**Lindsay England, Just A Ball Game? and (Bradford City LGBT+ Fan Club/LGBT+ Lionesses Fan Club) - Interview, 5 March 2020, Liverpool**

A Interviewer

B Interviewee

A “So thank you Lindsay. Erm, one thing as I’ve been undertaking this research is I’ve found out that you’re, well you’re really busy on the network aren’t you? You’re really busy and you’ve got many roles through the Just A Ball Game? founder, the Bradford City LGBT+ Fan club co-founder and many others. If we can start chronologically, is it the 10th birthday of Just A Ball Game? this year?”

B “It will be, November 9th, 9/11, the official 9/11 if you want to see it like that. It just happened like that, I never really thought about that to begin with, it was just down to officially, yeah, we did launch Just A Ball Game? as a campaign organisation on the 9th of November 2010.”

A “And did I notice that it was originally going to be a more light hearted, Roberto Carlos’s Thighs?”

B “Yeah so it originally Just A Ball Game? existed as a blog, so early 2009 I was doing a lot of voluntary work for what was then LGF Lesbian and Gay Foundation in Manchester, a couple of people I knew there were part of their North West Magazine editorial team and they wanted to touch on bits of sport cos they were interested in sport as well and it was something that was getting more and more prominence in the LGBT+ scene, not just in Manchester but across the country. There was probably something like 25-26 different LGBT+ sports teams at that time in Manchester and had all been running for some time. So there was enough to focus on there plus all the work that I’d been doing myself and it made sense to do something as a short column for the on-line magazine and also the printed magazine that they had. We got a great response from that and decided to set the blog up under the same name because yes the column in the Out North West Magazine was called Roberto Carlos’s Thighs and why not, if you’re gonna have a gay column about sport, why not, you know, he has got the best thighs in football, come on, at the end of the day.”

A “They could welly a ball as well couldn’t they?”

B “Yeah and he’s a great guy.”

A “At that time you were doing, you were doing quite a lot of writing weren’t you, you were writing pieces for 4-4-2 and for other outputs as well?”

B “Yeah so growing up as a lifelong Bradford City fan we’d had highs and lows over the years and of course ’99, getting promoted to the Premier League and the massive story that was around that, I was working part-time for the Club, running the coaches to the away games for the fans and the ticket office on my days off with being self-employed and at the end of that season after the promotion I got the opportunity to go on holiday with the team to St Kitts.”

A “Wow.”

B “The team played St Kitts and Nevis team and the Canadian Under 23s team, pre-season, like I said, it was a massive story, there were 7 television crews from all around the world, like the Australian networks, Indian networks, never mind the stuff out in the Caribbean and the US and that as well and little Bradford City getting promoted to the Premier League in the fairy tale way that we did with Stuart McCall, local legend coming back, the has beens as it were, superstars like Peter Beagrie and then the youngsters like Lee Mills and Robbie Blake and everything and we just, you know, ...”

A “Paul Jewell as manager.”

B “Yeah, everything just happened. We’d had success a few years ago at Wembley against Notts County and Chris Kamara and everything but nothing like the feeling, I never thought that I’d see it in my lifetime that we’d ever get to play at Wembley and we did that in ’96 and then to play in the Premier League, to get promoted to the Premier League in ’99, they literally were dreams come true and we went out there to St. Kitts an I got a good deal. They gave me the same deal, did the Club, as what the players were getting and what it cost to go out there so I borrowed some money for the first time ever in my life, and went out to the Caribbean for 10 days and it was amazing, it was a really weird experience as well because they really were laid back, the stuff that we remember with Paul Jewell saying ‘when are the ground staff gonna get everything sorted at the Warner Stadium’ which was attached to the cricket ground and that as well and it was always ‘yeah, yeah, yeah, you know ...’ so laid back ‘we’ll sort it, we’ll put some water on it tomorrow, we’ll get the pitch right, we’ll do this, we’ll do that’ ...and for some reason it was decided that I had to be mascot for the game as well, the first game that I was out there [laugh].”

A “So you wore the mascot gear?”

B “Yeah. So I’m there pretending I’m 12 years old.”

A “Bloody hell.”

B “In my full kit wanker syndrome [laugh] a la John Terry walking out with Gary Walsh and Peter Beagrie and then cos they ...”

A “Did you have to hold their hands?”

B “Yeah [both laughing], it was funny and everybody had been at the curry houses and the beer houses had been in the stands before and literally everybody on the island knew who we were and the President of the island used to come and sit with us and that and Jack Warner and everything and they loved it and we was getting so much publicity so we was all just milking it, all the City fans that was out there, most of us had worked like that all our lives and everything and cos we won the first game with me as mascot, Peter Beagrie and Gary Walsh and that was like ‘no, you’ve gotta do it for the next game’ [laughing] which was a little bit embarrassing. It was all, alright it was a laugh and a joke and everybody had been drunk the first time of me agreeing to do it but yeah so ...”

A “It’s a good job that didn’t carry on all season.”

B “[Laugh] Yeah! Maybe, he’d had, there’s so many stories of out there and I remember the film crews and the little bits of videos and that that are out there but we know the truth and that, yeah, we made a lot of friends within the team and the fans and the camaraderie and the team and that but the stuff that was on that tour will forever stay ...”

A “And that became a spark to writing Just A Ball Game?”

B “Yeah because the closeness of the Club and that, like you said, I’d been involved with the Club from being like, 8-9 years old through uncles that used to take me to the game and my first ever match was a 2-1 home defeat against Lincoln City and I stood on the crumbling terraces and we lost the game but there was Joe Cook, there was Peter Downsbrough, there was Eugene Martinez, Ces Pod, they were all heroes to me and I was just, you know, it was a football match and it was Bradford City and there was something about the Club and even years after that and even just a few years ago when I’ve taken people to football for the very first time or other football supporters that have supported teams all their life, they’ll go to Valley Parade or they’ll go to an away match with us and there’s just something special about Bradford City football club when you go as a fan and once you’ve been once you want to go back again, it’s just like, it’s just so, there’s something there, I don’t know what it is. It’s just so infectious about the Club and people understand then and a few people have been ‘why do you spend all your money on them, why do you go to all the games and why do you do this and that ...?’ and then when they go, when they find out what a day out it is and ....”

A “And they know.”

B “And the closeness between the Club and the fans and, okay, a lot of that is with the City as well and the tragedy in ’85 and everything it’s there and it’s always been there but yeah.”

A “So when did you begin to think ‘well let’s, let’s change it, let’s further progress Just A Ball Game’ from the, from the blog into a wider grass roots movement?”

B “Because I just wasn’t getting anywhere and I hadn’t been getting anywhere for something like 8 years with the FA, with the Premier League and the Football League. They didn’t wanna know, they were still totally in denial. It was ‘there is no homophobia in football, let alone bi-phobia or transphobia, there’s no homophobia in football like some people have said, well there is but not that much so we don’t need to do anything, everything’s under control, it’s just isolated incidents’.”

A “So you thought ‘let’s give this more of a political edge?’”

B “Yeah. It was like ‘okay, so if you’re not gonna do something about it I was getting a lot of homophobia at work at the time, even with trade union support I wasn’t getting anywhere, it was really getting me down and for somebody who’s worked all their life and always had a work ethic of you work hard and you play hard so if I put the hours in I can go and see Bradford City more or I can go to HMV and buy some more tunes and you know, have a better car, have better clothes, build your house, probably in that order as well and it’s just like you want to do something and it was like ‘hang on a minute, there’s young kids out there that are going through the stuff that I used to go through 20 years ago and that can’t be right, something needs to be done’ and I was just witnessing an ever increasing amount of homophobia coming into the game, one, being a massive England men’s team fan and following them around the world as well as following Bradford City and it was, it was there internationally and sadly it was there at Bradford City games as well and it was like ‘I need to do something about it’ plus not being able to do anything about the homophobia that I was receiving personally at home and at work. It was like the natural thing to me is to be an activist and do something about it, do whatever I can, if I do anything, if I have to graft for several weeks to do something or I have to spend 5 minutes doing something if at the end of it it makes a difference to one person’s life then it’s been well worth doing.”

A “So how did you then change that, get the wheels in motion as a grass roots movement?”

B “Just getting out there and doing stuff and standing up myself, I remember being picked up by Diva magazine, so 2004, a couple of years in, originally I was writing to the FA and I was phoning up and I was getting shooed away by people, you know ‘we don’t need to speak, we don’t need to have conversations’ and then I got myself into the 25th century in 2004 and bought a computer so I could send e-mails, still getting rebuffed but then I was getting the hang of seeing things on–line and connecting with people around the country and around the world and Diva magazine picked up on the fact that I was a massive football fan and they did an interview with me and it was something like, you know, ‘let’s give the FA the red card’ and I told it like it was.

 Somebody at the FA saw that and said ‘oh, (panic mode) this person could cause us a big embarrassment if they carry on telling the truth, best get them in'. And the Gay Football Supporters Network (GFSN) members were also at that meeting, people who still work for the FA now were at that meeting, Peter Tatchell was at that meeting, people who have left the FA were at those meetings, other significant LGBT+ people were at those meetings, initially, although they weren’t out and proud at the time and that’s something that was wrong and I just got stuck in and being an activist and always campaigning and always coming from grass roots and fighting the fight from a small club and being part of Bradford City and being part of the editorial team from the City Gent magazine, always coming from that grass roots and that fan base perspective and telling it how it is, facing whatever oppressions in front of you, it had to be done and I just stuck to it and I thought ‘no, it’s like I’ve got somewhere here, if I look at what’s kept me going when I was a youngster, my football, my music, my beer, my artwork, let’s put it all together, what can I come up with?

 Bit of a campaign, it might work, it might not work, it might have to turn back into a blog, let’s see what we can do’. Erm, thankfully at the time then my friends in the music world, I was still DJ’ing and earning a living out of DJ’ing, which I had done for several teen years, literally I was good friends with Beth Ditto and the Gossip and they were getting to be quite famous at the time in the UK and I gave up seeing a lot of bands live cos I was so disappointed with them, although I loved them as bands, I loved their music and still play their music to this day, I didn’t like lots of people live and these were big bands, you know, Chilli Peppers and the Foo Fighters and that aside, most of the old school punk bands and Ska bands that I used to knock around with as a kid had all stepped away or disbanded and the next lot of music coming through was your Brit Pop and stuff like that. I’d also managed a band myself and wrote a few songs for them. They’d become, they got voted the fourth best un-signed band in the country in 1998.

 We had 118 shows in just under 2 years, got to play some amazing places, the likes of Chris Evans and people at Virgin Radio were picking up on them, they were too young, they were 16 and 17 years old. They could have been the next Green Day, could have been the next Smashing Pumpkins but it didn’t happen, mums and dads wanted to come on board as soon as the money started coming in. I sold my car, I sold my DJ equipment, bought a van and a PA system, drove them all around, they won Battle of the Bands, up here in the North West, got £1,000 and then the parents wanted to take over basically, which was really sad cos at that time we were supporting Stiff Little Fingers, we were supporting UK Subs, we had people like Embrace, we had people like Paradise Lost coming to see us and we had Terrorvision coming to see us. They’d been seeing me DJ’ing and that for years anyway and Graham Lambert from the Inspiral Carpets coming to see us and that, you know, it was, it could have been the next big thing to rival Oasis and Blur and stuff like that but it didn’t happen but I knew that I, and I was drifting away from the music and the music scene as well, I was getting more and more involved with the gay scene having moved to Manchester and I just pulled it altogether and thought ‘let’s do something, let’s use my skills that I have got’.”

A “Your, presumably, your, your skills at managing projects, presumably your skills at getting things done but also like the energy, I guess, that was required in terms of being part of that music scene?”

B “Yeah, you know, with it being grass roots and at the same time as well because of the circles that I was expanding in, with what trade unions were picking up on what I was doing as well and they was crossing over through links initially with Peter Tatchell and wanting to fight things and putting things out on social media. a few MPs were coming on board and supporting an LGBT+ movement and the fact that things were really bad in all sports, not just football, and I will stick up for football here cos football always does get a bit of a kicking at times, a lot of the homophobia was around in lots of sports although people won’t admit it. Then the trade union movement embraced me with the TUC, in 2009 they got me to speak at a fringe conference and then the year after I spoke at the LGBT conference at the TUC and I got a standing ovation there, I had the PFA sat to one side, I had the FA sat to the other side, people asking questions, they were stuttering and stumbling and they couldn’t answer anything and I just stood up and told it like it is and I got the standing ovation and it made them look really stupid.”

A “And Neville Southall’s a friend of Just A Ball Game isn’t he?”

B “He is, yeah.”

A “And so, so does that connection to Neville Southall come through the trade union movement?”

B “Well more from Bradford City because ...”

A “Oh because he played there.”

B “He played there.”

A “Yeah, you forget that.”

B “And goalkeeping coach and everything.”

A “Yeah.”

B “And in those days, like, in the Premier League and he’s just a great all round guy and he got on to his Twitter and he’s outspoken but he’s not outspoken cos he’s just a great guy and tells it like it is and he’s got an opinion like anybody else, it’s just that, he doesn’t force it on people, he just shouts a little bit louder than some people, that’s all, just to make one or two people more aware, you know.”

A “And in 2013 your team, Bradford City, were one of the first, maybe the first to begin flying the rainbow flag before home games did you, did you influence them in making that action?”

B “Basically I’d been involved with Bradford City in trying to get them to be LGBT+ inclusive since 2007 and I’d gone to a meeting a few months earlier in 2006 at the Camp Nou part of an LGBT+ scene there, got involved with QFF, the Queer Football Fan clubs and I was wearing a Bradford City shirt at Barcelona and got to shake hands with the President of Barcelona and the Deputy over there and we was in the newspaper, we was on page 3 of the Barcelona News, the Barcelona Times, however it was, in those days brought it back, showed it to the Club, cos I was still involved in the Club although it/I [?] was going through a lot of changes in 2007 and 4 years earlier I’d set up the initial meeting to save the Club, We had an initial meeting of 70 people and out of the 70 people we decided to do something to save the Club because that, that year before it was our centenary year and we didn’t have an official supporters club or an independent supporters club and I said ‘this can’t happen, our centenary year, we can’t not have a supporters group’, so I took over the sole running of the supporters group and that and we called this meeting together and out of the 70 we agreed to get Supporters Direct who’d just evolved round about that time on board to help us out and we called a meeting at St George’s Hall in Bradford, got quite a few people around to support, even just, like, local people from the city, 350 people turned up and said ‘we’ve gotta do this, we’ve gotta set up a supporters trust, save the Club’ and we did. Thankfully, as well, with and despite any other failings and through the connection with David Wetherall, Gordon Taylor, we’ll always be grateful to Gordon Taylor for saving our club. A lot of people don’t know that ...”

A “Gordon Taylor from the PFA?”

B “Yeah. Gordon Taylor signed off a cheque for something ridiculous like, when you think about it, it’s 2003, something like £55,000, a bill for £55,000 that May, it saved the Club and Gordon Taylor allowed it to happen as a loan and we were 63 minutes away from going into not just administration but liquidation and having to start rock bottom again, right at the bottom of the pyramid of the football league and work your way up.”

A “And so this, so this influence within the Club, through the Supporters Trust and through your connections at QFF, prompted the Club into flying the flag?”

B “Yeah cos I, like I’d had 6 years of them moving things around in the Club. In 2007 I come back and said ‘look, we’ve been out with all these fan groups across in Germany and the Netherlands and Austria and Switzerland and even Spain’, like, at the time it was then, I said ‘they’re doing little things, some of the stuff is, like, really easy that we can do’ so we became the first club that made a Tannoy announcement just before kick-off and then again at half time saying ‘no to racism but no to homophobia as well’, you know, changing little bits of wording on the posters and in the programme around the ground rules and regulations that were just coming into the game. I was working in security and I was getting my qualifications that way so I knew things had to start moving that way as well, you know, I was getting trained up to be a safety officer and then just prior to that, then later in 2011-12, I became Safety Officer at Hyde Utd FC.”

A “Okay.”

B “So the stuff I was doing with Hyde Utd and that and then also AFC Rushton & Diamonds, they embraced the work that I was doing. It was then so easy after we’d done all these small steps with Bradford City and sadly at the same time still reporting on the homophobia as well, sometimes from our own fans and sometimes from opposition fans and going away and nobody doing anything about it, the police were there and letting it happen and the stewards and the safety officers were there, the clubs were not doing anything and I had a whole stack of evidence together and it was just the natural thing to do and it progressed to 2013 where I was still writing for the City Gent magazine, I was still writing articles for the Club in the official match day programme around the work that I was doing and it was only small but it was significant cos it was all building up and then I’d been to yet another St Pauli game again and seen that St Pauli were such an inclusive club of everybody and were flying a rainbow flag and at that time in 2013 were the only club in the world to fly a rainbow flag at the grounds and I come back to Bradford City and I was like ‘do you know what, we can make a huge difference to young LGBT+ people here, show that we’re inclusive, something small, something insignificant, if we’re gonna do these days one weekend in August/September when the season kicks off, if I give you a rainbow flag can we fly it for the match, maybe just put it up at the Club around the Club for the whole weekend? We’ll get it in the local newspaper, we’ll get it in the City Gent magazine and say ‘the Club’s been inclusive this weekend ...’ and we’ll do a little bit of a story around it. Against a backdrop of the work that we had been drip-feeding into the Club and getting the fans to acknowledge things and try to gain support that way and break down the barriers and things and be pioneering, for a small club ourselves, although we’ve had that nucleus fan base and the big ground and everything, we’re always a club that’s existed on a fan base and the loyalty and everything and the city of Bradford as well and I said ‘can we fly the flag?’ and the Club took the decision that yes they would fly it but not just for a game, which was something like the second or the third game of the season, because the reaction that they got from everybody that was so positive and the Club wanted to progress themselves said, they ended up leaving it up for a week and then a month and then it was like it’s not really doing any harm to anybody else is it, it’s just flying there up the flagpole, let’s get it up for every home game for the rest of the season and it worked and it’s still there to this day, every home game. So yeah, you know, we became the second club in the whole world to fly a rainbow flag in 2013 and it’s still there and we like to think that we have influenced other clubs to do similar.”

A “And you played a leading role in carrying those ideas through to the Club.”

B “Yeah but it’s, it’s not really a leading role, it’s just something that happened, and if people want to look at it and say ‘hey, that’s worked, let’s us have a go and let’s try’ and if it betters things and gets messages through and means that people who wouldn’t go to a game will come to a game, or makes them feel more inclusive at a game, then, you know, it’s just a status symbol, well away from the politics and well away from anything else, it is just, it’s a flag at the end of the day and it’s a few colours but it means so much to so many people because they know there’s somebody out there is thinking about them and they’re thinking ...”

A “It says ‘you’re welcome’.”

B “It does and it says if we’re gonna go to a game then there’s quite the possibility then that if I do get into any difficulties somebody from within that stadium will know that I need help because they recognise what that symbol is. And then obviously the other bits of stories that I did for follow ups in the newspapers and on the local radio as well as what the Club were still putting in the match day magazine and what I was getting across myself from the City Gent, it all tied in together and we got the recognition that was there and it was great because then I could go back to the QFF meetings as well and I was really proud that it really embraced me as an individual and Just A Ball Game? as an organisation in being part of QFF and being part of that family after so many years and it also inspired some of the other teams across mainland Europe to do something similar and push for things within their club. So it worked really well.”

A “So did that then influence you further in terms of setting up the Bradford City LGBT+ supporters group a couple of years later?”

B “Yeah definitely. I mean it was something that I was gonna try in 2007 and there were, there were 2 or 3 people who I knew who were Bradford City fans through and through, like myself, we used to sit pretty near to each other but at that time those, those guys and they were all guys, they just didn’t want to, they didn’t want to be out and proud, they didn’t want to be identified and everything so I was not gonna push it, it was never gonna be right, it was never gonna happen, it was always gonna be something that evolved naturally, and it’s worked better cos the stuff that happened between 2007 and 2013 led to the progression of what Just A Ball Game? was and where I wanted to be. I was part of the FSF national council then, relocating to Manchester with my home and my job and representing the North West and going away with England and it was, it was a total contrast. I could go away with watching the England men’s team as part of the England fan set up, get abused, physically and verbally and some of that led to death threats and things like that and in the end I just gave up in 2010 and started going back to watching the women’s game again, solely, and following the Lionesses.”

A “So you didn’t go to Bradford City?”

B “I still go to Bradford ...”

A “Sorry, the England men’s?”

B “Not to the England men’s team, no, because basically I was getting all this and the FA wouldn’t do anything about it.”

A “That must have been frustrating?”

B “It wasn’t frustrating, it was quite sickening really because if it was affecting me then it was affecting other people and that’s not fair.”

A “Yeah and probably affecting other people in their droves as well.”

B “Yeah. And that, so, you know and it just, 2007 wasn’t the right time and neither was it a little bit later when we were setting up Just A Ball Game? and then even 2013 it just wasn’t right but we were, the acceptance was there and it was changing the mindsets, the education was getting out there very, very slowly and when things progressed a little bit more and Councillor Richard Dunbar was introduced to myself and I started coming back to Valley Parade quite a bit more because of work, I was working different shifts and that, and I could get to more games although I’ve always had a season ticket and that, I was coming back to watching the team again on a regular basis and travelling away again and I was feeling comfortable and I could take my LGBT+ flags, I could wear an LGBT+ t-shirt and people would start sticking up for me then and people would be more accepting and more respectful. The Club started thinking themselves and doing little bits themselves and progressing themselves a bit as well and everything seemed right and, you know, Richard came on board with me and I came on board with Richard to help him do stuff through, through Bradford Council, so the city as a whole progressed the LGBT+ scene and it seemed the right thing to do and of course at that time we also had Bradford Brewery, which was a safe space and people can, can knock it and say ‘oh why did you have your safe space in a brewery?’, well, for one, they offered it, you know and it was a safe space but it was like a cafe bar you could go in and you could have a coffee, you didn’t have to drink, it was a safe space for football fans.”

A “And this was for home and away fans wasn’t it?”

B “Yeah it was great.”

A “And the LGBT+ community in that part.”

B “And allies as well, we opened it up to other fans as well, we had the Rugby League fans and we did that by showcasing that ‘stronger together’ ethic and a year or so after we got rewarded by the Brewery granting us our own Just A Ball Game?- Bradford City pale ale. They had a couple of new brews in mind that they were gonna create and they thought about things and wanted to help promote what we were doing in the safe space and recognised that we were bringing all that custom in which they probably wouldn’t get and it works both ways and we were really proud then that we actually had our own Just A Ball Game? and Bradford City LGBT fan club beer, which was sold in the pumps.”

A “Did it taste good?”

B “And not in bottles as well.”

A “Did it taste good?”

B “It certainly did, yeah.”

A “That’s good, that’s good. That’s an important thing. Erm, was that, so it seems to me that the idea of having a pub safe space, that’s a bit like the German fan zones too, was it influenced by any of those ideas or was it completely just by coincidence?”

B “Well some of it was, yeah, cos like in some ways that’s why the German fan movement and the LGBT+ fan movement was so much more advanced than what we were in the UK because it’s something that they’ve been doing for years, meeting up, socialising in certain places, you know, like them or hate them the German fans, they love their football like we do, they love their food, they love their beer, they love their music and there’s plenty of spaces that they have over there, there’s places that you stay out of because of the rivalry but there’s others.They’ve got the old school photographs, they’ve got the scarves up, they’ve got all the mementos and people will go, they will go to that, they will go to several other pubs before they hit the ground or there’ll be others that will just go and will stay there cos that’s their safe space. And it, it just seemed as if we were emulating some of the stuff that I was learning from mainland Europe, I was learning things and at the same time they was learning a lot from me, going out as being the sole UK representative for so many years.”

A “That’s bizarre isn’t it, when you think about the, when you think about the, the football culture in this country and also, and also LGBT+ communities, that you were the only, you were the only British football fan campaigning that was on that scene for years. That’s bizarre.”

B “It is but, again, it’s and I hate saying what’s happened in this country in the last 3-4 years but I think that was the start of all of it, even back then, 2006-2007, it was like there was just that British attitude that we’re this and we’re that.”

A “British isolationism.”

B “Just do it on our own, we get on with our own thing and we don’t really care about what everybody else is doing. But yet and a lot of it through my DJ’ing and through my music as well and through the fact that music live was so much more accessible to me in mainland Europe, you know, I could get a flight out to anywhere in mainland Europe and get a ticket to see my favourite bands at a quarter of the price of what it cost me to see them at home in Manchester or just get down to London, so why would you not want to do that, experience a different culture and meet new people, experience different food and different beer ...”

A “Taste better beer.”

B “Why not?”

A “Yeah, yeah and at the time you set up you were one of the forerunners weren’t you, I think there were only a couple of fan groups that were there by the time, I mean, bearing in mind that you’d sort of set up, even about 8 years before then but when you formally set up in 2015 there were only a couple of other LGBT+ fan groups in the UK.”

B “There was 4 initially set up together and then maybe 2 or 3 who maybe like half set up and then we came on board but then if you’re gonna look back to longevity and who set up first then that credit has really got to go back to round about 2004-5, unofficially, to the Aston Villa LGBT group.”

A “Aston Villa?”

B “Yeah.”

A “Is that one, it’s now Villa and Proud but I don’t think it’s that group?”

B “No, so this was members of the GFSN and that was an FA meeting that was held in Coventry and Villa fans being there and being part of the GFSN.”

A “Okay, I didn’t know about that. Did they just disband?”

B “They just never really got going, they was parts of lots of stuff that was going on at the time and of course the other thing around 2007 was the last real thing that the GSFN did together as a unit was create liaison officers. So as a forerunner to the fan groups basically something that the FA really, really did get right but then sadly failed to follow up with any substance behind it, even though it was working and it was a great thing to do, they created the idea of every, every professional football club in the country, so all 92, having an LGBT+ liaison fan who was, like, an officer who liaised, officially, with the football club but the FA, in their wisdom, forgot to explain to all the football clubs that that’s what they were doing. So we had them and they, they got the publicity by saying to the media, ‘oh we’ve created these fan liaison officers from within the GSFN and other people who have volunteered to go to their, the club they supported or their local club and be a representative and be the link between an LGBT+ community and a local area and the club’ but there was some hesitation then and out of 92 clubs there was only 38 volunteers and out of those 38 volunteers from within the GSFN and other people who were known to GSFN members, actually out of those 38 only 11 bothered to go and contact the clubs and all but 4 were just.., had the doors shut in their face and told to go away and clubs said there wasn’t a problem and the clubs didn’t wanna know. So instead of the FA doing something like that and even Bradford City, even when I went to Bradford City, even though they knew me and I’d been part of the Club and done so much, you know, setting up the Supporters Trust and everything else around the Club because the Club had gone through a little bit of a transition period at that time, again in 2007, I went there and said ‘look, I’m the Bradford City liaison officer from the GSFN that the FA have set up’ and somebody from the Club phoned the FA and it was just, they just randomly phoned customer services or whatever at the FA and because people at the FA don’t talk to each other in each other’s department so they didn’t know what was going on, and they just denied all knowledge and said they never knew anything about me or who I was, so even I got the knock back.”

A “Which highlights the depth of the issue.”

B “Yeah but it was a great system and it was, it would have worked with a lot of help and support and that substance behind it but the FA are very good at ticking a box and say ‘we’re doing X, Y and Z’ getting it out there in the media and the media have something then to put out as a story, if it all falls down they’ve then got an even bigger story cos they can slaughter the FA and if it doesn’t work it’s just like, it then drifts away because the FA don’t really put any substance behind it and follow it through. Plus, at the time the main people who were setting all this up then for, you know, over the next year or two, the equality management team, they all left the FA, they all walked away and the FA actually had for almost 20 months, they didn’t have anybody in, involved in that sort of area within the FA. They had a Head of Safeguarding or rather Child Welfare as it was at that same time, who was also Head of Equality and Diversity but then they had no management structure and I was like ‘how can you have somebody heading up equalities and diversity and at the same time heading up child welfare?’ They’re two big entities enough anyway to lead a concentration on and you knew which was gonna be fobbed off and not given the time that it needed. So everything fell apart, so for a whole 20 months there was nobody to liaise with, there was nobody to contact with and it was back to like when I first started in 2002, your e-mails were just getting ignored and then there was other people jumping on the band wagon because they, the likes of Stonewall or Kick It Out was just playing at it and although they meant well they didn’t know the mechanics around football and being a football fan, they might have been great people equalities wise and things but sitting on it, talking about it, in an office meetings but not actually being out there and doing anything and experiencing anything and they weren’t LGBT+. So, you know, Kick It Out came out with a 100 page document which they were sending out to schools and teachers. Well, no teacher has got time to read a 100 page document let alone teach whatever’s in that document to the kids and a lot of it was wrong because it was people from, not from an LGBT+ community.”

A “And probably not listening that deeply either.”

B “And they just looked at bits of research from certain academics and things like that which were which weren’t the best, at the time. And, you know, it all just fell away and then they brought on another equalities manager who then said they was gonna do X, Y and Z ‘yes we want you on board, we need to do this, this is great what you’re doing’ and then it was like excuse after excuse, ‘we can’t do this, we can’t do that cos we wanna get away from that cos we don’t wanna do this’ and then other stuff, the FA Council didn’t wanna go down that route because they’d then have to change, the County FAs then had to come in and they’d have to change and they didn’t want to do that and then it just got really, really messy and then the people who have got these jobs and have got this power and that control don’t wanna use it cos they don’t wanna be outspoken and don’t wanna lose their jobs and they just limped away in the end and it all fizzled out. At the time, when I was setting up Just A Ball Game? as well, thankfully Darren and Jason were setting up the Justin Campaign, so we did team up with them quite a bit and I’m very proud to say that Just A Ball Game? headed up the very first Football V Homophobia Day, Darren and Jason set stuff up in Norwich...”

A “Okay and when was that?”

B “In 2011.”

A “Okay.”

B “Football V Homophobia became a day of focus globally and there was a simultaneous event happening in Norwich I’d set up something in Manchester, a flash mob and a photo shoot, ironically outside of the Urbis which was to become, a few months later, the National Football Museum and we got sent away with a flea in our ears from nosey women who worked in the offices at the Urbis ‘you can’t take photographs outside of here, not with our building in the background’ so we just carried on and got it out there. Er, it went down really well when the Justin Campaign created FVH, they just wanted, it was just gonna be that one off, just to raise the awareness and they created it as a bit of an initiative that anybody the world over could use, you didn’t have to have the copyright, you know, you could do whatever and the year after it evolved from a day to a weekend and then because of the influence that I had with saying ‘look, the Germans are picking up on this and they really wanna do stuff but they don’t have the same seasons as we do so they can’t do anything that weekend or the weekend after’ so, you know, so it eventually became a whole month and again, because I got the trade union movement behind me I then, the second year I set up like a three cities challenge so I did an event in the Gay Village in Manchester with the FvH banner, did some Just A Ball Game? leaflets, some badges and other resources. The money initially came from, the first ever £1,000 that Just A Ball Game? were given was from Beth Ditto and The Gossip.”

A “Oh okay.”

B “So being out and proud musicians, you know, they really embraced what I was doing and that’s where the first lot of funding came from. So we did the event in Manchester, wrapped everything up, put it away on maybe 10 o’clock that night, I think it was maybe got the last train, as it was then, to London and the next morning we did the same thing at Congress House, at the TUC headquarters, got support from MPs as well as heads of several trade unions, had a bit of a flash mob photo shoot, we put our press releases there, a bit of a video and then we commissioned a French version of the FvH banner and I jumped on the Eurostar and took it out to my friends at Paris FootGay who were doing some work similar to myself out there in the capital of France so I managed to get three cities in 24 hours in and that was the second year of Football V Homophobia.”

A “Wow, wow, that’s really interesting. Erm, the Bradford City LGBT+ group was, was once a member of Pride in Football wasn’t it?”

B “It was, yeah.”

A “How did that membership come about?”

B “Erm, basically there wasn’t any membership as such, it was just a loose term, there was no membership fee, there was no joining or anything like that, it was basically through social media and the other thing was as well was we did with our Bradford City group because myself and Richard had other things going on, like myself, with Just A Ball Game?, Richard with his charity commitments alongside his work for the Council and working for the Labour Party as well we decided that our, our LGBT+ fan club wouldn’t be like some of the fan groups that existed and only wanted LGBT+ people to join. We wanted anybody could become a member and the easiest way to do that would be to set up a Twitter account and just call those followers that followed us as members of our group. We’ve got over 800 now and we quickly got, within the first 6 months, we got I think about 450-500 people and some of them were Bradford City fans who were LGBT+ and some of them were just Bradford City fans and people who just liked what we were doing and wanted to follow something that we were doing. Some people followed who were following us on social media for several years as Just A Ball Game? and knew it was an extension for that but it worked because it gave me another outlet to get things out with and it also meant that apart from myself and apart from Just A Ball Game? officially being part of the QFF I could do then what I wanted to do, a couple of years ago when myself and Richard followed the rules and regulations of the Germans and applied officially to QFF, went over and did our presentation and I’m very proud to say that still to this day we’re the only UK member of the Queer Football Fanclubs.”

A “Great. And I mean I’m just astonished and I suppose it’s a comment rather than a question, cos you’ve already addressed it around the British isolationism there, how there aren’t more British teams that are involved in that but I was wondering if you could tell me I was wondering if you could tell me a little about what you think umbrella groups like QFF bring, what the big value of them are?”

B “It’s all learning, it’s all sharing, it’s all camaraderie, it’s all support. A couple of years ago we got our heads together, working group meetings with the World Cup coming up, most of the Germans don’t follow the national teams some of them won’t even watch the World Cup on the TV but because there’s been so much oppression in Russia we wanted to do something and some of the Russian sportspeople had been over to various meetings and that a year or two before and been involved and we really wanted to do something. So we came up with a couple of things, a couple of initiatives that some of the stuff we could just do on social media so that none of the fan groups felt pressured and you could do something in-house, you could do something small and significant, you could do something around social media or you could galvanise yourself either go to Russia or you could do what a few of them did and on certain days when the Russians were playing or the German team was playing, go to the embassies in certain places in Germany with the posters, the flyers, the stickers and the banners that we made and it all come under one banner of To Russia With Love.”

A “Hhmmm, that was really significant that wasn’t it?”

B “And we sort of, like, got our heads round that a few years earlier. We’d had an initiative in the Gay Village in Manchester when the Winter Olympics were held in Sochi, as a bit of a protest we did a same sex holding hands around the Gay Village and Just A Ball Game? was quite heavily involved in setting that up where 2,000 people linked up around the Gay Village and had some publicity out of that and that sent a message out to say “if you’re LGBT+ and in Sochi, we’re here in Manchester, miles away but we’re here for you, we feel your pain’.”

A “That symbolism again, symbolism of solidarity. Erm, To Russia With Love banners and the movement, where did that, who’s idea was it, where did it come from?”

B “Basically just 2-3 of us sat in the QFF workshop. We were thinking of what should we do and somebody mentioned ‘let’s do this and let’s do that’ and then somebody ...”

A “So it came from in a workshop...”

B “And obviously a little bit of a twist on the James Bond and things like that, yeah, just the three, just a few ideas thrown out here and there and then once we decided what was gonna happen it was gonna be the protests then at the Russian embassies. Some groups didn’t want to do that, some groups knew, in their towns and cities, it would be a problem if they did that and some groups couldn’t get the fan bases together to do that so I said ‘let’s do something then on social media’ and I created the little bits of the selfie boards and that. We got some designs together and we created Just A Ball Game and QFF To Russia With Love selfie boards and things like that and also that’s how, you know, we used the social media and what was there and did stuff remotely.”

A “I saw then the FSE congresses too.”

B “Yeah and a lot of that was down ...”

A “That’s an ally congress.”

B “A lot of that is down to the fact that I’ve recently had a knee replacement and was laid up and couldn’t really do anything myself so I, you know, I wanted to be a part of what was going on.”

A “Yeah, yeah, that’s great. So, across the, across the European movement, who do you see as key people?”

B “It changes all the time and it’s basically whatever’s going on. One of the great things is the longevity, you know, the German fan groups have been going as far back as 2000-2001/2, QFF came about in 2006 and was part of other European movements then that all came together and the umbrella network was set up from that. I’d supported them as much as I could going to meetings and stuff cos I had to step away for about, about 3-4 years, I couldn’t get out there. Erm and then for the last several years I’ve been back on it, part of the movement and through Bradford City and the fact that it’s, everything’s shared around so the two main conferences as it were, the meetings that the Germans have and of course the Dutch and the Swiss, not so much the Austrians and the Spanish these days although there’s a couple of I can’t remember whether they’re Slovakian’s or Slovenians.”

A “Okay.”

B “But they’re Bayern Munich fans anyway. They come over every now and again. They all share it around and we all share the responsibility but it’s great because we all get to see a little bit of each other’s towns and cities and the cultures and that and in the towns and cities there’s always generally a lot of support from the clubs and that that come back and they’re really great weekends. There’s the board meetings set up from that, there’s the working group meetings and the fact that there’s, there’s a main AGM every year but there’s also a really big grass roots working group meeting which is and everything’s well attended. There’s anything between maybe 40-90 people turn up to these events twice a year.”

A “Excellent. And what do you see as the key differences between the, the German European movement and the British movement?”

B “It’s, some of it’s slightly cultural differences but again some of it is I would say there’s, although there’s rivalry between the teams and the clubs and the people who support those clubs, and one or two for obvious reasons, just like the last few days with the Bayern fans getting a lot of stick although other clubs had had a presence and the protests around the ground and the 51% ownership and things like that and it being fans and grassroots, there’s always that little bit of rivalry and little bit of stick but as a whole, as an LGBT+ community they are all pretty much together and will support everybody and each other. It tends to be the rivalry from the teams and who you support does spill over a little bit into QFF and one or two people maybe new to the scene don’t really quite know how things work and think that they, cos they’ve got things a lot easier now, they don’t seem to remember or they forget or they don’t care about those of us who really, really did struggle for a lot of years to put things in place and really had it hard and really had the knock backs. We’ve taken all the knock backs for years and years for them to pave, you know, to pave the way and almost roll in, you know. But times have changed and, you know, the first, the big significant change was Section 28 in 2003 and then civil partnerships and then the Equality Act in 2010 and then equal marriage, steps within LGBT+ community itself have moved on and acceptance and respect has moved on, thankfully, in most ways. So it does get a little bit easier and plus the education’s getting out there as well, lots of young people are getting involved and that so the movement will grow and the movement will progress plus the clubs now, just like schools, are getting penalised and no funding with OFSTED and that and if clubs and leagues and associations want to get hold of that UK Sport and Sport England funding, County FAs, they have to be seen to be doing something. Again, a lot of them sadly are only tick boxes to get them the funding and that but you know, you don’t get that in Germany, it’s still really the fans doing it themselves.”

A “There’s a DIY culture isn’t there?”

B “Yeah and it’s right across the board, it’s like if people are heavy into anti-racism stuff, anti-sexism stuff and that, they’re into anti-homophobia stuff themselves even though they might only be LGBT+ allies and it works both ways, you know, from time to time when we’ve done stuff as an LGBT+ community throughout the QFF movement, it’s, you know, just something simple like me taking Show Racism The Red Card stuff over to our meeting in November last year in Bremen. It was the first thing the Germans picked up on, ‘I want a photograph with this card’, you know, and they were straight out there with it on social media, they wanted to get it out there, we was there to discuss LGBT+ stuff but they wanted to hold a card up and equally seen holding a card showing Show Racism The Red Card.”

A “Yeah, that joining up.”

B “Yeah. It is and the fact that it’s also spreading around the world as well. Don’t forget North America and the LGBT+ fan groups out there which have predominantly started within the women’s game and you know, and the movements there and the fan bases within, in the women’s game. It’s only since 2013 and Portland setting up and being part of that, that Timbers make up and the almost mirrored North West attitude that there is out there and again, off the punk scene, the grunge scene, years ago and you know, the riot girl scene and music scene out there in Portland and other fan groups and the women wanting to emulate what’s out there, you know, 20,000 – 21,000, sometimes 25,000 week, in, week out watching the women’s game and the cappo’s that they’ve got there and the drum rolls and everything are a real fan based movement and that’s what a lot of is being emulated over in Europe as well but for some reason in the UK and although a lot of it might be down to health and safety restrictions and the different structure of the grounds and it’s still a different culture out in Germany and why I spend so much time out there. You can still be a proper fan, you can go out there, if you want to be corporate and sit down and enjoy everything that goes with it you can but if you wanna stand up behind the goals, have a proper beer in your hand, they trust you to do that. If you want to sing, you want to have a pie, want to raise your LGBT+ flags, it’s there.”

A “Hhmmm.”

B “And everybody’s in it together and out there for the same reason and it’s affordable.”

A “Lindsay, you got a letter last year from Theresa May didn’t you?”

B “[Laughing]”

A “Can I ask you about that? No?”

B “You can, you can.”

A “Okay. Did that, I’m guessing your politics aren’t quite hers, are they? But it must have still been nice to get some recognition?”

B “It was amazing to get the recognition, especially on the day that we did. You do realise what day I got that recognition?”

A “No, please tell me.”

B “24 May.”

A “24 May.”

B “2019, the day Theresa May resigned.”

A “Really, okay.”

B “So, one minute past midnight, Points of Light, announced to the whole world that I’m the 1,183rd person to be given the Points of Light award, that’d been existing for 3 years, right across the world and Theresa May was the Prime Minister at that time and at 7 o’clock that morning she resigned. So there you go, you know, Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour Party, the Lib Dems, all the Scottish Folk tried everything to get rid of Theresa May, even David Cameron, they all tried to get rid of her ...”

A “But you’ve managed it.”

B “And you know what, that might, that moment, she has to give me the Points of Light award, she has to sign that little certificate, stick it in the post to me.”

A “And that’s it, gone, gone.”

B “And 7 hours later she has to resign.”

A “Wow. Some might call that a result. It seems to me as if you’re a hugely influential figure and you’ve been so tireless in, in just trying to make a difference but do you ever feel drained of energy? And if you do what picks you up?”

B “Football, music and beer.”

A “It’s always the same?”

B “Always the same.”

A “And is it, like, when you feel, when you feel as if, when you can see that you’ve made a difference to somebody, does that kind of boost you and replenish those energy levels?”

B “Yeah because it’s like, as I said, when I set out I never thought we would achieve, especially doing it so grass roots and with so little funding and I’ve had an amazing group of friends and volunteers around me for the last 10 years who’ve given as little as they could or as much as they could and it’s irrelevant because they’ve always promised me what they could or couldn’t do but that’s given the basis to be able to just carry on and get on with things myself, knowing that I still had that support wherever I had and just get on with it and, yeah, some days it’s like, is it the right thing, is it worth it, am I making it worse? I‘ve had a few knock backs on the way but sadly they’ve come back at us from our own LGBT+ community.”

A “Okay.”

B “And yes there has been, outside there has been opposition but it’s just, I don’t know how to, I looked at my life and I looked at things that other people probably could have done to help me, I didn’t get that help, I didn’t get that support and now today I’m looking at it and that was all years ago and young people today, 13, 14-15, 19, 20, 21, they’re LGBT+ and they’re coming out for the first time and maybe even older, look at Philip Schofield, you know, it’s a different time for everybody and it has to be when it’s right for you. In the women’s game there are so many women across the world and that but again it’s when it’s right for them or their partners, their girlfriends, their wives, their families, it has to be right for them but when they do and then they realise it’s like a massive weight lifted off your shoulder to just be part of that and knowing that you’re, you’re helping to make a difference somewhere along the line to help people in their own way, it’s like everything that I’ve had to take on board, so if I can make a difference to, you know, just 5 minutes, if doing something for 5 minutes makes a difference to one person’s life it’s been well worth doing it, you know, spending 3 hours with you today, if it’s made a difference to one person’s life it’s been well worth doing it. If it’s something that I’ve slaved away at and it’s been several months in the making, like our first ever seminar at Wembley last year, you know, the graft behind all that, if that makes a difference and it does because people come back and tell you and you can see the results and from both sides, from within an LGBT+ community and from outside. There’s a couple of things that I’ve said from the very beginning, you know, one of our slogans has been ‘Stronger Together’ and that and the other one is like how much we revere in our non-LGBT+ allies. You look at our patrons, we’ve got LGBT+ people there involved in football or other sports, they’re out and proud and we’re showcasing their stories and that’s getting through to influencing other people and to helping other people but some of the biggest compliments that I’ve got through the work that I do is the fact that so many people either from grassroots or at the very, very top, like, like we’ve got with Francis O’Grady who’s, you know, General Secretary of the 6 million members of the TUC, trade unions, Barbara Plant, National President of the GMB and then on the other side of the scale 3 years ago now, a 16 year old Emily Ramsay, you know, who’s playing 2 years above her age level for England Lionesses, she can see that there’s LGBT+ people around her, her age, and she can make that difference that I can’t. Nobody’s gonna listen to me at my age going into that environment but they’ll listen to her. So the two different scales of people going out there who are not LGBT+ who are helping to make that difference and it’s the fact that they recognise that and they believe in the work that they’re doing and they want to come and support that and the other thing is, like, we look back at what’s gone before us and all the struggles everybody has had and all the doors that other people have opened for us, some of it good, some of not so good. We’re really just paving the way and pioneering things now for other people coming after us and hope it gets better. Sometimes it doesn’t, sometimes we take a few steps back and well, I’d rather look at it as a few steps sideways rather than a few steps back before we go forward again but, you know, even, again, even what we’re doing here today, “today’s LGBT+ celebrations are tomorrow’s LGBT+ history” and we’re pioneering that and we’re carrying that forward and hopefully the stuff that we leave behind and is documented, people can look at it and learn from it and they can take that on board because it will turn around again. It will get better and people will have things great for a few years and then something else will happen because too many people will say ‘we don’t like this’ or ‘we don’t want this’ and there’ll be an oppressed community again. It’s like a punk movement, everybody said punk has died.”

A “Punk’s not dead.”

B “Punk turned up in ’76 and it died in, what, ’79-80, punk will live forever, always has done and it always will do but, again, that’s something, another movement that was totally misunderstood. Yes there was people that were on drugs but which rock and roll person wasn’t? You know, even going back to the late ‘50s and early ‘60s it happened. The rock and roll stars in the punk scene in the late ‘70s were no different. You know, and it will, a lot of people in the punk movement were misunderstood, it was individuality, it was doing it yourself, it was art, it was music, it was style, it was the freedom. A lot of people just looked at it and saw the Sex Pistols swearing and throwing up on TV and that’s all it was and it wasn’t, it was far more than that and there was such a huge cross over at that time between young people, between black people, Inuit people, Asian people, other ethnic and minority communities who were oppressed, between miners who were oppressed, the gay community that was oppressed, everybody fit together and everybody looked out for each other and punk was a massive driver.”

A “So, one last question in this, it seems out of place to end but everything you do at grass roots level, is it fuelled by a kind of punk spirit, of a DIY making things better?”

B “Yeah why not because if you’re out there and you go to, you go to the FIFAs, you go to the UEFAs, you go to the Premier League, to the Football League, you go to the FA and then outside of that you go to all the other sports, going back to our research, the most homophobic I found for sports fans 10 years ago in my research was cycling, by far.”

A “Cycling?”

B “Yeah, you know, look at what’s happening in rugby at the moment, you know and I’ve said this all along, people are, people use examples ‘oh there’s no out gay footballers and there is in rugby’, ‘who?’ and at the time it was, like, Gareth Thomas. I was like ‘oh right, so Gareth Thomas came out in 2009, how many other rugby players have come out?’, ‘well the Rugby League player Ian Roberts came out in Australia late in the ‘80s’, it’s still 130’ odd years of Rugby League, Steve Davies came out in cricket and within six months he never played for England again but you’re telling me there’s no homophobia there? You know, from time to time England Lionesses have not been able to be out and proud and play and they’ve had to find careers elsewhere and sadly out of the country and that can’t be right, so football does get a bit of a kicking at times and I will stick up for it when, you know, all sports have got to tackle it and it’s not just all sports, it’s just all walks of life, every industry, education, what is the problem about 5 year olds learning about difference, learning about acceptance, learning about respect, learning about different family units, you know? At the end of the day we were all born into this world and we’re all different, otherwise we’d all look like robots, we don’t choose what size feet or hands we have, we don’t choose what type of a nose or sticky out ears we have, what colour hair, what colour eyes, we’re all born into this world and the one unique thing we all have in common is that nobody is asked to be born, it’s something that none of us choose but we’re here and we make the best of it, if we can and sadly some people just want to oppress people just cos they’re slightly different to themselves. But you’ve just gotta go through it, you’ve just gotta strive and make a difference and if the people that have the money, have the power and have the control are too selfish, too self-centred that if they don’t get it then it has to be a grass roots movement that takes it forward and going back to where we started at the beginning, things weren’t always great for me growing up, other stuff happened then in later life, I love my football, I consider myself to be really hard working, I work hard and I play hard and you’re getting oppressed at work for being out and proud and I just looked at what I had and what I could do, not the best of education, maybe couldn’t make an influence with academic skills or professional skills but I looked at what I had and what got me through, my football, my love of football and my love of art, my love of music and tied them altogether, set up some sort of a campaign around it and now it seems to be working. I just wish it was on a bigger scale that’s all and then lots of other people could see what a difference we could make across the world, if the funding and the power and the control was put behind it that it needs.”

A “Great. Thank you Lindsay.”