

Talk ALBION

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



The first time talkSPORT's Robyn Schonhofer went to a match at the Goldstone, back in 1991, Albion's John Robinson nearly crocked someone. He didn't mean to, but that's not the point. The person he nearly crocked, as he crashed into an advertising board, was Robyn Schonhofer.

Standing close to the front – perilously close, as she was about to discover – 13-year-old fledgling fan Robyn was unable to swerve out of the way in time as Robinson careered towards her.

"We were playing Newcastle," she recalls, "It was absolutely teeming with rain, and he kind of aquaplaned across the pitch. He smacked into the hoarding just in front of me – where my hands were. For a moment I honestly thought my fingers were broken!"

Something of a baptism of fire, then, but not enough to prevent Robyn returning to watch the Albion on a regular basis, initially with her mum Stella and stepdad Nick. Just as significantly, it gave her an early lesson in how to survive in a

predominantly male environment – something which, nearly two decades later, has stood her in good stead.

"I work in a very male dominated environment now," says Robyn, who's been presenting talkSPORT's news bulletins for five years. "And thanks to the fact that football has always been in my family, I can do all the banter and be sarcastic. If you can't, you wouldn't last five minutes!"

"You need to be able to give as good as you get when someone like Adrian Durham (the station's Drivetime host) is berating you about

your love of Brighton and Hove Albion – and suggesting that his own club, Peterborough United, is the best thing since sliced bread!

"It's the same thing at matches. I can certainly hold my own."

Robyn believes football has become a lot more female-friendly in recent years. "You do get a lot more women going to games," she says. "There are certain grounds in some parts of the country where you perhaps wouldn't go into particular areas, but I think the abolition of terraces (personally, I never stood in the old North Stand, I was too scared) has generally changed the dynamics of the game quite dramatically.

"A lot more people are prepared to take their wives, girlfriends and children."

The best part of 30,000, of course, turned up in Albion colours for the old Division Two play-off final against Bristol City at Cardiff's Millennium Stadium in May 2004. And that's the occasion Robyn says was her happiest as a Seagulls fans.

"It was my birthday weekend," she recalls, "but I deliberately didn't go out the night before. We'd chartered a coach, but we were on strict instructions to travel sober.

"I just remember it being a really bright, sunny day – and walking through Cardiff beforehand in the special shirts we'd had made, dreading the possibility of that long journey home if we lost.

"As it turned out, of course, we needn't have worried – except that the bloke who arranged the coach had managed to book one without a toilet..!"

As for her saddest moment, she points to any of the Albion's relegations. "I've hated watching them fall apart in front of my eyes," she says. "You could tell when there were problems in the dressing room, or when certain players weren't talking to one another, or when there was a disruptive influence.

"But living through that is all part of the experience of supporting any club – that sense of despair you feel when you know they're messing it up."

As for her most memorable moment work-wise, that was meeting the late George Best. "He came in to talkSPORT about a fortnight after I arrived," she recalls, "to talk to Rodney Marsh. I think it turned out to be George's last ever interview.

"It was so sad. I remember thinking how desperately ill he looked."

Away from work, has Robyn played much sport herself? "I was part of the school football team at Blatchington Mill," she says. "Watching the Albion had inspired me to play, but I kept getting sent off! I was a little bit too enthusiastic with the tackling – and I had absolutely no ball control. I was rubbish!"

The best thing she did at school, sport-wise, was apparently trampolining. It's something she took



up again not so long ago ("to be thin") – and, after a freak accident last summer, wishes to goodness she hadn't.

"I landed badly and broke and dislocated my left elbow," she recalls. "It's one of the most painful experiences I've ever known. I've just had my third op, to replace some of the metalwork in there.

"Watching footballers suffering injuries now, like Bobby Zamora breaking his leg, I immediately know how that feels and the sound it makes. The pain is indescribable."

Given her broadcasting credentials and her love of the game, can Robyn envisage herself in a football-related TV role some day? Apparently not.

"I'd like to do it," she says, "but I'm not built for TV, either mentally or physically!"

"I don't look at myself and think I'm fat, but I'm not a size zero. I did a *Shocking Celebrity Moments* thing for Channel Five last year, talking about Tiger Woods' affairs – and being on camera made me look like lard!

"My problem is, I like cake and I like wine!"

"I was a little bit too enthusiastic with the tackling – and I had absolutely no ball control"

