

Q&A

STEVE HARDY

Speaking to *FGIF* is Midlands based **Steve Hardy** - super hopper and avid programme collector. In addition to contributing reports and photos, Steve also compiles the highly regarded *UK Non-League Programme Database*. Having watched football for nearly sixty years, Steve takes us back to his early days supporting his beloved Reading and tells us his vast programme collection (with some issues even dating back to the early 1900's); his eclectic taste in music and his passion for fungi. We hope you enjoy what is cracking read....

FGIF: Steve, firstly tell us what encouraged you to get into football?

Steve: It is all my Mothers fault. I was recovering from the mumps in 1966 and she decided that as a treat, she would take me to a football match at Oxford United. It has been all downhill since then really!

FGIF: Which teams did you support when you were growing up and the reason behind this?

Steve: I have been a Reading supporter since February 1967. When all my Oxford United supporting friends took me to watch Oxford at Reading and despite the inevitable defeat for Reading, I decided they were my team. It has been a long depressing journey through thin and even thinner times since then.

FGIF: What was the first game you attended and what are your memories of it?

Steve: My first league match was Oxford United v Millwall in March 1966 and first non-league game was a week later when I visited my local club for Didcot Town v Morris Motors.

FGIF: How many years have you been a hopper?

Steve: Well, since March 1966 really, so 54 years now.

FGIF: What is the best goal your have ever seen?

Steve: No doubt about this one. Robin Friday of Reading with his cracker of a goal v Tranmere in March 1976.

FGIF: We know how much you love collecting programmes. When did you start collecting non-league programmes?

Steve: It was after my lad was born in 1977. I couldn't take him to Reading in his pram, so he and I would trundle off to all our local clubs every Saturday and non league programmes from our visits became an obsession.

FGIF: Tell us about your involvement in the Non-League database?

Steve: The late Ian Runham helped all us collectors when he started issuing his paper copies of the database in 1991. After many years of periodic updates, he asked me if I would like to take it on. I was delighted to do so, and managed to persuade Martin to host what had by now become a digital database. Without doubt we all owe Ian a sincere debt of gratitude for all his efforts.

FGIF: Steve, tell us what your collection consists of.

Steve: My non-league collection consists of one-per-club from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Ladies and Sunday clubs, with the latter being my favourite. I currently have c.8300 different clubs in total, dating back from 1903 to the present day.

FGIF: Do you share your hobby on any of the social media platforms?

Steve: Yes. I see it as a pleasure to share my non-league programme collection with other collectors. I currently write about old programmes daily on a twitter site called @NonLgeProgs. Given that I am about twice the age of most of the kids on there, it gives me a perfect platform to show them what they have missed from the past.

FGIF: Do you have any other collections?

Steve: Only from other sports like Rugby league, where I collect programmes from games I have been to.

FGIF: Do you subscribe to any soccer magazines?

Steve: No, none.

FGIF: Do you think there is a future for non league programme collecting?

Steve: This is a very pertinent question in these days of online-only programmes. You might be surprised to hear me say that I don't think there is a future for collecting on the same grand scale as I do. The number of serious collectors has fallen dramatically in recent years, and I can see this continuing as there seems to be no new young blood coming in to our hobby. People will still collect their local club or favourite league programmes I hope, but collecting everything is a dying art.

FGIF: If you didn't watch football, what other hobbies would you probably follow?

Steve: I have a love for fungi, so would probably carry on photographing various forms of mushrooms and toadstools.

FGIF: What is your favourite food?

Steve: As a veggie, I love veggie curries, followed by more curries really.

FGIF: Drink?

Steve: I am not a big drinker, but I do like the occasional real ale. Currently Doom Bar is my favourite.

FGIF: Genre of music or band?

Steve: Music is a big part of my life, and I have an eclectic list of favourite genres. Dub Reggae, Be-Bop jazz, Gilbert and Sullivan musicals and Radiohead to name but a few. I am not a fan of country music however!

FGIF: TV programmes?

Steve: With my current depression, I have the attention span of a gnat. Therefore I don't watch much TV any more, as I just can't concentrate on it. In the past though there was a comedy Sci-Fi series called Eureka which I adored.

FGIF: Favourite film?

Steve: Ice Station Zebra, The Wizard of Oz and High Plains Drifter for three. Also old Sci-Fi B movies like The Day the Earth Stood Still. (The original 1951 version, and not the dreadful remake of 2008, obviously)

FGIF: Favourite book?

Steve: See the TV question above. My attention span precludes me from sitting down and reading a book these days. If I say The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists by Robert Tressell, or L'etranger by Albert Camus it makes me sound like a pretentious pseud, so that is what I will say.

FGIF: Paper?

Steve: None. The modern media is controlled by the right wing billionaires who feed us a diet of blatant Tory propoganda and lies. As a proud Socialist I can't be doing with that.

FGIF: And finally, name three people you would most like to take with you on a desert island?

Steve: Currently, Jeremy Corbyn, Shefali Oza and Eddie Izzard. My choice changes by the week however!

That's really helpful. Thank you very much Steve for taking the time to answer these questions and for helping us with our survey!

Martin - 05/20