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Interviewer: Okay, so can you tell me your name, please?

Keith McLellan: Yes, my name's Keith McLellan.

Interviewer: And Keith, what's your connection with Stevenage Football Club?

Keith McLellan: I've been following- I live in the local area, just down the road in Codicote and I've lived here since '95. And I've started- I followed them anyway, but I've been supporting them and coming to the games since that time.

And my biggest connection now is that my son has been to see them a lot in the last 12 months, including being a mascot on several occasions.

Interviewer: Right. So before you came to Stevenage Town, did you have any affiliations with other football teams?

Keith McLellan: Yes, I mean, I've always supported Manchester United since I was six years old and I followed football- I used to play it before I became a runner. And so I've- whenever I'm running, if I see a football match I stop and watch it. And I've been watching football ever since I was a little boy.

Interviewer: So you moved into the local area and you came along to your first Stevenage game. What prompted you to do that? Can you remember?

Keith McLellan: I think I'd always wanted to and one of my best friends, who I got to know through moving to the area, said, "Keith, let's go and watch Stevenage play." And that was it really. I just- we came and watched the game and I remember the game distinctly, because Stevenage won the game and I was- I can't remember who it was against, but I was absolutely hooked after that.

Interviewer: Right, so what in particular about that match day experience made you want to come back?

Keith McLellan: I think you- because I used to live in Wear, just down the road and I used to follow them through their early days. And then my best friend lived in Hollister and I went to school there and I used to follow them. And then I moved to Hertford and I followed them.

And I think it was the whole atmosphere of the thing and it just- the spirit of the fans, the passion and things like that got me.

And being an ex-footballer myself, only a sort of local level, it just got my juices flowing, so to speak.

Interviewer: And have you ever held a season ticket here or has it been..?

Keith McLellan: No. No, I've just come on ad-hoc.

Interviewer: And so in those early days, which league was Stevenage playing in those days?

Keith McLellan: Well, they were only playing in what was the Conference in those days. And my- one of my biggest ever memories of them in that time was when they won the Conference, but didn't get promoted.

I came here with another friend to watch the final game of the season when they were already promoted and I'm not normally one to do this sort of thing, but when they paraded the trophy around, I jumped over the barrier and ran on the pitch and kissed the trophy. Which is not something I would normally do.

Interviewer: I was going to say, that must have been quite a season.

Keith McLellan: Yes, it was. It was just disappointing that ultimately, because of the nature of the ground, I think, they weren't able to get promoted. And you thought that was their- it would be a long time before they actually reached that. They were, by far, the best team that season.

But unfortunately, due to ground regulations and things like that, they weren't able to take their place.

Interviewer: And were the supporters aware of this potential issue?

Keith McLellan: I think- I think so. I mean, I think in those days, teams knew that they had- to be entered into Football League, winning the Conference wasn't the only thing. You had to have certain regulations adhered to, to move up. And Stevenage weren't the first team not to have that and it was just a bit unfortunate really.

Interviewer: So that was- that was in the year of Westley being the manager. What memories do you have of him?

Keith McLellan: I don't think Westley was the manager, I think a guy called Fairclough was the manager then.

Interviewer: Sorry, Fairclough, I beg your pardon.

Keith McLellan: Just about a guy that showed tremendous passion and, you know, spoke a lot of sense when he was interviewed. And I think the team worked for him and they all worked as a collective.

There weren't- there were some star players, but everybody worked for everybody else and it was just- you know, they

played for the whole 90 minutes plus injury time. And even if they were struggling, they still kept going.

And you know, they had some destiny there and it was just disappointing at the time that they couldn't move up to play at a higher level. But obviously it happened eventually.

Interviewer: So what would a normal match day have been for you then?
What was your routine?

Keith McLellan: Well, just my friends would pick me up or me to pick him up.
We'd park at the car park over the road there and walk across.
And we'd go and stand over there.

Now I'm older I sit, but in those days we used to stand and jump about. But you didn't have the stand that we're looking at across there where the Becker advertising is. That was all standing in those days and we used to stand there and go for something to eat at half time and it would be just a sort of go and stand and jump about and sort all these things out.

Do you want to stop for a minute?

Keith McLellan: Is that..?

No, that's fine. So would your pre-match routine have involved drink and something to eat? Or did you come straight to the ground?

Keith McLellan: No, we used to come straight to the ground. We'd have a drink afterwards.

Interviewer: And would that be with the- with fellow supporters?

Keith McLellan: No, it would just be with whichever friends I came with to the game.

Interviewer: And in those days, how would you characterise the atmosphere around the ground?

Keith McLellan: I think the atmosphere was a lot- it was different, it was noisier. The- because most of the ground were standing, so although the crowds were probably smaller in those days than they are today, it was a lot noisier. Because you were standing up and you tended to jump about a little bit more, but yes, I think it's just a bit more boisterous in those days possibly than it is today.

Interviewer: And that season was one that Stevenage scored a lot of goals. Are there any specific games you can remember during that season?

Keith McLellan: No, not really. It's quite some time ago now and of course there's been a lot of games since then. So I just- you just remember them being at the top for quite some time and hoping that being at the top would enable them to qualify for the Football League.

And you were ever hopeful of that, because in those days, a different team was top all the time and you thought this is their one chance, as I said before.

Interviewer: And do you have any memories of that legal battle to try and get that place in the Football League?

Keith McLellan: I do vaguely, in the sense that I knew they were appealing against the decision and, you know, they had the opportunity to get the ground ready in time and despite the fact- I remember reading about it in The Telegraph or something that they were going to appeal against the fact that it was deemed their ground wasn't ready in time.

And they asked for- I think they asked for an extension, I can't remember whether they got it or not. But just the disappointment, but you know, clinging onto some sort of hope that the rules would be overturned or an exception would be made. But ultimately we knew that wouldn't happen, so it was just disappointing.

Interviewer: And the following season, obviously Fairclough had the job of, you know, bringing the players back together after that disappointment and I think they'd felt they'd won stuff and they'd got nothing for it.

Did- was there a similar feeling amongst the fans that second season?

Keith McLellan: Yes, I suppose so. I think that those that I knew, obviously there's a lot of other fans that I don't know, but you felt that it

was an opportunity- not an opportunity missed, because they did win the League. But you wondered sometimes whether- what it would have cost to get the ground into shape to get promoted could have been sorted out before.

But then, you know, most of us that stand on the terraces or sit on the terraces don't know what goes on. So...

Interviewer: Did you put it down to a lack of ambition at the time?

Keith McLellan: No, not at all. I think that it was just the rules and regulations that might have been too stringent and, you know, bureaucracy, to some extent. Because you looked around the ground, you couldn't see anything wrong with it yourself.

But then certain rules had to be adhered to and I'm sure these things are still- you never get it anymore. Teams now- obviously things have moved on a lot in Conference level football.

Most teams- you don't get a team now ever failing to be, but I'm sure they still have the same rules and regulations. And some of the teams that come up go straight back down and disappear from existence.

So one hopes that- obviously Stevenage have done exceptionally well since they've been in the Football League and long may it continue.

Interviewer: And immediately after that disappointment, Fairclough set his stall out to have a good FA Cup run. I don't know if you remember much about that FA Cup run, where they ended up in the famous ties against Newcastle United.

Keith McLellan: I do. I think it was one of those things that you can't believe your local team is playing against Newcastle with Shearer et al and the fact that Shearer played against Stevenage. And the fact that it was relatively close.

I mean, Stevenage were not outclassed in either of the games and you thought as a fan it was great for the players of Stevenage to compete against, you know, top level footballers. And it was a great experience, put Stevenage on the map and what more on the map of the football club.

And you know, every team dreams of their day in the sun and that was Stevenage's day in the sun. Obviously it was repeated at the beginning of this year, but no, it was a brilliant thing at the time. And, you know, for Stevenage to be on the football map and be in the press and all that sort of thing was a brilliant thing.

Interviewer: Did you manage to get a ticket for either of those games?

Keith McLellan: I got the ticket for the home game here. And I just remember the noise and the extra- the extra accommodation for fans being put up and the chaos of leaving the ground and getting to the ground. But the whole atmosphere, you know, the ground wasn't big enough for everyone I don't think who wanted to see it.

Interviewer: And where were you standing on that particular day?

Keith McLellan: Oh, crikey. Over there, on the far side somewhere. I don't remember exactly where. It seems a long time ago now. But I don't recognise the ground now from those days. It's changed dramatically. And for the better, I think.

Interviewer: And so Newcastle went one up fairly early on. Can you remember anything about Stevenage's equaliser?

Keith McLellan: No, I can't. I can't, honestly. I know it seems bizarre, but I can't. I can remember since then. Being to watch the games now in the last two years with my son have sort of blurred those memories really, because obviously he's been lucky enough to be a mascot a few times.

And it's for him now. I think Stevenage has moved on and my memories tend to be current over the top of the old ones, because my son's now getting involved in it. Which is great for me.

Interviewer: And was that because of the influence of his dad or is it because he's a local boy and just wants to see his local team?

Keith McLellan: Well, two things. He is a local boy and we both support Manchester United, but our local team is Stevenage and I wanted him to see football at this level, to support his local team, because I'm a great believer in that.

And the first- and he wasn't interested in football for a while and as a dad who's into football you think, "Oh, crikey." But eventually he did get interested in it and his first ever game to

watch Stevenage was when they played in the Trophy final against Barrow at Wembley the year before last.

And he's been to so many games since then and he loved that experience and he wanted more of it and though they lost to Barrow, he loved the experience. He loved the fact that he'd been to see his local team and we've been to so many games since then.

Interviewer: So his first game was at Wembley then? That must have been quite something.

Keith McLellan: Mm, to watch Stevenage. It was, because we had the hospitality as well. And...

Interviewer: So how did you get to the ground?

Keith McLellan: Well, we- I bought a hospitality package from here. We picked up the coach from here, we had breakfast on the way, we sat in the Bobby Moore suite and I'd never been to the new Wembley. I'd been to the old one, but not the new one.

And to see Stevenage there and feel part of it, and it was as very small crowd in a very, very big stadium. But it was just brilliant to see what was your local team and leave with, you know, with the other coaches.

You just felt part of a game, whereas sometimes when you go to Wembley you don't. And it was a brilliant thing for him and though Stevenage lost, he loved the day out.

Interviewer: And so were you all bedecked in Stevenage's colours that morning?

Keith McLellan: We were indeed. Particularly him. I had to buy him every- I think I bought the shop, but he absolutely loved it and...

Interviewer: So what was he wearing for the game?

Keith McLellan: Well, he wore one of these sort of- I don't know what they're called, sort of clown hats, but with lots of spikes on and bells on the top. and the tracksuit and a scarf and the gloves. And when he moved his head it was like Jingle Bells and things. But a joker hat or whatever they're called, I think.

But no, he absolutely had a brilliant time and it was just disappointing that they lost.

Interviewer: I mean, that is the life of a football fan, isn't it? Sort of expectation followed by disappointment, so perhaps he started off in the right way.

Keith McLellan: Yes, I think so. And I think sport is a great leveller. You can't win all the time and I think the downsides help you appreciate the good sides.

Interviewer: And that was the season Stevenage won promotion to the Football League.

Keith McLellan: It is.

Interviewer: Did you manage to get to any of the games, apart from the FA Cup?

Keith McLellan: No. We didn't go to any of the games, because he really wasn't into football then and he was- although he was interested in football, he didn't really want to go to any games. But when I said to him, "Look, Stevenage have made the FA Trophy final, would you like to go A, to Wembley and B, to watch Stevenage play?" and he said, "Oh, I'd love to go." And that was it really.

Interviewer: And since then, league football.

Keith McLellan: Indeed.

Interviewer: And you said that your son has been a mascot.

Keith McLellan: He has. The- he's been a mascot at least on half a dozen occasions, the first time of which was the Newcastle FA Cup game in- which I bought him as a Christmas present in January of this year, I think.

But we'd been to other games before, but he said, "Daddy, can I be a mascot one day?" and I thought what- because we'd seen the other FA Cup ties here and I thought, "What a better

game? If they get a decent team in the third round, how about getting him mascot for that?"

And when they drew Newcastle at home, here, I treated him to that as his birthday- Christmas present.

Interviewer: So there must have been a bit of competition for that, was there?

Keith McLellan: I don't know. I think there were other mascots there, but I made sure that he grabbed the captain's hand before they walked out. I think there were two other mascots, but I said to him, "Look, you make sure that you lead the team out, if you can."

Interviewer: So what was that day like for him then?

Keith McLellan: Fantastic. We- we watched the game 10 or 11 times on tape since then, just a fantastic day. Because we had hospitality here before we saw the Newcastle team turn up in their huge coach. Got some autographs, had a meal, he had a warmup.

The atmosphere was absolutely fantastic. And he will- actually, we only spoke about it today. And we- it was just a fantastic evening for him and even when we got home, because we stayed a bit here afterwards to get some more autographs.

When we got home, the phone was red hot. People had seen him on television and he- on the following Monday at school, the headmistress of the local school made a special announcement for him, that he'd been mascot for Stevenage

in the FA Cup. And everybody clapped and that wasn't it- he didn't know that was happening.

And it was absolutely fantastic. Brilliant day for me, but a proud day for me. But a fantastic day- evening for him.

Interviewer: So as the dad of a mascot, what was your- what was your experience of the day then? Did you get good seats and..?

Keith McLellan: Yes, we had reasonable seats. We were down towards one end, near the Newcastle fans. But it's just all buzzing around. You're trying to take photographs, you're trying to make sure he's in the right place to soak up the atmosphere.

And you're standing on the pitch, taking a million photographs to capture the thing and video him and not be in people's way. And just the noise and everything's happening so fast. And the game almost blurred with everything that's going on.

And you cannot believe that it's all happening and it's over in a blur. But it was- and you're just numb afterwards. Because we went back to the hospitality where we were and everyone was talking about- it was just brilliant.

I just, you know, I can still remember it now. Very vividly.

Interviewer: And were the Newcastle players around after the game or was it just the Stevenage ones?

Keith McLellan: They- the Newcastle players were around. Some were disappointed, but others were a little bit chatty. And I think that, you know, they just wanted to get home, it's a long way for

them. But some of them would sign autographs and some wouldn't, that's up to them.

But I think they got a bit of a rude awakening and on the day, Stevenage deserved to win. They took their chances and it was one of those things that, you know, if it happened 100 times, maybe Stevenage would only win 5 or 6, but this was one of those times.

Interviewer: And outstanding performances on that day came from..?

Keith McLellan: I think everybody. I think from the management down to every player. I wouldn't want to single anybody out. You have to single the management team out definitely for the tactics.

But Stevenage- sorry, Newcastle were never really- you know, you couldn't say that Stevenage didn't deserve to win. They took their chances. You get lucky decisions in games, but I think everybody deserves a tremendous pat on the back, because it wasn't a fluke result.

Stevenage deserved to win on that particular day in that particular match. It's the 11 v 11 and Stevenage deserved the win.

Interviewer: And when your son got home that evening, did it make it all worthwhile for you?

Keith McLellan: Most definitely, because by the time we got home, he was buzzing and we saw the photographs that I took on the camera. We played the video back that I'd taken and people

had seen it on ESPN, I think it was. And he was still reliving it and things like that. The whole thing was just tremendous.

I know that he didn't sleep very well that night, but with excitement, and we just couldn't believe what we'd witnessed that evening. It was a great evening out.

Interviewer: And the rest of the season didn't end too badly either. Are there other games you remember from last season?

Keith McLellan: I think not particularly. I just think that that particular performance and the atmosphere that was created...

Because at the point, at that particular point of the Newcastle game, I don't think- I think Stevenage weren't exactly struggling, but they were in the lower reach of the division.

And I think that performance, together with obviously the one against Reading where they were, you know, they gave Reading a very, very good match in the next round of the FA Cup, the fourth round here, gave them the enthusiasm and the confidence to pick up results.

And I remember they went on for a run of about seven or eight wins, particularly towards the latter end of the season on the bounce. Which took them from mid table to a play-off position. And obviously the rest is history now.

We managed to win the play-off final at Old Trafford and it was- maybe the Newcastle game was a stepping stone to them achieving what would have seemed an unlikely promotion at that time.

Interviewer: And so did you- did you manage to get along to the Accrington game in the semi-final of the..?

Keith McLellan: We were. We were in the Accrington game, I think it was a sunny evening game. I remember the Accrington game, I think they had a drummer in their crowd at the far end there, behind their goal who was drumming all the time. He was drumming for 90 odd minutes of the game.

And Stevenage did well in that game, but you're always fearful of the away game that they hadn't done enough, but it proved that they had done enough. Because Chris Beardsley scored a late goal, I think, to make sure they progressed into the final.

And you just were taking one game at a time really. You thought they've done well to make the play-offs, they've done well to get through to the play-off final.

But again, in a one-off game against Torquay, who were playing well, most pundits you'd seen favoured Torquay to get through. But in a one-off football game, you never know.

Interviewer: Who's- who's your son's favourite player at the moment?

Keith McLellan: Lawrie Wilson, both he and I.

Interviewer: And what is it particularly that he likes about Lawrie's style of play?

Keith McLellan: Well, I think for Lawrie for us, he chases everything down, he's always on the move, he's very committed to the cause, an unselfish player.

I think you often hear a phrase, "Puts a shift in." There are other players that we like, but our favourite one is Lawrie, because he- whenever he plays, he never gives less than 100%.

He is perpetually on the move and he's encouraging his teammates and things like that. And we both like that in a player.

Interviewer: And how did Wilson do in that momentous final against Torquay?

Keith McLellan: I can't really remember. I think it was one of those things where we weren't actually there and we were watching it, because unfortunately we'd booked up to go on holiday that weekend.

And so we watched it in a bar on the East Coast, in Hemsby near Great Yarmouth. And you were very conscious of the whole team, rather than Lawrie in that particular...

The only thing I can remember about the game is the goal that Mousinho scored, because the rest of the game we were just thinking, you know, "Can we get a goal? Can we get a goal?" and then "Can we hang onto it?"

You know, they had to defend manfully. The defence played brilliantly well. There weren't many attempts on goal in the whole game, it was a very, very tense affair. But Stevenage

scored the one crucial goal, a great goal by Mousinho and a goal fit to win any game.

Interviewer: So comparing the team when you first started going at Conference site back in the mid-90s there to the current site, what similarities are there and what differences?

Keith McLellan: Well, I don't know if there are any similarities. I think the big differences are that it's a lot more, and it had to be, a lot more professional. A lot- there's far more warmup done, the drills, the tactics, the speed of the game. It's just moved on many, many fold.

It's a very, you know, different game now and definitely- I wouldn't say the players didn't take it seriously before, but it's- there's a lot more build-up to the game than there used to be.

As I say, the warmup alone is very, very different to how it was then. The drills that people do and it's just very, very much more professional.

Interviewer: And what do you think of the management structure at Stevenage and in particular the leadership that Westley gives the team?

Keith McLellan: Well, I think he's grabbed the team by the scruff of the neck and I think he's just a great motivator. And I think, you know, we can hear him from the stands and I think that, you know, he makes his wishes known to the players.

And I will say that there are other members of staff, Dino as well, the assistant manager and the other coaching staff that are there, they're very encouraging to the team. And I think it's a difficult job that they have, because they're moving up a level all the time. And it is- you know, players coming in.

But the core of the players is still probably here from two years ago. And it's a difficult- it's a difficult league. The standard is difficult. But I think they're doing a very, very good job.

Interviewer: Opposition fans and coaches seem to criticise the Stevenage team for being over-direct and over-physical. Do you think that's a fair criticism?

Keith McLellan: I- I don't know. One of the criticisms sometimes that Stevenage have that people say is they don't score enough goals. And they often play very narrow.

But every single player in the Stevenage team knows his role. And they play to their strengths. And they do a good job.

They, you know, they're not- they're never going to be Barcelona, but anybody that plays Stevenage will know that they've been in a game. And they tend to build from the defence, I think, which is very important, I think, to have a solid back four, back five, including the keeper. And build from there and the spine of the team.

I mean, I think Roberts is a great captain and he leads by example. You know, he'll put- Roberts will put his head in where other people put their feet. And that- he's a great captain and I think, you know, as I say, they- in any type of football, you've got to have a strong defence.

And they build from that strength that they have and I think yes, they could score more goals. But no one really hammers Stevenage. You know, they'll lose a lot of games by the odd goal, and I think, as I say, whenever I've seen Stevenage play, I'm sure the opposition would say that they- Stevenage gave them one hell of a game.

Interviewer: Two seasons ago, all those players were Conference players and they were playing alongside another Conference player at the time, Steve Morrison, who's gone on to represent Wales internationally and has gone on to score goals in the premiership.

Keith McLellan: Yes, scored today.

Interviewer: Is there anybody else in the Stevenage team who you feel could make the grade of that level, if given the opportunity?

Keith McLellan: I- that's difficult to say, because I think that there probably are quite a few. I wouldn't want to necessarily pick anybody out. I think that they're doing very well where they are. I think- you know, it's a tough level, I'm sure, to move up from the level that they are.

I think the players are improving all the time. To move up to premiership level, that is- I follow Manchester United and I've seen them in the flesh and that is a tough, tough level.

And you know, Stevenage are very fit. Don't get me wrong, they are very fit. You'll very rarely see Stevenage players

flagging at the end of the game. They go for 90 minutes plus, but I am sure that, you know, they take one level at a time.

They need to consolidate what they have, in my opinion, which I think they are doing. Take each game as it comes and let's see how it goes. But there's some potential there, most definitely.

Interviewer: Stevenage is quite a- quite a sizeable town these days and two years ago, when Stevenage were in the Conference, they were pulling in quite reasonable crowds for that level. Those crowds haven't increased in the way that you might have thought they could have done. What would you put that down to?

Keith McLellan: I think the cost of football now is very, very expensive. And it-gone are the days where you could both get in for £5 each and things like that. It costs a lot to go and watch football.

I'm not saying that you don't get value for money, but it does cost a lot. And the games come thick and fast.

You've got 46 League games, you've got Cup games on top of that and people have other demands on their resources, so it is difficult to keep going week after week. And you only have to look at some of the crowds in the premiership. For some clubs they are sparse, particularly for midweek games.

And it's hard to finance that and even now, Stevenage have now changed their policy and rightly so, I think. They're in a business and they've gone into category A, B and C games now, because of the level that they are.

And it's expensive to come and watch football at whatever level. And people have other demands on their money, so I think that's why crowds don't come.

I think Stevenage still get a decent crowd and I think maybe if they did kids for a fiver or whatever, which I know even some premiership teams do, they would get bigger crowds.

But I can understand, you know, they've got to run as a business.

Interviewer: What would it mean to you if tomorrow morning you woke up and Stevenage Football Club didn't exist?

Keith McLellan: I think it would be a really big loss to the area, because I think football, even from when I was young, people in an area, particularly if they're sporty and football is very popular, love to identify with a local team. At whatever level. Because there are hundreds and hundreds of football teams around the country.

Stevenage are very lucky that they've now got a Football League club that exists and does well. And people like to identify with that, so it will be a terrible situation and one would hope that that would never happen.

Interviewer: So final question, Stevenage until you die?

Keith McLellan: Most definitely. Most definitely. And passing on through my son, because it's- one of the best things as well is that when you come to a club a lot, you say hello to the same people and Stevenage officials here have seen William and I quite a few

times and they say hello to us. And you feel like you belong much more to a local club than you do to a great big club. So yes, absolutely so.

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