

File: BMD Rhys Goldsmith and James

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START AUDIO

Rhys: I'm Rhys Goldsmith, I'm one of the Central Ambulance Advanced First Aiders. I've been here for about four or five years, now, providing first aid medical cover on match days.

James: I'm James [Frail 0:00:11]. I'm St John's Ambulance, and I've been coming to Borough for about six years and I'm an AFA too.

Interviewer: If you could describe for me what a normal match day would begin like and how you would start your routine, and everything like that.

Rhys: For us, personally, we would turn up – there tends to be quite a lot of socialising to begin with, drinking coffee, and then when the game starts we come out and we put in [to either 0:00:23] end of the pitch and we're there to provide first aid to anybody that needs it.

Interviewer: And how early do you get to the pitch, before the game?

Rhys: Yes, just before it starts. And then at half time we go back in and come back out after half time.

Interviewer: And when there's an injury to a player, obviously the physio runs on first, are you then on alert?

Rhys: No, we don't tend to deal with the players, they have their own club doctor to deal with that.

Interviewer: So you're mainly here for the fans?

Rhys: For the fans, and we have a crowd doctor for that as well.

Interviewer: There's a crowd doctor? Ah, okay.

And so what are the most common complaints?

Rhys: It tends to be, actually funnily enough here we tend to have quite a lot of fits, just convulsions, which tend to be regular visitors to the club that are well known to us and to a lot of the NHS services, to be fair.

Interviewer: And so obviously you build up a good rapport with people you see a lot and you know what sort of medicine to bring with you and that?

Rhys: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. How are you finding working here? Is it a good environment to work in? Do the fans socialise with you a lot? Do you get a lot of banter?

James: Yes, we do, really.

Rhys: We do have fun, it's part of our- it's quite a good social event as well for us. We get on with all the stewards and stuff like that, so it's great.

Interviewer: And how are the facilities here for you? Do you use any of the facilities here?

Rhys: Yes, we have our own first aid room and we get provided with tea and coffee and stuff like that, so the facilities aren't too bad.

Interviewer: How have they changed over the years?

Rhys: We've had the first aid room painted – I believe.

James: Yes.

Rhys: Yes, it's been painted and a few more bits of equipment added and things like that. But overall there's not been too much change.

James: No.

Interviewer: And you two aren't personally Stevenage fans yourselves?

Rhys: No, to be honest I'm not really into football. I just end up attending a lot of football games.

James: Same with me.

Interviewer: And how do you find the atmosphere at football matches? Is it different from what you're used to?

Rhys: Yes, it can be. It can easily turn to quite a volatile situation as well, especially when you've got a club that's well known on match day events. But here, it tends to be quite nice, a family controlled sort of event.

Interviewer: And how does the crowd impact on your job?

Rhys: If it's a heavy crowd it can impact quite heavily, especially if we have patients that we need to get to that are at the top of stands,

and stuff like that. When there are a lot of people here it's quite hard to get to them.

Interviewer: Is that the main trouble with everyone pressed in and everyone's jostling?

Rhys: I must admit, our regular patients tend to have their seats at the top of the stands.

Interviewer: And obviously because there are a lot of standing areas here, is it a bit easier to get to because people aren't pressed in so much or is it harder?

Rhys: No, the standing is harder. You have to try and squeeze your way through. The seating is better because you have stairways.

Interviewer: Ah, right. Because there are designated areas that are free?

Rhys: Yes.

Interviewer: And what are the more serious end of injuries that can occur?

Rhys: You can have people that fall down stairs. We have actually had a cardiac arrest here as well, where – that's obviously one extreme to the other. And you get your minor injuries as well, so your cuts and your bruises and stuff like that.

Interviewer: And do the – I want to say symptoms, but that's the wrong word. Do the cases change with the different weather?

Rhys: It can do. Definitely if it's icy you can get people slipping over and things. Also if it's very hot you get people that faint and stuff like that.

Interviewer: And if there's a serious injury to a player, do you actually go onto the pitch to help out?

Rhys: The stewards will remove them from the pitch, but if the doctor requests our help we'll go in and help them.

Interviewer: And have you ever had a case where that's happened?

Rhys: I believe so, because we stock a bit extra equipment than what the doctors does here.

Interviewer: And do you feel nervous before a game, for what might happen?

Rhys: Not any more. I think we both used to, didn't we?

James: Yes. We used to but we don't any more.

Rhys: We've been here too long.

Interviewer: And how do you feel you're received by the crowd?

Rhys: Yes, by the crowd it's generally okay.

We've had one or two problems where we've had to try and get through to a patient, but they're more interested in watching the football than letting me through. But apart from that it's been alright.

Interviewer: And when you're – because you're not football fans – how does it seem; was the first match you'd been to through this capacity, or had you been to matches in your personal life beforehand?

Rhys: No, it was through this capacity.

James: Yes.

Interviewer: And how do your experiences here relate to other stadiums?

Rhys: We tend to notice - because we do Tottenham football as well – we tend to notice it's a lot more family-atmosphere here, and it's not quite so scary. Whereas when you go to Tottenham it's massive. And that can be quite busy can't it?

James: Yes.

Interviewer: And do you get to – because like you were saying you have your regular patients – do you get to know them more here because there are less people?

Rhys: Yes. You get a good rapport with them.

Interviewer: So how does an alert happen? If someone was to fall now, how would you be alerted?

Rhys: The stewards tend to radio through to us and then we get dispatched to a patient.

Interviewer: So do you have to have a good working relationship with the stewards?

Rhys: Yes.

Interviewer: And do you spend a lot of time doing exercises where it's the stewards and yourselves working together in tandem, or..?

Rhys: No, I don't think we have personally here. We tend to do a lot of role play and that, within our divisions within St Johns, and I think that's where we get most of our training from.

James: Yes, I'd agree with that.

Interviewer: And where do you take them? After they've been injured. You say you've got a doctor's room-

Rhys: No, we have our own treatment room, and there is a designated doctor that the club employs for the crowd.

Interviewer: And who takes precedence over the situation?

Rhys: If the doctor is needed then he has clinical responsibility for the patient, so he would take precedence over that. But if it was us and the stewards, then it would be us.

Interviewer: Sure.

Obviously there have been a few high profile injuries in sport at the moment; if there were to be a life threatening injury to a player, would you have to go on the pitch?

Rhys: Yes, if the doctors – the player's doctor – requested our assistance, yes, we would have to go on and give him a hand.

Interviewer: And I presume straight away everyone would go over to Lister as it's quite near.

Rhys: Predominantly they go to Lister, unless they have a medical speciality that could be treated elsewhere. So if they need to go to Addenbrooke's or a London Hospital then they would be transferred there, depending on what the ambulance crew or doctor sees fit.

Interviewer: So you're kind of like the first line of defence in case someone is hurt, seriously.

Rhys: Yes.

James: Yes.

Interviewer: If you see someone go down and there's a big ____ [0:07:50] see them rolled over, do you have that massive apprehension just before you have to run over or is it all trained into you?

Rhys: I think some people do. It's not the treating of the patient, it's what can happen when you're on the pitch – can't it, James?

James: Yes.

Rhys: Somebody had to deal with a spinal injury and bent down and split their trousers in front of – how many thousands of people?

(Laughter)

Rhys: Things like that do happen. But yes, in general it's alright.
I think you get a bit more anxious about it because you have got five or six thousand people watching you, than what you would do normally.

Interviewer: Eyes in the back of the head syndrome.

Rhys: Yes.

Interviewer: And do you get any other cheers? Have you had any incidents, apart from trousers splitting, have you slipped over or..?

James: Yes, I have. I slipped over. That wasn't fun.

Interviewer: Do you ever get a cheer go up when the crowd give you a bit more banter?

Rhys: To be honest, I haven't really done anything on the pitch. You have though a couple of times haven't you?

James: Yes. We're not supposed to go on the pitch unless we're asked to, or unless we can't get round on the paths.

Rhys: Oh yes, I remember that.

Interviewer: And you're both living in Stevenage.

Rhys: Yes.

Interviewer: Has Stevenage football team impacted on your lives in any way, as non-football fans?

Rhys: I wouldn't have said so. Apart from on match days the traffic. And if you're going from here straight to work it's a pain in the backside.

Interviewer: And do they ever come into your school or community, systems like that?

Rhys: I can't remember.

James: I've never had them come in.

Rhys: I know we've done some other events for the academy – the football academy up the road – that was quite a high profile sporting event. I think it's to do with the club as well. I'm not really sure.

Apart from that, not really.

Interviewer: What about your friends? Are they Stevenage fans?

Rhys: Yes, I've got a couple that are. Tend to see them when I come down.

Interviewer: And have they always been a Stevenage fan? Is it like a family thing that's been passed on from their mum and dad?

Rhys: Yes, I think so. There's actually one of our St John's members, her whole family is into football. I think they've got season tickets and come down every week.

Interviewer: Right.

Rhys: We always say hello.

Interviewer: And do you notice lots of the fan also have other teams? Other premiership teams, or London based teams?

Rhys: Yes, we do tend to see a lot of people don't we? Sometimes you query whether - because we're always standing in the home stands - we do tend to query, sometimes, whether they're meant to be in this stand or the other stand, with what they're wearing-

Interviewer: Oh right.

Rhys: To be fair, didn't we?

Interviewer: And how do you find it – the cheering aspect. Do you think this is an especially good crowd, from ones you've been to before?

Rhys: It can be. You can hear some quite strong abuse coming from some of the crowd sometimes. But apart from that they're normally alright.

Interviewer: Do you feel like they could cut down a bit more on abuse? Is it excessive?

Rhys: Yes. It tends to be the away supporters. And it does frustrate me a bit. Because you've got five or six-year-old kids in their as well. You know?

I know they pick it up from school and stuff like that, but they just don't need to be educated like that at such a young age.

Interviewer: Do you think that leads to more social problems in later life?

Rhys: I think it can do. Yes. Definitely a bit more football violence and stuff like that.

Interviewer: And does it frustrate you in your capacity when you have to treat people that have been injured by football hooliganism?

Rhys: Yes. It does a bit. We've had a couple before. And it's quite upsetting because when you've got a 12 or 13-year-old kid who's been whacked in the face who clearly can't appreciate the day or the money spent on the ticket here.

It does get quite frustrating if you're upset for that particular patient you're dealing with.

Interviewer: Do you see any ways in which that can be lessened or stopped at all?

Rhys: To be honest, going back – I think it was probably just after Christmas – there was a big game where a lot of the home fans actually went on to the pitch and there was a player that got injured from them, and we ended up treating quite a few of the crowd.

Interviewer: Oh, so you were working that day, as well?

Rhys: Yes, we were treating quite a few of the crowd that got injured as well. And since then there is definitely a lot more police presence and a lot more steward presence as well.

Interviewer: And how was that incident, when there were people on the pitch?

Rhys: That was quite scary, because I was treating a patient at the time, and the stand we were in – that's where they all ran out from.

So we had to try and think of our safety and then we had to try and think of the clinical need of the patient as well.

Interviewer: Sure. Did you find they were aggressive towards you or did they just bypass you?

Rhys: No. I think part of the problem is now with St John we're changing all of our uniform, so it should be a lot better now. However, we used to wear black and white, so we did get mistaken for police officers quite a lot of the time. So, yes, it could cause us problems, to be fair.

Interviewer: And obviously that game was the Newcastle game.

Rhys: I believe it was, yes.

Interviewer: And a player got punched.

How did you see the actions of the stewards and everyone else, and how that was dealt with?

Rhys: I saw a lot of stewards running on and a lot of coppers kicking people out.

I found it... I think it was dealt with correctly and abruptly, which is the way it should have been dealt with.

But I did find it quite intimidating and quite scary, to be honest. Given the fact that I was over in that stand treating a patient at that time.

Interviewer: Sure. And on match days, is it just the two of you?

Rhys: No, normally there's about five or six of us, and on bigger match days there are more of us.

Interviewer: Do you always feel you're sufficiently equipped to deal with everything at big matches?

Rhys: Yes, we always tend to be sufficiently staffed as well, with equipment.

Interviewer: And you don't feel like – with the bigger games – like you were saying – sorry...

So are the shifts at sporting events sought after?

Rhys: I would say they can be. Wouldn't you?

James: Yes, they are.

Rhys: I think it's more done on a fairness basis, or a regular attendance basis as well.

Interviewer: And could they get any perks from them?

Rhys: Apart from the coffee. I suppose we don't have the pay to go into events, but apart from that...

Interviewer: So it could be a dream job for Stevenage-Borough fans.

Rhys: Yes. Some of our members are.

Interviewer: With leaving football matches, because you've got so many thousand people leaving – they all have to be forced down certain walkways – do you find a lot of incidents happen there? Especially with cars coming through?

Rhys: I suppose, predominantly it can do, but to be honest we've haven't really been to any. Apart from on very, very big match days, we haven't really been to many incidents after the game.

Interviewer: And how do you find the safety arrangements here? Pretty good?

Rhys: Yes. They do have a safety officer who goes round and assures everything is above order and ship shape. And the stewards are all safety conscious as well.

Interviewer: And in bad weather – because there's not too much protection here – how do you find that?

Rhys: That's alright, I kick someone out of their seat and sit down.

(Laughter)

Rhys: No, I'm joking. There are generally always spare seats, if it's bad weather I can sit down.

Interviewer: Is it quite comfortable – are they accommodating while you're here?

Rhys: It can be, I suppose. We haven't got a heater.

(Laughter)

Rhys: In our treating room it's alright.

Interviewer: And when you're out there-

So where do you normally station yourselves during the match?

Rhys: We normally have one down on the home and away corner, and then one on the opposite end of the corners, two or three people.

Down this bottom end it tends to be a lot of the footballer's wives and girlfriends down there, and a few of the club officials.

And on the opposite side it tends to be a lot more fan based than anything.

Interviewer: Do you get to know the fans that are stood nearby you?

Rhys: Not generally, to be honest.

Some of the ones that we know tend to be either St John's Members or our friends, personal.

Interviewer: And the footballer's wives, do they always sit in the same area?

Rhys: They tend to. Yes, doing their make-up at the same time-
(Laughter)

Rhys: No, I'm joking.

Interviewer: The corporate side of things.

Rhys: Yes.

Interviewer: And how have changes to the stadium impacted on the way you work here?

Rhys: Not too much really, to be honest, has it?

James: No.

Rhys: I wouldn't have said so.

Interviewer: You said you used to walk around the stadium, has that changed because of systems in St John's Ambulance, or..?

Rhys: I think it's more to do with the fact that we now generally, near enough every match day, have two teams, so there's not really much need for us to be wandering around so much anymore.

Interviewer: And have there been a lot of new systems to work in stadiums like this?

Rhys: I think since Stevens-Borough have become a football club rather than being a borough, they tend to introduce a lot more-

definitely on the medical side, because we had a visit from the officials of the FA – and a lot of things changed from there.

END AUDIO

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