

# A mid-life crisis to enjoy!

There's more to a football club than 90 minutes of action. Mike Ward unearths the individuals who have one thing in common... a love of the Albion



**Back in his student days, Ken Brown would often enjoy a bit of football-related banter with his flatmate, a Chelsea nut. That flatmate was called Sebastian Coe.**

"Even then, Seb was a very passionate Chelsea fan," recalls the Albion's managing director, "so we certainly had our debates!"

Ken was, and indeed remains, a proud Evertonian, having supported the Goodison side since he was nine. And even as a student [he and Seb were at Loughborough University, where Ken was studying economics] he wasn't afraid to put his money where his mouth was.

"Before the season started in 1977," he tells me, "I staked £1 on our striker Bob Latchford to score 30 league goals – at odds of 200/1! It's still the biggest football win I've ever had. That was a lot of money in those days."

Despite his passion for the game, however, Ken never imagined he'd end up running a football club. "Before I joined Millwall eight years ago, I'd spent 23 years in financial services," he explains, "so it was a huge learning curve."

And a pretty bold change of direction, career-wise?

"Oh, yes," he agrees, "it was a chasmic leap – a huge, huge change. I joke that it was my mid-life crisis!"



"There weren't many sleepless nights beforehand, but there were a few after."

Ken, who joined the Albion three years ago, points out that football is "like no other business".

"There's the playing side of it, the retail side of it, the stadium management side, there's catering, conferencing etc – and obviously we're about to go into the brave new world at the Amex. There are times when it's absolute bedlam, there are times when I question my own sanity – but it's really good!"

"The resources now that are required to run a football club successfully are huge, so we're incredibly lucky to have the Chairman we have, with the commitment he's shown to the club."

And since Tony Bloom took over, it seems, Ken's responsibilities have also expanded. "When I arrived, in 2007, I didn't have any involvement at all with the playing squad," he explains. "That's because it was dealt with entirely by Dick Knight. It was made clear to me when I came that it wasn't part of the job, so that was fine."

"That's changed now. But obviously the new stadium is also taking up a lot of time, and whilst Martin Perry is leading the internal team, he and I are working very closely together now in terms of things like ticketing and access control."

So, what would Ken say was the biggest frustration of running a football club, day-to-day?

"Probably when in a backroom sense you think you've done everything, as much as you can, and things on the pitch don't reflect that. But when it all comes together at once it can be pretty special."

Given the amount of hours he currently dedicates to the job (driving from his Woking home each morning, he's usually in the office around 8am), Ken must relish the chance to get home and put his feet up. It sounds, mind you, as if the Brown household is a pretty hectic environment in its own right.

"We're a busy family," he tells me, "definitely not 9-to-5 types!"

"My wife Denise is a freelance educational psychologist, and she has a diary that's probably more packed than mine. My son Adam, who's 19, is a competing tennis player on the British tour, so he's always travelling. He's been all over the world as a junior, playing ITFs, and he's now making the transition to adult. So he's in and around, and then he's gone again for a while, and then he's back again."



"Then there's my 15-year-old daughter Joy, who's very busy with a whole range of things, besides preparing for her GCSEs. She plays hockey, she fences, she's in a band, she plays the harp, saxophone, cello, piano. I don't know where she gets her musical ability from, but it's certainly not from me!"

"We've a number of friends who look at us and think we're absolutely mad but I think we thrive on the chaos."

Ken admits that personally he's "never really excelled at any sport". But it's clearly not for the want of trying.

"I did virtually all sports at Loughborough," he recalls. "There was a very strong intramural sporting

competition there, and we took it very seriously. I think the scariest thing we played was mixed hockey – all those hockey sticks crashing on skulls and shins!"

So did he play Seb Coe at anything? "Not very much," he confesses. "I certainly didn't race him!"

As for his latest great challenge, how important does he think the Albion's success on the pitch this season will be when it comes to building on our fanbase at the Amex?

"I think it can be very significant," he says. "There's a growing feelgood factor here at the moment and our profile is beginning to rise significantly."

"We've all been working incredibly hard, in every area of the club, to drive things forward and there's a real sense that it's starting to come together."

"The beauty of football is that if you get it right it's a fantastic feeling. Soon after I joined Millwall we got to the Cup Final and into Europe. That felt fabulous and I'd love to replicate it."

"I haven't got a promotion on my CV just yet, so I want to do everything I can to play my part in taking this club forward."

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