

Interviewee: Dave Christie

YOB: 1964

Born: Isleworth

Parents: Mother a primary school teacher and father a research chemist

Date of interview: 24th February 2020

Location of interview: Griffin Park

Interviewer: Fiona Gilchrist

Summary: Richard Donaldson

Dave recalls being taken to his first Brentford game in 1970/71 by his father (who “knew nothing about football”). Dave felt there was something “lovely” about the club and by 13 he was attending games on his own or with friends.

Dave’s earliest memories focus on the “spectacle” of seeing the Griffin Park pitch as a “vast space” within a ground that “seemed huge”. He recalls as a young teenager being excited that football matches were places where “the normal rules didn’t exist” an example being hearing grown men swearing in public. Dave was also excited by the edginess of attending games – the angry rivalry and the threat of a fight on the way to the ground.

Dave describes some of the changes since those early days – he recalls being able to change ends at half time (which ended with increased hooliganism) and the sale of the Royal Oak terrace (and subsequent building of the Brook Road stand “the Wendy House”) which Dave “can’t stand, it looks like non-league football.” He feels these physical changes and having fewer fans standing at games have affected the atmosphere. Dave also feels the club has a younger and more diverse fan base. According to Dave, one thing that hasn’t changed is that “the burgers are still crap.”

Although sometimes patronised by supporters of larger London clubs, Dave feels that in the long run he gets respect as a Brentford fan “no-one could accuse a Brentford fan of being a glory hunter”. He has also tried to convert others to be fans of Brentford. Dave’s biggest rivals are QPR – and he enjoys reminding them that they have ideas above their station. He particularly enjoys the fact that Brentford fans have reclaimed the “we’re just a bus stop in Hounslow” chant, that started as a put down sung by QPR fans.

As a fan Dave is “focussed on the games” and has observed some of the fan campaigns of the last few decades from a distance (he moved to Hereford) rather than being directly involved. He was aware David Webb generated fan anger and put it down to the manager’s association with Chelsea and only discovered later that Webb was asset stripping behind the scenes.

Dave recalls the Ron Noades era fondly – Brentford bought good players (e.g. Hermann Hreidarsson) and won a championship but Dave wasn’t aware at the time that Noades was spending beyond the club’s means. Dave credits the ABeeC campaign as “reminding” Hounslow that they had a football club in their borough and speaks highly of Bees United’s fan ownership of the club that worked successfully and harmoniously although limited by the level of finances that could be invested.

The interview returns to the subject of changing football culture. Dave feels Brentford was never as nasty as other London clubs – but “part of the fun” was feeling of a heightened atmosphere of

tension at games – the aggressive chants, taunts and gestures, songs making him feel part of something. Dave saw the odd train carriage being vandalised by fans – but “actual violence was few and far between.” Dave places his football experience in a wider social context “getting beaten up was an occupational hazard of going out in London” and going to Brentford was no worse than that. Dave recalls hearing racist and homophobic comments “as a matter of course”. Then in the 90s the culture changed and fans who said something racist were told to shut up by other fans.

Dave’s proudest moment as a fan have been the last five seasons in the Championship and particularly the team of 2019/20 “so skilful”. His best moment speaks to how much the quality of football has changed, recalling Steve Phillips chipping the keeper to score in the promotion season of 1977/8 “it sounds like nothing now but I hadn’t seen it [anyone chipping the keeper] before, [it seemed like] “the greatest footballing achievement as the standard was low”.

Dave will miss Griffin Park. His “feelings for the club are wrapped up in the ground” – the terraced housing, the burger van. He is pleased the new stadium is so close by.

The interview ends with further observations on the rapid change of football culture in the 90s when people started wearing replica shirts (whereas previously fans didn’t wear colours), and fanzines brought more humour to fan experience. Dave hypothesises that this is related to a wider change in drug use with more people from working class backgrounds smoking marijuana “you can’t be as angry or worked up and you are more likely to be flippant and witty”.