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Chris Clarke: Hi, hello. I'm Chris, Chris Clarke.

Interviewer: And Chris, how long have you been supporting Stevenage Borough?

Chris Clarke: I started coming to watch Borough, I guess the last 1980s, early 1990s.

Interviewer: And, you know, what was the first thing that- what's the first thing that you can remember? You probably can't- can you remember the first match that it was?

Chris Clarke: The first game I came to on a serious basis was a home game. Guinness Book of Records were up here at the time, because Stevenage were about to break the Guinness Book of Records for the amount of home games without defeat.

Everyone was here at that time, as I say, Guinness Book of Records. We were at home to a team called Dulwich Hamlet. We lost. And that's a record that we never gained.

Interviewer: The- I imagine there was a great enthusiasm before that game. Can you describe the emotions on the day? You know, what were the events of the match? Was there anything controversial that happened? Was it close?

Chris Clarke: Well, as I say, that- no, not really. I think they were the better team, Dulwich Hamlet, and it was- we were going to be on a hiding to nothing.

Everyone here expecting this and of course it was a big let-down, the fact that we lost.

Interviewer: So that was- that was the first game or the first big..?

Chris Clarke: That was the first game that I started to come to, to watch Stevenage on a serious basis. That first game got into my blood, got under my skin and from then on I was hooked.

Interviewer: Where is your- where was your position for that match? Have you stayed standing in the same sort of place?

Chris Clarke: No, I don't stand. I sit. Right above the tunnel, best seat in the house. For many, many years.

Interviewer: Can you sort of remember, you know, what it was like in those days? Is it comparable to today? Is the atmosphere the same? Are the numbers of the crowd..?

Chris Clarke: In fact, I guess the excitement, the expectations from fans now is a lot higher, of course. But in those early days, there was a little bit more comradery with the 800 fans that were here.

You used to see them every week, week in, week out. And it was- in those days, I believe it was probably more of a family club than it is today.

And in fact, hand on heart, I think I might say I preferred my football in those early days, rather than today.

Interviewer: You talked about the family sort of style of the football club. Why is it different now?

Chris Clarke: I think probably more expectations, things are more money-orientated. I think the- probably the quality of the football is better today, but I think if you ask many real football fans, they're just as happy to go and watch kids playing in a park on a Sunday as they are to go to a big match.

And the thing is with Stevenage, when friends ask, "Why Stevenage? Why not your Arsenal, your Tottenham? Teams within an hour's drive." It's because at Stevenage, you get a good game and a fantastic game.

And it's the same as if you go to watch Tottenham or Arsenal. None of those games guarantee you a good game of football. And all the England games will tell you exactly that. And these players, these prima donnas on thousands of pounds a week, compared to the grassroots football. And I think Stevenage deserve my money.

Interviewer: You talked about the commercialisation of football then. You know, has football become too commercialised? And also with talking about Stevenage as a family club and perhaps a bit moved away, because of the commercialised route, are there things that you miss from back then?

Chris Clarke: No, not- I would never go back. I always want to go forward. And to be in the position that we are in today is absolutely fantastic.

But whether the football is the same, whether I enjoy the football the same, I don't know.

Interviewer: What was- what was your greatest team then?

Chris Clarke: My greatest team? I can't tell you the greatest team, I can pick certain players out from the past that are absolutely fantastic. Players that we've never been able to replace. And one captain, midfield general as we like to call them, one playmaker was the fantastic Steve Berry.

And I'm sure many people who go back many years would tell you exactly the same. And since he's gone, we've never been able to replace...

Interviewer: What was- what was impressive about Steve's style?

Chris Clarke: Just the- he wasn't necessarily a good footballer, but give him the ball, he would always know where to put it for the next player.

Interviewer: Was there a- you know, is there a particular sort of game or a run of games where you think that Steve's contribution was, you know, particularly significant for you?

Chris Clarke: I think he was a pretty steady player. Not- not particularly good player, but an organiser. And I think that's what we'd probably be lacking to make us a fantastic team.

Interviewer: You saw Steve as very much a leader?

Chris Clarke: Very much a leader. Very much a leader.

Interviewer: Can he compare to any of, you know, present-time captains?

Chris Clarke: No. I wouldn't- I wouldn't say- I'd give someone praise, but I wouldn't give anyone criticism.

Interviewer: Have you got other players that stand out from the times? So Steve was number one. Are there other players that you remember?

Chris Clarke: Some fantastic individual players we've had here. And I remember, the first game that two of my favourite players, Barry Hayles and Phil Simpson, when they came from a really low league club.

And they played here and of course, Barry Hayles, you know, which probably is one of our biggest stars, came as a defender. And Paul turned him around and saw the genius that is Barry Hayles and made him into a forward.

Interviewer: Barry Hayles is remember as something special. What was the special part of him for you?

Chris Clarke: For me, Barry Hayles would never say no, would never say die. A player could- an opponent player could have a ball 25 yards away and Barry Hayles would go after him and beat him and take that ball.

Interviewer: Does a goal stand out for you? A match? A moment? Was there a bit of, you know, sheer brilliance?

Chris Clarke: What Stevenage have had in the past was never a lack of goal scorers. We always had fantastic goal scorers. Goals that you could say in the- in September that this goal would be goal of the season.

Barry Hayles would score your goals, Carl Alford would score you fantastic goals. I can't think of the other bloke's name, it'll come in a minute. He would always score you fantastic goals.

This last few years, we've never had players of that ability to score fantastic goals.

Anthony Eldin, another fantastic goal scorer.

Interviewer: Do any of those players have a particular signature celebration?

Chris Clarke: No, not really. Just, you know, everyone coming around, cuddling and kissing.

Interviewer: Moving on then to, you know, you talked about Stevenage struggling with a great goal scorer and great goal scorers make the success, if you like. Were you- was there any moment when you thought that the team then would go on forever and keep on winning?

Chris Clarke: The problem I think with today, because our goals come from probably eight different players, which is absolutely fantastic, at this level of football that we play now I think we are going to be found out.

We're okay. Our record shows that we went X amount of- nearly two years without losing a home game. And if we scored at home, we have never lost, apart from a couple of weeks ago, we had never lost a game. As long as we scored.

The problem for us is, if we manage to go today, if we go two goals down, we haven't got that quality of goal scorer that will be able to pull those goals back.

Interviewer: What was, you know, you've been coming and watching Stevenage through the years when basically a year wouldn't go by without them winning something. What was it like to be part of that?

Chris Clarke: Yes, that's very true. That's very true. There's always- every season has its highlights. My best highlight, my most emotional time, was when we were drawn to play Birmingham City at home.

The ground here at Stevenage was covered in snow, we were allowed to swap the games to Birmingham and my most emotional part was when Andy, the announcer, came on in front of I guess probably 20 odd thousand people and said, at St Andrews, and said, "Welcome to Broadhall Way." Because it was our game that day. It was our game, our home game.

Interviewer: Do you remember, you know, that was obviously special. What was the excitement like with switching it to St Andrews? Was there- did people- was there disappointment that it wasn't played here? Or was there a buzz that you were playing a home game at Birmingham?

Chris Clarke: You're right, there was a buzz, of course. And as far as playing here, there is a- there is a capacity that Broadhall Way would hold. More people could go and watch Stevenage play at St Andrews than could get in here at Broadhall Way. So economically speaking, it was a far better choice.

Interviewer: What was the day like? How did you go? Was there loads of supporters' buses or..?

Chris Clarke: Yes, there were plenty of supporters' buses. And I managed to get some money together and have one of these corporate



days where you had sandwiches before the game, sandwiches half time, drinks afterwards. And I'd never been able to afford anything like that. And I've never been able to afford it since.

Interviewer: What was the- what was the celebration like in the crowd, 8-0?

Chris Clarke: Well, we couldn't understand why it couldn't become 10.

Interviewer: Was there a big Borough following that day?

Chris Clarke: Stevenage, we've always been a well-followed club. And I guess when we got promotion, the teams in the old Diadora League were sorry to see Stevenage promoted, because there was a lack of money coming into those clubs that all Stevenage supporters would bring to watch the away games.

Interviewer: Can you- can you describe the match, the 8-0 win? Obviously you turned up 3 goals late, but...

Chris Clarke: Jeepers, my friend, you're going back 25 years plus. And when you get to my age, I can't remember what I did yesterday, let alone 25...

But I know it's heaven, it's heaven.

Interviewer: And I assume that- well, not assume, but the journey back on the bus must have been more pleasant than the one up.

Chris Clarke: Elated. Elated. And to- and for a borough and to go all those miles, you know, and when you have a win you're on cloud nine. And when you have a defeat, it's suicidal.

The trouble is, you know, Borough gets so much under your skin that if you lose that game on a Saturday, that lasts probably until Wednesday before you can get out of that depression.

Interviewer: What was the greatest season being a Stevenage fan?  
There's quite- probably got a few to pick from.

Chris Clarke: Many years. Many years. Borough were always the sleeping giant, always- in my view, always just there. It was only certain things that stopped us moving on. Politics, which was the reason that we didn't get promoted way back then.

Interviewer: What was your feeling about that? You know, the goal was Football League football. The \_\_\_[0:14:32] motto, "Join today for Football League tomorrow." Was the- was football against Stevenage?

Chris Clarke: It's political. In all- since football's been going, it's always a team that wins gets promoted. That's the essence of football, of playing in a football league.

When we won the league and didn't get promoted, politics came into the game. And people will tell you- well, people that

know, will tell you that even Luton at the time, Luton said we could ground share with them.

Today that happens. You know, you ground share. But it wasn't allowed for us. Stevenage, this little team, these little upstarts? We don't want them in our team.

It was the old powers acting in those days. If you got relegated, you just used to get resigned for the following season.

But politics, that's what stopped us. Not the quality of football.

Interviewer: Did you think that you could win the argument?

Chris Clarke: Victor Green did, because history tells you that no one has ever won that league two years in succession. I believe the court costs ran into a quarter of a million pounds. But he felt it was worth the effort.

And because it went to the hearing, the judge couldn't decide whether to allow Stevenage in or out. It had to go to a second hearing with three judges.

And we lost that 2 to 1. But with recommendations that this will be the last year that this will ever be able to happen. And from then on, every team that won that league got promoted, thanks to Stevenage and Victor Green's quarter of a million pound court case.

Interviewer: Is there anyone- I don't like to use this, but was there a feeling here that there was someone in Stevenage to blame for not being able to go up?

Chris Clarke: No. Not at all.

Interviewer: And you say that, you know, the leaf was that Victor Green didn't think that Stevenage could go and win back-to-back promotions, it hadn't been done. Was there a belief on the fans that, you know, the ground was being changed, you could win and get promoted the following season?

Chris Clarke: Well, it was so obvious and history tells you that, it tells you that we were right. We only spent- I think it was probably another three years before we won it and got- I can't remember all my dates.

It was always going to be there, we were always going to get promoted.

Interviewer: Does that make it, you know, great season, was the first time- it was a good team and- what was it like on the last day of the season, watching Stevenage pick up the shield? Sorry, not the shield, the trophy. Knowing that in a way, it was what you'd always wanted to do, but it wasn't quite right.

Chris Clarke: Yes, yes. It was quite right. The inevitable had happened. We'd achieved it.

Interviewer: The FA Cup generally captures the imagination of people. What's your best memory of Stevenage in the FA Cup?

Chris Clarke: My best- my best memory is the round- I think it was the third round when we were playing away to Swindon. Swindon, big club in those days, I believe two leagues above us.

We went down to Swindon on a shocking day, pouring with rain, soaked to the skin. And I think we went 1-0 down. And then with the wind against us, we scored and equalised and then with a gale blowing, the Swindon goalkeeper kicked the ball into the wind, it seemed to loop around onto Giuliano Grazioli. He put the ball into the net and we won 2-1.

That, to me, was our greatest club achievement.

Interviewer: What was it like to be part of the crowd that day? You know, scoring that second- to was of great significance, the goal.

Chris Clarke: It was absolutely fantastic. Everyone was soaked to the skin and I'd never seen so many black dustbin liners, because that's what everyone wore. I don't know where they all came from, but that was such a fantastic day.

And of course, the draw for the next round didn't happen until the Sunday. And that's when we found out we had Newcastle.

Interviewer: Was that- you know, was that sort of like a fairy tale dream, Newcastle, FA Cup at home?

Chris Clarke: Yes, of course it was. You know, we'd never even thought we'd get to this type of level. But it was so- it was so political, that game. Battles going on between different chairmen of the

clubs, different managers of the clubs and I must say that Paul Fairclough was a real gentleman at the time and didn't stoop to this mudslinging backstabbing.

And I think all in all, we came out better. Newcastle had gone well down in my estimations and as a taxi driver, I remember sitting on Stevenage railway station when the coach pulled in and waited for the Newcastle intercity train to come down.

And all the players and Kenny Dalglish got off that train and no one was allowed to sign an autograph. All the young mums with their kids standing there and Kenny Dalglish ushered all their players onto the coach without signing a single autograph.

So it really went- they really went down in my estimations.

Interviewer: Big team, Newcastle United against small team, Stevenage. The world watching. What was it like to be part of Stevenage? Everyone wanted to that day.

Chris Clarke: Well, of course, you know, this was- this was a fairy tale game. It was a banana skin game, because Mr Green decided the game would be played at Stevenage. So with sponsorship from The Sun Newspaper, Stevenage were on good takings for that day.

And it was- it was just unbelievable. And the fact that we beat them, we should have beat them. We had one goal disallowed and Stevenage were the better team on that day. The day Alan Shearer returned from a bad ankle injury and within a few minutes had scored that first goal. And we thought it was going to be humiliation.

But it wasn't. And I think Stevenage came out of that game heads held high.

Interviewer: Were you, on that day, in your seat above the players' tunnel?

Chris Clarke: Yes.

Interviewer: What was- what was, you know, at the end of the game, describe the scene.

Chris Clarke: What I can remember most of all, of course the elation from all the players, Paul Fairclough went to shake Kenny Dalglish's hand, Kenny Dalglish turned his back on him. That says it all for me, Newcastle.

Interviewer: Was it Stevenage's- you know, one of their proudest moments? I mean, a decade on, you could say they got their revenge.

But people see- that Newcastle game was the one that people remember if you say "The Newcastle game."

Chris Clarke: Of course, it was the famous game. As you say, the whole world was watching. And the amount of wages that Newcastle have to pay their players, Kenny Dalglish was onto a loser as soon as he came to Stevenage. Because 1/3 of the money that the away team earn from a cup game wasn't enough to

pay Newcastle's wages. So it was a real banana skin game for them.

So they were on a loser to nothing. They were expected to win, of course they were. But they drew.

Interviewer: What was the feeling when Stevenage went 1-0 down in that match?

Chris Clarke: It- it wasn't as though hope had all gone, because it was expected. All we hoped that it- we wouldn't be humiliated. And it just turned out to be absolutely perfect.

Interviewer: What was their- the scene when Giuliano Grazioli scored the equaliser, can you describe the event at that moment?

Chris Clarke: I can't ever remember seeing so many grown men crying. Crying with elation.

Interviewer: And can you- you know, can you- the ground at capacity, was that making the game extra special?

Chris Clarke: No, not...

Interviewer: Can you remember the ground being that busy before?



Chris Clarke: No, I don't think- I don't think I can, because there was a temporary stand built for the away end. So the capacity was more than the whole ground would hold on a normal game.

Interviewer: Did you go to the Newcastle away match?

Chris Clarke: Yes, I did. And in fact, that game, and I think we had 20 odd coaches going, it was the- it was the biggest ground that I personally have ever been to, Newcastle.

People were very friendly up there, because they didn't feel threatened by Stevenage. But what a lot of people- we scored a goal. They scored a goal and then I think we equalised. I think we lost 2-1 in the end.

But what the referee failed to miss was a Mark Smith clearance off the goal line, but was given as a goal.

The linesman wasn't on- in line to give a decision, but the referee awarded a goal. But what I can't understand is how the referee missed all the professional fouls that Stuart Pearce did against our players, where we should have had 100 or so different free kicks, missed all that.

But must have the eyes of an eagle to see that ball go over the line.

Interviewer: At the time, did you feel it was a goal or wasn't, in the ground?

Chris Clarke: Well, some players- some fans went down, I think, into some of the other rooms where they kept showing the replay of the goal. And my heart of hearts says of course it wasn't.

Interviewer: Can you think of a special moment that compares to the joy of the Newcastle game and the proudness that you took them to 1-1?

I mean, you know, when the team finally clinched promotion, does that feel better than Newcastle game? Were the feelings the same? Was it different emotion?

Chris Clarke: Of course cup games are one-offs and anything can happen in a cup game. Everything is on equal footing, so a cup game, if you win it you go to the next round, if you lose it you move on.

The most important thing to me is league games and I've had some fantastic experiences of wins and had some big sorrows of defeats.

Interviewer: The referee- you talked about the referee in the Newcastle match. Referees have a bad name in football and do not tend to be popular with the crowd. Would you be a referee?

Chris Clarke: I certainly wouldn't. I certainly wouldn't be a referee. Of course there are two forms of criticism. One constructive criticism and the other destructive criticism.

And to be a referee, you have to have such broad shoulders to accept that destructive criticism.

Interviewer: What do you remember of the club's first trip to the new Wembley stadium?

Chris Clarke: Well, that was great. That was great from an actual supporter, a fan of Stevenage.

What I can't understand, the other 20,000 Stevenage people that went have never come to watch another league game after that.

Interviewer: Why do- you know, the Wembley stadium that attracted, you know, as you said, 30,000 Stevenage supporters. Why weren't- why do we struggle to get the crowds at Broadhall Way?

Chris Clarke: Because Stevenage is a young club. Support is a generation thing. The majority of youngsters support the clubs their dad supported. 20 years' time we will have that type of support.

Interviewer: Is there more- is there more that can be done to help, you know, inspire a new generation of Stevenage fans?

Chris Clarke: I guess as a boy, years ago, I don't know how it is today, we played football every day of the week, 22 a side sometimes, 30 a side. And football doesn't seem to be like that.

I know as a schoolboy we used to finish school, put blazers down as goalposts and play until dusk. I don't see players- I don't see young boys doing that anymore.

Interviewer: The- but you know, back to the Wembley match, was it special for you? You know, Stevenage, the first time they'd won the trophy in the new Wembley stadium, 2-0 down.

Chris Clarke: Yes and where we expected to get goals in that game, they weren't appearing. And I should think that when half time came, our centre forward, Steve Morrison, I think was probably torn off a strip. And was told that, you know, you'd be lucky to get to a higher club than Stevenage, because of this performance.

And then he turned it around. And had a fantastic 2<sup>nd</sup> 45 minutes.

Interviewer: Did you believe that Stevenage were going to go on to win 3-2 at half time?

Chris Clarke: Yes, yes I did. Under manager Paul Fairclough, a real football brain. To play the first 45 minutes and then after a team talk, tactical changes could turn any game around.

So that's always been within Stevenage's grasp.

Interviewer: Can you remember how you celebrated the Wembley win? Was it particularly special for you? Anything different to previous celebrations?

Chris Clarke: I think I got myself on the television a bit and no, we just went home, just a family evening at home with the family.

Interviewer: Are these- are the big games important for the cameras and promoting the football club?

Chris Clarke: Yes, I guess so. I guess so.

Interviewer: Do they add something special to the fans? Does- you know, if you know that the cameras are here for a live game, does that give it something else?

Chris Clarke: No, not really. I don't sit and smile because the camera's on me.

Interviewer: When we clinched the championship and finally got promoted...

Chris Clarke: To the Football League or to the Conference?

Interviewer: To the Football League. So two years ago, and taking into reflect the sort of rollercoaster ride, can you describe the sort of- your feelings of not getting the promotion and then the struggle afterwards and then obviously the time that it took. Did you feel that it was ever going to happen?

Chris Clarke: I think I always knew it would and I think what I've learnt by coming up into this, for want of a biter expression, a

professional game now, what I have learnt is that some of these teams, the biggest things about these teams is their name.

But they are nothing to fear. I have never seen- since we've been in Division Two or Division One, I have never seen us humiliated. I have never seen- in fact, I'm surprised at the lack of football ability from these big clubs.

All they are is just a name.

Interviewer: Was it special finally getting up? Special probably isn't the right word to describe it.

Chris Clarke: Yes, as I say, I think for me it's all inevitable. And I think within two, three years it will all happen again.

Interviewer: You feel that Stevenage- you feel there's life higher for Stevenage?

Chris Clarke: I think so.

Interviewer: So last year, winning promotion in the play-off final at Old Trafford, you know, did you feel that Stevenage could keep the momentum of back-to-back wins? Did you believe last year that Stevenage could win and get promoted?

Chris Clarke: Play-offs, it's a funny thing. To win- to be certain, you must either win that league or come 2<sup>nd</sup>. Promotion- play-offs are all

one-off cup games that, you know, a team finishing in 6<sup>th</sup> can beat a team finishing 3<sup>rd</sup> and get promotion.

Interviewer: What was more special, promotion to the Football League or winning the play-off final to League One?

Chris Clarke: I can't answer that, I think they're- you know, it's like going to Wembley. You know, fantastic the first time. Second time is good, third time you've been there and done it. The edge seems to have gone off it a little bit.

Interviewer: Supporting Stevenage, it's a tribal sport. You know, you have your- you have your friends on the terraces, is there a particular game that you look forward to? Perhaps back in the old days, one that always used to stand out that was always on the calendar?

Chris Clarke: No, not for me. No, not really. There are- there are rivalries that have gone over many years. I've never really been involved with that and I think teams like Woking are a very successful team. \_\_\_\_ [0:36:39], fantastic manager.

They were always a team to beat. Always a successful team, always a successful League Cup team. And we were- we wanted to beat them.

Interviewer: Was there more excitement about playing Woking than another game in the League? Was that the one you looked for?

Chris Clarke: Not so much excitement. Maybe a fear of losing to them again, because they did have a good record against us at certain points, Woking.

Interviewer: Can you remember a particular good game for Stevenage against Woking?

Chris Clarke: Oh. One fantastic one down at Broadhall Way here, I think I'm right in saying that it was 5-0, 5-1 and that was really bittersweet.

Interviewer: Is there- is there- you know, Woking were the team to beat, as you put it, so that was an extra special sort of moment? Sort of like one over the old enemy?

Chris Clarke: Well, it was like- it was like having your bit of toast, but when it was beating Woking it was like having a bit of jam on that toast.

Interviewer: Is there anything that you miss today from our non-League years?

Chris Clarke: It's a generational thing. You know, I don't know so many of the supporters that come here now, whereas in the past, in the non-League days, you used to know every face.

Maybe it's just me stuck in the mud a bit.



Interviewer: Do you still- you still see it though as a friendly club and you come with family and friends, sit with friends or..?

Chris Clarke: No, not so much, because being a season ticket holder, I can't come with friends because I don't have a spare seat to bring friends to.

Interviewer: The team and a winning team, is that- does that have an effect on your life?

Chris Clarke: At some points, to watch- support Stevenage could be heaven and hell. One minute it's heaven and the next can be suicidal.

Interviewer: So would it be right in, you know, saying that Stevenage affects your mood? Does going to work or getting up on a Sunday or a Monday morning change depending on Stevenage's success?

Chris Clarke: Very much so. Very much so. My wife will tell you that.

Interviewer: Has it- you know, Stevenage winning 3-0 today, does that change the atmosphere of the house or..?

Chris Clarke: Of course, of course. And I think any football fan will tell you exactly the same. It's- from a non-footballing person, they

probably can't understand how a depression can last three or four days.

Interviewer: Stevenage, supporting them obviously has a big effect on sort of your time and your life, you mentioned your wife then, has it caused problems at home? You know, not necessarily like that, but you know, has following Stevenage, you know, "Are we going out here to the park or are we going to watch Stevenage?"

Chris Clarke: Holidays have always been booked around the football season for me. My wife of 40 odd years has never dared ask the question, "Who do I love the most? Her or Stevenage?"

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