come over from Holland and have supported us ever since the first Newcastle game. You see them here about 6 or 8 times a season. Away games that are near the coast, like Folkestone and that, they come over from Holland to support Stevenage.

It is a bit worldwide. As Steve said, (Laughter) he was in South Africa. We know of people that have gone to Australia that still support the club. It is known internationally, but it's just a case of getting it to be known more now.

Steve Miller: I think it'll come within time. It's like saying we need to walk before we can run. We're doing it in proportion. What worried us I think with coming up an extra league was that we wouldn't be able to cope with it, but at this present time-

John Woods: Fingers crossed. (Laughter)

Steve Miller: ...fingers crossed, and for those in the future that are listening to this, (Laughter) we've maintained it. I've not seen any team in this league that's frightened me at all. We've lost against teams that we should have really beaten and we've played against good sides and we've maintained it, so we've got it there. Who knows what'll happen? I'd love a big stadium here, but at the present time I think it's just right because we can cope with what we've got. We could spend money on certain other things.

We can develop the stadium later when the time is right. I think that's where Wallace is correct in what he does, just maintaining the certain level. It does need doing up. It needs a bit more painting around it. One end needs doing up, at the time, but again, in the future that'll probably be different.

John Woods: That's already in place.

Steve Miller: It's in place.

John Woods: It's got all the planning permission to have a stand where the small stand is. It's in place to have another 1,500 capacity seated stand. I think in future it'll be a 10,000 capacity crowd, but what's the use of having a 10,000 capacity stadium but not getting the supporters?

Steve Miller: You go to a lot of these clubs now, established clubs, they've got grounds that hold 20,000 and you've only got 4,000/5,000 in there. You can't run a club like that, and in this present economic climate. It's a very unpredictable time in football. Football is a very expensive trade, and people, at this present time- I'll say that again. (Laughter) Economically, people haven't got the money in this time to actually get to games. To get to a game these days is very expensive to travel.

They've just gone up to Bury today. That's a lot of money, £20 on here, £20 to get in. For people on minimum wage, it's- but when you're desperate to go and see your football club you do anything, don't you? (Laughter)

John Woods: Yes. That's it, yes. I brought along, this morning, badges of my late father-in-law. He was the secretary of the supporters' club. The club was known as Stevenage Athletic Football Club then, in the 1960s. As I say, I think this is where he's passed it onto me to support Stevenage. I've lived in Stevenage 45 years, and as I say, I met my wife around 42 years ago. I think that's when I started supporting Stevenage and getting involved.

Interviewer: How did your father-in-law get involved? Had he always lived here?

John Woods: Well, he just liked sport. He used to go around on his pushbike selling lottery tickets. Well, they weren't called lottery tickets then, but tickets to keep the club [surviving 0:20:58], where they used to go round, similar to the lottery tickets today. He used to go round selling these tickets on the door to just keep the club going. I think by him doing that it got me interested.

Interviewer: Have you passed that on too?

John Woods: Unfortunately, I've got 2 daughters and they're not interested in football. They're in their 40s. My wife is not interested, but she will not stop me going, or else there'll be a divorce on the scene. She doesn't stop me going to football. She knows how dedicated I am to Stevenage.

Interviewer: You've got a season ticket, so you go to-

John Woods: Yes, a season ticket. I don't go to the away matches so much now because of cost. I'm semi-retired. I do go to the ones that are local, but like today, Stevenage are playing Bury, which is the other side of Newcastle.

Steve Miller: Manchester.

John Woods: Manchester.

Steve Miller: Yes, it's Manchester.

John Woods: Sorry, not Newcastle. I'm thinking of their cup game. (Laughter) Manchester, and there's just the cost factor. It's just, as I said before, a sign of the times and the economic climate we're in. I still manage to get my season ticket every year. (Laughter)

Interviewer: You talked a bit about when you were a child you saw the floodlights and the players came out of that little-

Steve Miller: Side area, yes, yes. Yes.

Interviewer: ...side area and things. How's the ground changed and has that changed the experience of coming?

Steve Miller: My mother sent me a clip of the pitch with the original guy. When it went bankrupt they dug up a hole in the middle of the pitch to stop people playing there. My mum sent me some- I think it was from the Stevenage pictorial, of the grass growing. It was just a wreck here. You could have put a combine harvester through here. That's how bad it was. It was so terrible to see it and see what it is now. It is an amazing thing to see. When I've gone over on an aircraft you look down and even pilots [who know me say 0:23:12], "Oh, Stevenage have been playing tonight." You can see the floodlights. The ground is very distinctive coming in on an aeroplane.

I know that's got very little to do with it, but it is so significant seeing it and people recognising it. We're so lucky to have such a lovely ground. Whilst there'll be improvements in the future, we're going steady at the moment, and I don't want us to run before we can really walk. Yes, we're lucky. As a club we're really lucky to have such a lovely ground. We really are.

John Woods: It's had its problems, hasn't it, Steve?

Steve Miller: Oh yes.

John Woods: It was Stevenage Athletic. Then it became Stevenage Town. A developer came along and he was going to make it into a super stadium, going to have a greyhound racetrack and that, but the council who actually owned the lease said, "No." He just got a JCB one day and went straight down the middle of the ground. Then that was it. It folded up, but then it's regrown again and we haven't looked back since, have we?

Steve Miller: No. If you look back at the old pictures [crosstalk 0:24:21].

John Woods: That would have been 1976, would it, Steve?

Steve Miller: Yes, yes. I wasn't here then, but I would assume so. Yes, it was then.

John Woods: Yes, yes. As I say, when it reformed again as Stevenage Borough- well, it's Stevenage Football Club now. They dropped the Borough, but it hasn't looked back since then. In 40 years it's really changed.

Interviewer: Why do you think it has been so successful in recent years in being promoted and these sorts of things? What was it that made the club-?

Steve Miller: Spirit.

John Woods: Spirit, yes.

Steve Miller: As we said before, I think there's something about Stevenage as a sporting town. We've got some good people in this town that are very good at sport. You've got the Hamiltons in cars. We've got other people, but when it came to football we've not had a bad- not even from I think the Delphian days. Was it the Delphian League days?

John Woods: Yes.

Steve Miller: They've always had good football in this town. Unfortunately I don't think the money was there to develop it like Watford and the Barnets at that particular time, but we've always had cracking football matches down here, for years and years. We've been hammered. We've had some bad games, but overall, when you think about it, we've had some terrific games

on this side of the woods. It's always been on the verge that we should be there, we should be a football league. Then there's the old guys that used to work on the pitch, the A team, the Ken Thomas's and co, who were wonderful people.

The beauty of this football club is that a lot of us are still going, and we've been going because we've built up a friendship together. Not just by going in cars and piling into cars and getting on the coach and going to God knows where to watch football, but it's built up a friendship. Those friendships have lasted for many, many years and it's become a family. Even though we're some distance from what it was when we were in the lower leagues, we have now great relationships with friends that still come round and we still talk about the games.

The days of piling into cars and getting straight out, straight in the car and going to God knows where to go and watch a football match, those were wonderful times. When it comes to football here, it was for me the best times ever, especially in the lower leagues, because that's when the football was really at its best for me. We've done wonderfully well. We've got a lot of people to thank for it.

Interviewer: What about managers? How important are they, do you think, in doing that?

Steve Miller: Well, Paul Fairclough-

John Woods: Paul Fairclough is everybody's tip of the tongue because he's been here, he's gone, he's come back.

Steve Miller: Let's not forget Paul Peterson because I think Paul Peterson was a wonderful, wonderful guy. He was a great coach. I don't think he got the accolade that he deserved, and I think Paul will tell you that. He was a wonderful man. Ex Leeds United, wasn't he?

John Woods: Yes.

Steve Miller: He played for Leeds United. He was a nice man. He had a lovely family. Paul Fairclough's family, when they used to come here to the doors- they've all grown up now. Everybody has gone their different ways, but wonderful, wonderful closeness between the players, the management and the fans. There were 700 or 800. Even for that, it was quite a big crowd. Wonderful experiences. We always dreamed. We wanted to get to Wembley, which we did.

John Woods: Twice.

Steve Miller: Twice.

John Woods: As I say, we haven't got the support we would like, but the support we have got is tremendous. I was at a Brentford game on Tuesday at Brentford. They had a crowd of over 4,000. We had 550 Stevenage supporters, but we out-shouted the Brentford support. You couldn't hear them. It's marvellous, the support we do get. It might be small in number, but it's great in voice. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Are there special Stevenage songs or chants?

John Woods: Well, there are chants, yes. Some we can't repeat. (Laughter)

Steve Miller: They're very vocal.

John Woods: Vocal, yes.

Steve Miller: Yes, yes, it's good. Each stand have got their lads out there, the youngsters out there doing their little bit of singing and chanting with the drum, and they take it wherever they. It's good when you read reports from other clubs saying how Stevenage, a small amount of fans, out-sung the rest of the game. We went to Huddersfield Town a few weeks ago. We lost two-one when we should have actually won it, but our fans were absolutely magnificent, absolutely, a credit to the club. Even the Huddersfield fans said that. From a big club like Huddersfield to turn round and say that, it's wonderful, really wonderful, amazing.

Wembley, going to Wembley was the most incredible experience I've ever seen. I flew from Cape Town to get there. I got there 20 minutes before kick-off. (Laughter)

John Woods: Yes, and that was the first actual proper game played at the new Wembley.

Steve Miller: That's right, yes.

John Woods: Stevenage were the first actual football club to play a cup final or any other game on that turf.

Steve Miller: Did your heart sink when we went two-nil down?

John Woods: Yes. (Laughter) Two-nil down, but came away winners in the end.

Steve Miller: Absolutely brilliant, absolutely. It was worth the jetlag.
(Laughter) It was absolutely wonderful. I've never known an experience like it in my life, my little club doing that, absolutely.

Interviewer: In that big stadium.

Steve Miller: In that big stand. Wasn't it 54,000, was it?

John Woods: Yes. We had 25,000, approximately, from Stevenage.

Steve Miller: No disrespect, and Kidderminster Harriers in this particular era were a very good amateur side. They were well recognised. Wonderful, to come from two-nil down to win three-two and go again and beat York City was wonderful. We should have beaten Barrow, shouldn't we?

John Woods: Oh yes, yes. Yes.

Steve Miller: That was a bit of a downer, hey?

John Woods: Yes. Well, Barrow-in-Furness, it must have been the longest coach ride I've ever done in my life.

Steve Miller: Five hours, yes.

John Woods: Five hours. That was a few years ago. It was worth it. As I say, I think it's the support that's kept the club going.

Interviewer: There's a whole group of supporters that you know and you see regularly, is there?

John Woods: Oh yes, yes. I've met Steve just through coming here.

Steve Miller: Yes, we met each other through it.

John Woods: Or being on the coach and that.

Steve Miller: We have a good yack about it. That's the beauty of it. We're all in the coach, and some of these people have been going on a

coach for years and years and years. It's just great. It's very special in its way. Going to these new grounds, we've got Preston North End coming up, we've got Sheffield United. We hope we'll win in the future, (Laughter) for those in the future, that we've won this game, and to get Sheffield United done and Sheffield Wednesday beat. Charlton Athletic, who've not lost a game, it was absolutely fantastic. Yes.

John Woods: [Crosstalk 0:31:30]. Yes, yes.

Interviewer: What's it like looking at the team in this stadium compared with looking at them from a seat in Wembley Stadium?

Steve Miller: Not much difference. I think it's just a bigger picture of Wembley, isn't it?

John Woods: Yes. You're closer to the players here, but that's understandable.

Interviewer: Does that feel good?

John Woods: Yes.

Steve Miller: Do you feel that you like being close to the players?

John Woods: The players, yes.

Steve Miller: I think you get a little bit more atmosphere. I don't like being 60 mile away from the goalpost. You've got to be in there at the side, behind the goalpost to get the feel for the game. That's how I see it. Other fans may see it differently, but I like that close proximity area between the players and us. You get a better vibe for it and initially it brings the best out in the players in certain areas because they're there.

John Woods: Well, my season ticket has been above the dugout and above the tunnel for 12 years and you virtually you can shake hands with them and speak to them by Christian names, which you wouldn't get if you were at a premiership club game. You're so far away, but here is the friendship, being close to the-

Steve Miller: Yes, that's the beauty of the club, even though we're not close to the players like we used to be. That's what I miss I think most. Like you said, we're just a number now. Whilst the club might say differently, I think the majority of us feel that we're not that close to- it's alright having the Supporter's Association meetings and you can speak to Graham, at the time, or Phil. They know you and they're very polite and very pleasant to speak to, but whereas when we were in the early days you were part of it. You felt part of the club and you did things for the club. That was the beauty of it I think.

Interviewer: When would that have been, in the '70s or '80s?

John Woods: '70s, yes.

Steve Miller: Well, for '70s, yes, but the '80s for me.

John Woods: '80s, yes.

Interviewer: When you said you were closer to the players and things, how did that-?

Steve Miller: Well, you get to know them. Do you remember Ian Whitehead?

John Woods: Oh yes, yes.

Steve Miller: Well, he works for Gulfstream. We work at Luton Airport. He used to sit down and we'd talk about- because Ian Whitehead was a good player. He wasn't the fastest guy in the world. He used to say to me that Stevenage Borough were good because they could manipulate the opposition by threatening them, in a nice way, saying, "I'm going to do you. I've got you in my pocket." This used to upset the rhythm of other teams, you see, and they knew it worked. It was a psychological game for Stevenage.

I think that was then, but the stories he used to tell me about Stevenage and what happened. Great, absolutely amazing. I've met some wonderful players. Noel Blackwell was my favourite player. He is such a lovely man, and he's from Luton. His brother I think was Leeds United's manager at the time. Nothing was too small. Noel would come and speak to you as though he'd known you and he'd always ask about the family.

Such a lovely man. I'll always remember Noel Blackwell. He was always my favourite player, always my favourite player.

Interviewer: Do you have a favourite player?

John Woods: Yes. I was just going to say, you'll have to excuse me in a minute, but Steve can still talk to you. I've got to go because we've got to go onto somewhere, with my wife.

Interviewer: No, it's very kind of you to have done this. (Laughter)

John Woods: Favourite players, over the years, Carl Alford. He didn't used to do much, but he used to get the goals. He used to be what they call in the game a poacher. That's when we won the championship. Unfortunately we couldn't get promoted because of the ground not being up to the FA standard, but that's the greatest player of my memory.

Interviewer: You'd like to say about Stevenage, about the history of Stevenage, what it means to you.

Steve Miller: Well, if you're listening to me in the future, it's Saturday 29th- what is it? '011, 11. Just to say, believe in sport, but believe in your club. You've got so much going at this club. I hope it survives. I hope, for those in the future, that this club survives because it's so important for the town. I don't know what Stevenage is going to be like when they listen to this. I'll be long gone, but it's important that we have a football team

because I think it brings community together. There's so many wonderful people in this town and there's some wonderful supporters and I've met some lovely people here. There's always a variation of attitude towards the game, the attitude towards various people, but it is a wonderful club. We're so lucky to have it at this present time. I hope to build on from it.

Like I say, we might not be here. For my grandchildren or future grandchildren- my son is a Hitchin Town fan, believe it or not, which drives me up the wall, but he's happy at Hitchin. I'll just say this. Believe in your club. Send your children down there, your children's children. I hope you go onto the 25th century and long after that because it is a great experience, even at this era in time, this time, [whatever you're going to do with it 0:36:52]. It's just an amazing experience.

Interviewer: That's brilliant.

Steve Miller: I've had something like 28 years away. I had 28-odd years away from Stevenage, being in South Africa. Being brought up as a child in this town and seeing it develop from nothing to what it is now, it's quite an amazing thing. What upsets me most is it's slagged off a lot for being downtrodden. Like I said, for those listening to this in the future, I don't know what the town is going to be like. Is it going to be a super town or whatever it is? It's got so much to offer, Stevenage, no matter what people see of it.

The town centre drives me up the [bend 0:37:41] because it's a dump. It needs knocking down and rebuilding. A lot of people listening to this will say, "Well, it's been done." Well, it has to be done. It has something for it. There's some very special people in Stevenage. I know it sounds a bit patronising, but

being as a kid that was brought up and went to school here and grew up here as a '50s and '60s child, it's an amazing, amazing town. It's got so big. I never envisaged it being like that because when I was a child everything was big at the time, but to see what it is now, it's phenomenal. It's going to get bigger I should think and maybe they'll be a city by the time they listen to this. (Laughter)

I'm always proud of anything Stevenage does. To see it on the news, to see from Lewis Hamilton to Stevenage Borough Football or Stevenage Town Football Club to the golfer, Poulter. There's a young bloke called Poulter who's a golfer - Ian Poulter I think his name is - that's presently playing golf. I think he was a Stevenage guy. He's done wonderful. We've got so many. Probably listening to this you've got people that are born in Stevenage now doing wonderful things in sport, on the arts or something else. Who knows? Be proud of Stevenage. We're very proud of it.

END AUDIO

www.uktranscription.com