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START AUDIO

Roger Lewis: I'm Roger Lewis. I work in Potters Bar.

I'm a volunteer worker on match days on Gate 6.

Interviewer: Brilliant.

Could you tell me a little bit more about your role in the Club?

Roger Lewis: I actually came down to support the Club in 1990. The wife told me to go and watch a game because I was getting under her feet.

I had to come down to watch Stevenage. It was pure chance.

I came down and watched the game. It was of a good standard and they played well, but what struck me was the camaraderie and the banter on the touchline.

It was an old rickety stand, but it was such a good laugh and the football that was being played was of quite a good standard. They looked like they knew what they were doing.

That started me off.

I came back for the following home games. I was interested because I wanted to get back into football myself, having packed it up for different reasons.

I was watching more what the team were doing and what the Manager was doing with the team, with a view to actually going and running a local team.

It was soon apparent that, really, coming down to Stevenage was probably a better option because the football was fantastic.

They were doing quite well, near, obviously, the top of the league in 1990, and Paul Fairclough was then the Manager. I was watching the way he handled the players.

One of the things that struck me about Paul, and why I've got an affinity with him, was that when I was managing our local team, Kimpton Rovers, when I'd had my team talk and they were warming up, I would go then and speak to individual players.

Not all them but just a few individuals, giving them final instructions.

As a sign of insecurity for me, I thought, "Paul did exactly the same," which elevated me into, "Oh, I'm doing something right, so that's a plus point."

Watching him man-manage then, he was such a fantastic motivator. He was getting 110% effort and support from these players, and outperforming teams, week in, week out, at that level.

They went on to win three leagues on the trot.

I'm not good with names, but the first player that comes to mind in those days is Martin Gittings.

He was a forward. I played up front, so I had a natural leaning towards watching a centre forward play, and he got goals.

He's a legend here, quite rightly.

He was a centre forward for whom you would just put the ball at the far post and he'd knock it in for you, time in, time out. He would score more than he missed.

That was my first recollection of coming to Stevenage.

I enjoyed the football, firstly, but the banter on the line...

There was a soul at the Club. I always felt that, at that time, it had a heart, and I thought, "Well, this will do. I'll come and watch this."

I never, ever did do anything else other than watch Stevenage then. I came, week in, week out.

Whilst Paul Fairclough was doing the managing at that time, they went up in the leagues. They finally got into the Conference.

To get into the Conference, we were also playing League teams in the third round of the FA Cup.

We were going to games like Cambridge away. I went to that one. That was my first away FA Cup fixture, and to come away beating a team in the League was fantastic.

Interviewer: What was the atmosphere like that day?

Roger Lewis: I remember it as a packed house. It must have been.

Cambridge hasn't improved, other than that the end that we stood has now got a proper stand in it. It's brand new. The rest of the club is exactly the same.

It was rocking. It really was good.

To see your team beating a League team in the manner in which Paul got the players to beat these teams...

It was pure football. They played to the strengths. Every shot was cheered. Every bad pass was cheered because you were trying to motivate those players as well to get them up and running.

Those games, along with the Swindon game...

I was in America at the time, and I flew back on the morning of the game, jetlagged.

Mike Litchfield, who works as the main receptionist on match days, picked me up and went up with Boro Bear, Dave Smith, to the game.

I don't remember getting there as I was asleep, but we got there.

It was howling rain, and I only had a Mickey Mouse poncho to cover me from the rain.

Interviewer: From Disneyland? (Laughter)

Roger Lewis: I had a jacket underneath and that saved my life.

It really did, because I would have been frozen.

As it was, one of the other lads didn't have a coat, so Boro Bear gave him his coat and he wore the full fishing tackle gear

that he'd worn overnight. He looked like he was going to go down the sewer and clean it, but it was the stuff to wear. The rain and the wind were in your face.

We were down that right end for that winning goal. The goalkeeper kicked it out. It blew back, and I think it was Graz who put the ball in the back of the net for the winner at Swindon.

Those two games were Stevenage, the underdog, taking on the bigger teams.

As we were progressing through the league into the Conference and then going on, winning the Conference and still matching these teams and beating these League teams, it showed you the style of manager that Paul Fairclough was, along with being a fantastic guy.

Interviewer: Would you say that he's had a main role in making Stevenage go up the League?

Roger Lewis: Oh, yes.

Luckily enough, I've been here since 1990, so this is rich history that I've been involved with. People will look back at it and say, "How lucky I was."

Paul got us to the stage where there was a plan. He was moving with the players and the style of football as well.

It was attractive football. It was good to watch and good on the eye.

He got the players playing to their strengths, managing, probably, on a shoestring, and getting the best out of these players.

They were part-time players. They weren't full-time professionals.

They were matching players that were getting a weekly wage, and doing it really well.

Then, come to the Leyton Orient game. We beat them at Leyton Orient. Peter Shilton brought down our forward. He didn't get sent off, but we still beat them.

Then, you go to Birmingham, with Andy Green and, "Welcome to Broadhall Way." A brilliant start.

The atmosphere for these games is fantastic. Stevenage people get behind the team. They don't come on a Saturday as much as they should, but they get behind the team when it really matters.

You've only got to see the FA Trophy Final when we took 25,000 there for the first ever Wembley appearance.

That shows you what you can achieve. I know there were reasons for people going that wouldn't normally go.

Going back to Paul Fairclough's time, those were generated by the television coverage, certainly for the Newcastle game, and the way he was actually putting things in the paper to generate the interest.

Then, when we played Newcastle here, he'd psychologically beaten them anyway.

He and Victor Green had worked the oracle with the paper. I think it was the 'Sun', if I remember rightly. They were supporting us.

There was a lot of anger from the Club that they wanted to take it back to Newcastle because they didn't think the ground was good enough.

We got the right to play the game, and from that point on, I think Newcastle were on the rack, because they came to the Club as the big boys.

As I say, I got asked by a Sky reporter, "How do you think this 'David and Goliath' game is going to go?"

I said to them, "I don't see it like that. It may be to you people that it's 'David and Goliath', but Paul Fairclough has got these players believing in themselves, so there's not much between them. I don't think we'll get beaten."

We didn't get beaten.

Interviewer: You made the right prediction, then?

Roger Lewis: I made the right prediction that day.

We didn't actually get beaten up there because the goal wasn't a proper goal. It didn't go over the line, and technology has proven that.

That's another thing. We were out, but it was the way Paul was bringing that team along.

I related to what he was doing. It must have been hard work getting someone who drives a van during the day to a game, having them ready to play a certain level of football, and being able to do it.

It was fantastic.

Interviewer: That's brilliant.

Could you tell me a bit about your role working as a gatekeeper here?

Roger Lewis: Yes, on match days, I do Gate 6, which is for players, players' families with concession tickets, scouts, and the press. They all come through my gate.

I obviously don't do it myself. There's another steward there, who's a paid steward. I'm a volunteer, so I'm actually there for any anomalies that turn up, and there are anomalies.

It's a very difficult gate to run because you'll get all sorts of stories.

Interviewer: Really?

Roger Lewis: Yes.

Interviewer: Have you got any good ones that you could tell?

Roger Lewis: Well, people will come and say, "I've forgotten my ticket," here, there and everywhere, and if they've got a Geordie accent or something like that, as they're certainly away supporters or whatever, they'll try anything.

"Oh, my mate is in there. Can I just go and see him?" and all that sort of stuff.



That used to be Conference football. You would get that all of the time because the gate was open. It was not a turnstile situation.

I joined at the same time that Phil Wallace took over the Club. I'm his lucky mascot, by the way.

Interviewer: Oh, brilliant. (Laughter)

Roger Lewis: I wouldn't work for Victor Green. I wouldn't come down and do anything.

Once Phil took over, I worked with Sam Bick.

Now, Sam Bick has passed away, but he was the General down there. He was a big guy - a big Guardsman, but a friendly, nice, soft-spoken man.

I got on really well with Sam.

People would walk past Sam without a ticket or whatever, but they were the volunteers as well.

You had to learn the faces of the volunteers. He never stopped them because he knew them.

I had to pick up these anomalies, if you like.

You obviously confront people when they haven't got a ticket, but you soon become the person...

Sam passed away three or four years ago. He was such a nice bloke and I got on well with him.

It was an easy job to do the gate with Sam because he knew who was what.

Then, as Sam was no longer with us, I took over that role and all of the faces then had to learn a new face, which was me.

It's fun to do it, but it is hard work.

Interviewer: You really enjoy it?

Roger Lewis: I do enjoy it. I certainly enjoy meeting the families of players that come through the gate.

I've got some that I'd like to mention, like Jason Goodliffe's family.

Jason was, in my opinion, the best captain we had because he was an all-round captain.

He captained England and played for England here. He was our captain.

He captained by not only the way he played, but he put his body in front of anything that was coming. It was a 110% effort.

He could read a game so beautifully, and was a gentleman and a friend as well.

His family become friends, so much so that they gave me some cufflinks when Jason left the Club, which was a nice present. There was no reason for them to do these things, but they were genuinely nice people.

The Club, to be honest, generally has nice people in it.

Interviewer: They must have really appreciated what you did.

Roger Lewis: Well, you look after them and make sure their tickets are there.

I used to look after the teamsheets, so I'd been given a wad of teamsheets. If I had a few left over, I would go and see Jason's family and say, "Look, do you want a teamsheet, because they'll be left and thrown away?"

They appreciated that kind of thing.

I had a joke with them at Rushden once. We were up there on a scouting ticket, and Jason was playing for them.

We went to see Jason play, and his family were there. I actually went with a teamsheet down to his dad and said, "Do you want another teamsheet?"

We got a big laugh out of that one, but they were friends. They weren't just family. They were friends in there.

Interviewer: Yes, so you've made a lot of friends as well working here?

Roger Lewis: Yes.

Stuart Lewis, who played for us under Mark Stimson, presented me with his England shirt that he wore in November 2007 against Finland for Paul Fairclough.

Paul runs the England C team now.

That was lovely. His parents came through the gate as normal.

"Have you seen Stuart?"

"No."

"Go and see him. Go and find him."

I organised things. Then, I went to find him and got him out of the changing room.

He came out with an England shirt, signed, which was special to me.

Other players:

Ronnie Henry - everybody knows that he captained the side that got us to the first Wembley final. We won it against Kidderminster 3-2, and were 2-0 down at half-time. We'd not played as badly as that before.

Ronnie lifted the cup.

Now, his granddad played for Tottenham Hotspur, and would come through the gate to watch young Ronnie play, so I related to his granddad because I watched him, as a boy, play.

If you've got teamsheets, you pass them on to these people, and you generally get a rapport with them.

To this day, Ronnie's family come through.

His young son is called Louie, which is my name. That's my nickname, Louie, so we relate to each other.

It is good fun. You can have a good laugh doing the job you do.

You're also helping.

You see, if you're helping, it doesn't matter, in any way, shape or form...

I still work now, but when I retire, I'm sure I'll come down and do something to help the Club.

I do as much as I can on match days. I do a little bit of the hospitality, but I don't get called upon to do much of that because I'm looking after that gate.

The scouts come through.

Interviewer: Is there anyone famous that's come through or special to you?

Roger Lewis: We've had Kevin Keegan come through as a VIP, but you get all sorts of people who are from my era of football.

Steve Perryman: he's the Director of Football at Exeter. A lovely man.

John Hollins. He played for Chelsea. He will sign anything for anybody.

Harry Redknapp.

These people who you see on the television being interviewed are genuinely nice people.

Interviewer: Did you get to talk to them, then?

Roger Lewis: Oh, yes.

We used to have Spurs Reserves up here, so you used to get all of the players that weren't playing in the first team - Ferdinand and players like that.

I am going back a few years.

Scouts would watch these players because they would then go on loan to their club. You would get scouts coming from all sorts of...

I just remembered Billy Jennings.

Billy Jennings played for West Ham in a Cup Final.

I played with Billy for Watford in a game. He doesn't remember me, but when he comes through, that's a reminder of days gone by for me.

He actually played against a friend of mine, John Mitchell, who I did play with in that Cup Final.

With all these people, you can relate in age, but, also, football is the key thing that links you.

Interviewer: Is there anyone specifically from Stevenage who has been scouted and gone higher up recently?

Roger Lewis: Not so much scouted, I would say.

George Boyd was a player who came through our youngsters.

I always thought that George had something. There was doubt whether he had the stamina.

He was a youngster at Charlton and got rejected at 14. He came here and he just had a way of beating players.

As an ex-forward, I loved the way he went past a player without thinking.

He had something, but people said he was a bit frail.

Still, he's now gone on to Peterborough and played for Scotland.

Yes, players have come. Barry Hayles is the most notable Premiership player that's gone from this club.

Paul Fairclough had him as a left back and put him at centre forward. He never looked back, Barry Hayles. He went on to Fulham to play in the Premiership.

Interviewer: Wow.

Do they ever come back to see the team?

Roger Lewis: They're lovely people.

Barry Hayles would probably be here if he hasn't got a game.

I think he's playing in Devon somewhere now. He's still playing.

They are genuinely nice people, and when they see you, they will recognise you and speak to you.

Interviewer: They will stop and have a chat?

Roger Lewis: Oh, yes. There are no airs or graces with a lot of the players. I can't name any.

With Efe Sodje, a Nigerian international, we went to Gillingham to watch a game. He wasn't playing. He saw us in the street and got us two complimentary tickets. He just recognised us.

“Hello, lads. What are you doing? Coming to watch the game? Stay.”

He got us two tickets.

They just remember you, and it's fondness for Stevenage. That's what it is.

Interviewer: Do you feel it's different compared to Premier sides because there's that kind of thing going that probably wouldn't happen higher up the leagues?

Roger Lewis: You can relate it to how Wimbledon in the past have gone up the leagues.

Blackpool is the most recent I can think of. Ian Holloway is a typical motivating manager who has got the best out of players. They got into the Premiership.

Brilliant, but the Premiership is such a hard place to stay. You've got to then spend money because the other teams are spending the money.

That's the difference.

With Stevenage, we don't owe any money. Phil Wallace runs quite a tight ship. He's a businessman. He's making inroads into all of the things that you need to progress as a small club into a bigger club.

We've got various revenues now. We've got a first-team training base down in Bragbury, and Shephalbury has come along with the training. That's an income stream now.

The away stand has been built, obviously, since 1998 when Newcastle came down and stayed on their scaffolding.



Yes, it's all progressing, but you need to get people through the door.

Interviewer: You must have seen how they've progressed to now being in League One and 13<sup>th</sup> in that league.

Could you tell me a bit about what you've experienced here?

Roger Lewis: Well, the quickness of it has staggered me.

If you'd said to me three years ago, "Well, you'll be playing in League One and then you'll be playing Sheffield Wednesday and beating them 5-1," the way we played...

That's the best football that I've seen at this club for 45 minutes - the first half.

Interviewer: That particular match?

Roger Lewis: That particular match.

To say we would be in that league three years ago, I would think you'd been dreaming.

Now, I'm going through a rich vein of history. From 1990 to now, this is rich stuff.

All teams must plateau, and we haven't plateaued yet, but I think we're coming to that level.

The Manager, in Graham Westley, John Dreyer, Dino, and the Chairman in place, who...

As I've said, we don't owe any money, and he's progressing the Club, when other football teams - Plymouth, Yeovil and these teams - are down the bottom of the leagues and were big clubs.

It's evolving into something.

We're a new town, and Crawley have just gone into League One as a new town. There are big similarities there, and it will be interesting to see how things progress from there in 30 years' time.

Well, I won't be around in 30 years' time, but I'm hoping that it will be...

Well, if Wimbledon can go in the Premiership, I don't see why we can't.

That's a dream, but I never would have thought that we'd have been in this situation three years ago.

In League Two doing very well, yes, but not in the middle of the table in League One and beating teams who were icons of football like Sheffield Wednesday.

It's fabulous stuff.

There were 5,000 in the ground. That was a midweek game.

Interviewer: Wow, that's impressive.

Roger Lewis: We need to get our gate up to 5,000 of our own supporters.

That's gone up from a 1,500 core in the Conference to 2,700 or 2,800 now.

Yes, it's all going in the right direction, and the football is going in the right direction as well.

Interviewer: Do you feel that a lot of hard work has gone in over these past years to get that done?

Roger Lewis: Yes, without a doubt.

The players do not come in at 10:00am, go home at 2:00pm, and go down the betting shop. They do a full shift of hours. They do as many hours as I work.

I know that for a fact. I think that's the ethic that Graham Westley has got within the Club.

They are all young players playing for him. They are the original players that were in the Conference and that won the Conference for him.

There's only one player that's come through. Two players, we've bought, but they're not megastars.

We could grab back Barry Hayles and these other players that have progressed on, but he's going for younger players and hungry players, and they are playing for him, without a shadow of doubt.

Interviewer: The players are working hard as well to get there?

Roger Lewis: Very hard, yes.

Interviewer: How often do they train?

Roger Lewis: Every day.

Interviewer: Every day?

Roger Lewis: Oh, it's a full shift.

Interviewer: Including weekends?

Roger Lewis: Saturday is the match day. They probably get Sunday off.

I don't know it for a fact, but they probably would get Sunday off. If they play badly, then they might not.

They do get time out, but they do work very hard.

I know that for a fact, and players will say that they work hard.

You get styles of managers, who say you can burn people out on the training pitch.

It doesn't seem to be happening at Stevenage, and I think we're envied now.

We're a hard place to come to. People don't like coming to Stevenage to play us. It will be a hard game for them and they've got everything to lose because we're normally the underdog.

We're not so much now.

Interviewer: They must be intimidated now because of the speed at which you've come up the league?

Any team must be slightly intimidated to come here.

Roger Lewis: Yes.

As I say, it's football that motivates me, mainly. I'm a football person and then I'm Stevenage. The two go together.

I watch Stevenage at every home game, but I probably wouldn't recognise the team as they go away because I don't watch them away. They will play a different style of football.

Other scouts have got to do that. When they come here, they will know that our number four doesn't play in midfield. He's centre forward.

The numbers mean nothing in football these days. You need to know where those players come...

A lot of our players can mix and match. They're flexible. Our centre forward can play left back, and our left back can play left midfield.

All these players have different qualities, and that's what Graham is doing.

He changes the time within the 90 minutes, let alone week to week, so nobody knows what to expect from us but only a hard game and an entertaining game.

I don't think you can come here two weeks on the trot and say that you haven't been entertained at some point in time because it is good football. It's good to watch.

Certainly, as a supporter, they're good times because we're doing well.

Interviewer: There's a good atmosphere as well?

Roger Lewis: Yes.

In the ground, generally, for big games, that goes without saying because, with the away support, the stand actually echoes the sound.

You need the home support down there, really, but that was built with FA money so I think we're legally bound to put the away supporters in there.

The East Terrace gives its full...

They've been phenomenal since we've been in the League, the supporters. The youngsters that are coming through are really doing their bit.

The money is coming in from the hospitality that I see and try and help with. That's more than paying its way.

Interviewer: Brilliant.

Is there anything else you'd like to talk about?

Roger Lewis: It's the people of the Club - the people who I've met and the managers.

As I say, it was Paul Fairclough when I first came down. I class him as a friend now. He'll speak to me today, I'm sure, and we'll have a chat.

He invited me and Mike Litchfield down to the England C final with Belgium at Oxford, to be in the VIP lounge as his guests. That was fantastic for me.

Interviewer: What's it like in a VIP lounge?

A lot better, probably.

Roger Lewis: Well, you get food and you get looked after.

When I say, "his guest", it was an England game. Scott Laird was playing at left back, and Scott is a lovely lad.

These tickets aren't just for volunteer people, and Paul remembers people. That's the sort of person he is.

I'm well looked after here in that respect by the Club.

When we've had cup finals at Wembley or the play-off final at Old Trafford, I've worked on those days in the hospitality coaches, but I don't class it as working.

I'm going to watch the game...

Interviewer: How is the atmosphere on the coaches?

Roger Lewis: It's fantastic.

Interviewer: Is it really enjoyable?

Roger Lewis: Yes.

They're people that, generally, you don't see week in, week out, but, mostly, you do.

You've got a mixture in there.

They bring their kids and you try and have a good atmosphere on the coach. It's not a rowdy atmosphere.

It certainly was a bit rowdy coming home after the win at Old Trafford.

Because we've had successful times in those finals, then you tend to remember those more than the ones...

"We lost against Barrow. Okay, we won the league that year."

These are still good times.

I'm happy to come here on a Saturday. I enjoy it. I am looked after by the Club. I know they value all of the volunteers, because without the volunteers, the Club would not run properly.

It wouldn't run because it costs a lot of money.

Interviewer: You do feel genuinely valued as a volunteer here?

Roger Lewis: Yes.

As I say, if you do it for nothing, you do it for love - the love of football and the love of Stevenage.

I'm not a Stevenage lad. I come from St Albans, but I moved here in 1972 when I got married.



Generally, it's all going in the right direction. With the way they play their football and the people you meet, you could say, 98% of the time, that everything is sweet, really.

I'll carry on doing it as long as they want me to, and when I retire, I'm sure I'll come down just to say, "Do you want anything done?" because I'll have time on my hands.

Interviewer: You definitely love the game?

Roger Lewis: Oh, the game is the main thing, but it's...

Interviewer: Yes, it's a bonus to have?

Roger Lewis: I was very lucky with what happened to me that Saturday when the wife said, "Go and see a game of football. Go on."

I looked at and I saw that Stevenage were at home, and I came down.

Really, it did change my life in that respect because I would have gone on to perhaps run a club somewhere else, but at a lower level.

You can enjoy watching how things should be done from the lower levels.

I've loved Non-League football because I've played Non-League football. Not at a very high standard, but I have played it, so you understand the game.

Well, you think you do.

I ran the Under 15s for the Supporters' Association when they were second from bottom and needed a manager.

We ended up second from top the next season on. We did really well.

They paid all their subscriptions as well, so I was quite happy to be one of the top bods in that respect.

Yes, I would do anything for the Club.

Clive Abrey, the Commercial Manager, is basically who I work for at the Club. He's the salt of the earth, and you would do anything for these people.

The Club will go from strength to strength as long as the volunteers are respected and valued.

Interviewer: That's brilliant.

Is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish?

Roger Lewis: No.

I just hope that the Club goes from strength to strength.

I'm sure I'll meet a load of people here now that I haven't seen for years. I'll stay for hours now. I'm supposed to go home, but I probably will stay for hours.

Interviewer: Well, it is Saturday, so your wife should be okay with that.  
(Laughter)

Roger Lewis: Yes. (Laughter)

Well, we're away at Bury today, so I'm not going to go to that game.

It's just that people that are here now. This is the next phase.

I've gone through two phases, I believe:

The Paul Fairclough era of us winning the league and not being able to go up; all of the trials and tribulations after all the FA Cup triumphs that we had, with the fantastic atmospheres in the ground; and wishing, on the Sunday, that the next game was today.

Then, you move to the next era, which is Graham Westley's second time here of being successful.

Now, I think we should reach a plateau.

Graham won't want to hear that.

You've got to then move again because the next level is a major, major level.

If this little club with 3,000 people coming through the gate can do it, then they're going to need a lot more support.

I hope they get it.

I'll be around to help them, that's for sure.

END AUDIO

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