



Behind the Mike

MARTIN McCONACHIE
SPEAKS TO BBC RADIO
COMMENTATOR AND DERBY
FAN **MIKE INGHAM**

As the owner of one of football's most recognisable voices, Mike Ingham is well known in the world of football commentating on radio. Having 'called' hundreds of games including nearly 30 FA Cup Finals, Mike is the BBC's Chief Football Correspondent. But what maybe isn't as well known is that he's a Ram and proud of it!

The young Ingham spent his early years in Swansea and Plymouth, having moved down from Cheshire. Then, after settling in Derby, a twist of fate saw his first Rams game at the Baseball Ground against Plymouth, beginning a love affair lasting more than half a century. The relationship is still as strong now although they don't see each other as regularly due to his work commitments!

"I began at the Birmingham Radio Network and moved on to BBC Radio Derby," explains Mike. "At the time, County were poor and it wasn't until Brian Clough and Peter Taylor arrived in the late sixties that the club really took off.

"I remember the League Cup in 1968-69 when we beat Chelsea and Everton; that was the stirrings of something special happening at the club.

"There were some fantastic nights at the old Baseball Ground, I miss it. The atmosphere there was almost worth a goal start at times; it traumatised Benfica when they came across for the European Cup game in 1972. We beat them 3-0, Eusebio included!"

Those years were Derby's most successful in their history under the



WORK: Mike Ingham, right, with commentating colleague Alan Green

legendary partnership of Clough and Taylor. Promotion to Division One (today's Premier League) was followed by a fourth placed finish then the title itself in 1972. They reached the European Cup semi-finals the next season and later won a second championship under Dave Mackay in 1974-75. But with Clough's son Nigel in charge at Pride Park nowadays, how does Mike see things?

"It must be really difficult for him," he suggests. "He is blessed with an inner strength and a steely determination to do well. As with Darren Ferguson at Peterborough, both sons would love to emulate their legendary fathers and equal their success but nowadays, it would be almost impossible to take a side the size of Derby and win the top flight title with them.

"Although the club is a sleeping giant, the fact is that any really top quality players will leave for pastures new. I hope that the board will give Nigel more time to build on what he's done."

Working for Radio Derby meant that Mike came into contact with Clough senior regularly. He tells a wonderful story where he met Brian for the first time. "He came down to Plymouth once with Middlesbrough

and I got his autograph (I was nine at the time). Upon meeting him years later in a professional capacity, I recalled the story and he said 'Ah yes, I remember you. You were the one who didn't say thank you!'. Brian would keep you waiting for hours when you went to interview him but it was always worth it."

As Mike's career progressed from presenting to commentating, Yeovil's FA Cup exploits from Non-League attracted the attention of the BBC. Mike explains: "I went to the old ground to see Yeovil play Farnborough on Boxing Day 1987 as preparation for the Cup tie with Queens Park Rangers. Our families were based in Sidmouth at the time so it was only an hour to the ground. I then came to Huish Park to work on the third round ties against Arsenal in 1993 and Cardiff in 1999. Three cup games, three defeats!"

Mike's job means that, combined with the vagaries of the Premier League fixture list, he doesn't get to see the Rams too often nowadays. As we speak, he's preparing for the Manchester United versus Chelsea match on Monday night. Approaching 30 years of commentary now, he thinks back to the days when he worked with one of the greatest sports broadcasters and presenters of all time, Peter Jones. "I worked with Peter over many years and often think of him nowadays. It was wonderful to spend time with both him and Bryon Butler on the way to games and to follow in their footsteps at the BBC is very special."

Mike Ingham also belongs to that elite group of British broadcasting luminaries now. Next summer, he will head out to Brazil to commentate for 5Live on his eighth World Cup Finals but before then, he'll be backing the Rams as they try to reach the Premier League. ■

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