

File: BMG Keith and William McLellan.mp3

Duration: 0:11:06

Date: 10/08/2016

Typist: 827

START AUDIO

Phil Roberts: Phil Roberts on behalf of the Borough Memories Group, speaking to Keith and William McLellan about Stevenage football club. First of all, we're going to touch on, Keith, a little bit of biographical detail. One assuming you're a Stevenage man, is that correct?

Keith McLellan: Well, yes, I mean, I live very local to here, just down the road in a village called Codicote, and I've been supporting Stevenage for about eleven years now.

Phil Roberts: How did you first get interested in supporting the club, as you live three or four miles away?

Keith McLellan: Well I was, I moved from Hertford to there, and I was looking for a local club, and at the time Stevenage were very successful, and I was looking for a club that was close to me. Stevenage just fitted that bill, really.

Phil Roberts: You must have been amazed at this, eleven years and knowing where Stevenage were eleven years ago. To look back in a decade and a bit and see where they are now, I mean, that is amazing progress, isn't it?

Keith McLellan: It is phenomenal. You cannot comprehend, looking around the stadium now, how different it is, and the facilities, the crowd, the atmosphere. The whole professionalism of the club is just astronomical now, compared to how it used to be.

Phil Roberts: So where was Stevenage playing, in what standard, presumably the conference, when you first...

Keith McLellan: They were in the conference, yes. They were doing well in the conference. In fact, about the second or third year I watched them they won the conference, but because the facilities weren't up to standard, they didn't get promoted, and you thought that was their one chance gone. Obviously six or seven years later they managed to do the same thing again, and obviously the rest is history now.

Phil Roberts: Yes, I distinctly remember that time, I was actually involved with the club in those times. So I do remember that, and you're right, there was a lot of depression and dismay at the time, and presumably yourself, like others, must have thought their time would never come again?

Keith McLellan: Yes, because lots of clubs at their level find someone who can invest money in the club. Improve the facilities, buy decent players, and we've all seen over the years, clubs do well in the conference one year and then fall apart the next year. It's all about momentum in football, and you have your one, often, chance, and that's the only chance you get. So Stevenage did

well to come again, and obviously they have improved year on year, and that's what you need to do in sport. Try and improve every year.

Phil Roberts: I'm assuming, being a fan during conference stage, you're thinking of the likes of Boston United and Rushdown and Diamonds, and looking at where they are today. Compared with where they were six, seven years ago.

Keith McLellan: Yes, I mean, you often wonder whether the bubble is going to burst. Because there were teams like Maidstone, and Kidderminster, and Greys, who all had big money to spend, and looked like they were going to go places and have just fallen away. One hopes that Stevenage invest the money that they've had from the big games and their success, and move on for the future. I know they're going to invest big in the ground, and I think that helps, because as they go up, you know, they're going to get more and more support.

Phil Roberts: And there's also a salutary lesson to be learned from established football league clubs. The likes of Chester City and Halifax, and people like that, who are very low down the pyramid nowadays compared with where they were six years ago. They didn't even come from the conference in the first place.

Keith McLellan: No, I think, the problem is, I think football finances, I'm an accountant by profession, don't seem to be that well-regulated, and people try and buy success. If it works, great, but if it doesn't you end up, and I say, sport's all about momentum.

You're either on your way up, but you need to look at yourself, because if you're not careful you'll soon come back down again.

Phil Roberts: So from what you're suggesting, Stevenage are on a very sound financial footing, and doing it exactly the right way?

Keith McLellan: Well they appear to be, because they're investing in the facilities. There aren't any stars, apparently big name stars at Stevenage. They're a workman-like club, they're very much a family-based club in my opinion, and there's some great loyal support here. I think the players respond to the fans and likewise the fans to the players, and I think that helps, you know. All the fans want to see is the players giving 100% in the game.

Phil Roberts: Now this season, obviously, they've played at the highest level the club has ever achieved. I mean, you must feel this has been an outstanding season. What have the highlights been for you?

Keith McLellan: I think the fact that, ignoring the FA cup for a minute, the fact that they've managed to cope with this level. Because to have two promotions in two years, you would think you'd just want survival this season, but Stevenage have done more than that. Consistently last season they were near the relegation zone until Christmas time, and then still got promoted through the playoffs. This season they've always been up there, and even with bad runs they've still managed to keep themselves near the top, and obviously after today's result they're in the playoff

positions. I think that they've responded well to the challenge of a high level of football.

Phil Roberts: Particularly when you consider that the other three sides that came up with them, two are in the relegation zone, are very likely to be relegated. The other one are just going to scramble clear by the skin of their teeth.

Keith McLellan: Well I remember telling my son here, one of the early games we came to last season was Wickham at home, and we got beaten by them, and they were outstanding. Absolutely outstanding, and they only just got promoted. Now look at them, and Chesterfield, who won a division, might be relegated today, and it's amazing how they've fallen apart with almost the same teams. Whereas Stevenage have moved on.

Phil Roberts: So talking about this season, obviously you've not touched on the cup run but, I mean, playing in the FA cup. Ultimately the tie with Tottenham, was that the highlight of the season for yourself, and for your son William?

Keith McLellan: Oh yes, it was definitely the highlight of the season. Because you want to pit your club against a big-name club, and Tottenham, fair play to them, have played some good football this season. They've fallen apart a bit now, but they came here with a decent strength side, and Stevenage, I would say, matched them toe-to-toe in both games, and were unlucky, really, to lose in the second game.

You know, Tottenham have got international players, but I think the atmosphere here is just absolutely fantastic, and a lot of people who live in Stevenage support Tottenham. So there were Tottenham fans dotted all around the ground, and it was just a brilliant experience, for William leading the team out here against Tottenham, and also seeing Stevenage play at a premiership ground, that was fantastic for me.

Phil Roberts: So you were able to make it down to White Hart Lane for the replay?

Keith McLellan: Yes.

Phil Roberts: And obviously you saw them the season before when they played Newcastle United, as well?

Keith McLellan: Yes. William was also the mascot for that. Which again was a brilliant atmosphere here, and just to see Stevenage pit their wits against these premiership footballers. Who you see live on Match of the Day, you just cannot believe it, but Stevenage have coped so well with that. They're not out-classed at all, and the effort they showed, I mean, the fans have really appreciated that, and they just show so much effort. I think they're not over-awed at all, and I think everyone's proud of them, and I hope they're proud of the fans' support.

Phil Roberts: Have there been any league highlights for you? Has one league game tended to merge into all the others, or has one stood out for you?

Keith McLellan: Not particularly, no. I think, obviously the Yeovil game the other day where they won 6-0 was obviously a fantastic performance. Maybe the 5-1 here against Sheffield Wednesday, where Sheffield Wednesday are a big club, big support. You know, they were the first big team that we played this season, but no, I think Stevenage play the same way week in week out, and everybody knows their roles, and we're not scared of anyone.

Phil Roberts: So let's talk to William, this is your son William McLellan, and you've been the club's mascot in both the two FA cup ties against Newcastle United last season, and against Tottenham Hotspur this season. You must have a lot of connections with the club, then, to have such a major role, William.

William McLellan: Yes, well, I really enjoy it. It's quite a lot of fun, because you get to do a kick around and stuff with, like, other mascots, and people that are at the club and stuff. Yes, it's quite good fun, and leading the team out and shaking all their hands and stuff.

Phil Roberts: You met famous players on both occasions, I would imagine.

William McLellan: Yes, like Joe Barton, Louis Sahar, Dawson, players like that. That's just amazing.

Phil Roberts: Have you any souvenirs from either, or both games?

William McLellan: Yes, I've got a couple of scarves from the Tottenham, when we played Tottenham, and Newcastle and stuff, and I've got some autographs of, like, Coloccini, and players like that, and Scott Parker.

Phil Roberts: So that's quite a collection. No doubt when you're old and grey, you want to raise some money, you can maybe make quite a killing with players of that nature in years to come. You became a club supporter, one assumes, because your father encouraged you to come with him?

William McLellan: Well, yes, he said they were doing really well, and I thought, "Oh yes," because they're local, I thought, "I want to see a club that's local."

Keith McLellan: At his first serious game he went to the FA trophy final, sorry to interrupt, at Wembley, in 2009, or 2010 was it, William?

William McLellan: Yes, 2010.

Keith McLellan: 2010, that was his first serious game, took him to Wembley, saw them play Barrow. Okay, they lost, but he was hooked. That was it, he was absolutely hooked from then on.

Phil Roberts: So do you attend every home game, and do you go away as well, William?

William McLellan: Well, we sometimes go away, but not often, but we usually attend every home game.

Phil Roberts: Do you play football yourself? Is your interest, does it exceed outside of supporting Borough?

William McLellan: Yes, I do play football, like, with my friends and stuff, but I don't play for a club.

Phil Roberts: So this is really your major football interest, watching Stevenage, and how far do you think they can go? I mean, they're, well, they're in the playoffs as we speak today, on April the 21st. So do you feel they can go in and match, they'll more than likely play one of the Sheffield teams, do you think they can get yet another promotion?

William McLellan: Yes, I do, actually. Yes, they've been playing consistently well all season, and yes, I hope we can get into the championship.

Phil Roberts: Well, we'll just finish off with Keith, asking you about the championship. Keith, if they did manage to get, or confirm, a playoff place, which hopefully in the next fortnight they will do, almost certainly they'll play one of the Sheffield teams looking at the way things are set up. I mean, could you see them getting beyond that, and getting to yet another final?

Keith McLellan: I think they can. I think no-one will want to play Stevenage. They're very, very good defensively, and might not score a lot

of goals, but very few people score against Stevenage today. I know the opponents, they missed two penalties, but over two legs, Stevenage have got every chance, and in a one-off game, like last season against Torquay. You wouldn't bet against Stevenage doing it again, and it would be fantastic if they could do it. You've got to take your chances, but you never know in football.

Phil Roberts: Well that would be like almost making football history. I know the Wimbledons and the Watfords and people in the past have earned a couple of promotions in succession. I don't know if anybody's earned three promotions in three successive seasons, have they?

Keith McLellan: Not that I'm aware of, no, and it would be absolutely phenomenal, and I think they deserve it. On their day, as I say, they can beat anyone. There's no stars in the team, but everybody works for everyone else.

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