

'This time I'll try and behave myself'

2005/06 is Des Walker's testimonial 'year'. It began last May with the all-star game at the City Ground (and, of course, the infamous after-match party) and continued in November with a massive dinner event at the East Midlands Conference Centre. Another dinner in Sheffield is planned for next year. But, despite all this booze and high spirits, Des is making sure he does his best to stay out of jail from now on, reports ALEX WALKER

Testimonials used to be staged in order to help players forced out into early retirement or to supplement a poor footballing pension, but it is hard to see why Des Walker – one of football's most notorious tight-wads – needs one. Co-ost and testimonial committee chairman David Hargreaves suggested, "He hasn't had a new car for at least a fortnight."

In actual fact, most of the money raised by the dinner on November 9 went towards the Danielle Beccan Memorial Trust, a anti-gun crime campaign in memory of the 14-year-old killed during Goose Fair last year.

Charitable cause or not, though, it still remains the case that there are few footballers more deserving of a bit of praise, thanks and recognition than Des Walker – and over 400 people had turned out in order to honour one of Forest's best servants (not to mention enjoy a slap-up meal and free champagne).

Rather like the match in May, the line-up of celebrity guests was rather his and miss, with auction compere Gary Lineker failing to show and Ian Wright arriving late. Still, a healthy selection of ex-Forest stars had turned up, including a few recent first team figures such as Jim Brennan, Andy Reid and Matthieu Louis-Jean – that they made the effort to come back to Nottingham says something about the influence that must have rubbed off on them from their time working

with Des (although, again, the prospect of free champagne can't have hurt).

And of course, the star turn, Stuart Pearce was there. You have to feel a bit sorry for Des when he is constantly over-shadowed by his close friend, with chants of "Psycho! Psycho!" bursting forth much more readily than the obligatory "You'll never beat Des Walker" salutation. Still, Pearce's quick, dry wit and easy-going public manner is needed to bring the notoriously reticent Des out of his shell. Mind you, when he gets going it's hard to shut the man up!

In an after-dinner discussion slot, ably marshalled by Des' Sheffield Wednesday teammate Mark Bright, the pair

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exchanged memories of their time at Forest and took questions from the audience. If they weren't both pursuing further careers in the game, one suspects they could make a good living as a wry comedy double act, with Pearce claiming that the most bizarre moment when he was at the club was "Des Walker scoring a goal" and Des revealing that he *did* enjoy his time in Italy, but only because of the food.

Reflecting on his career, Des



said: "I think the highlight was the World Cup. You always like to compete with and pit yourself against the best players in the world. To play at that level, even in the qualifiers leading up to the finals themselves, that will live with me forever."

That was suitably followed with Mark Bright asking: "What was the worst moment? Which one of the own goals?"

"I think you've already answered that one!" replied Des. "It doesn't get any worse for a defender than getting to the FA Cup Final and scoring an own goal. That was probably the worst moment of my life."

Pearce revealed how his team-mates consoled him: "We said, 'Don't worry about it. It's not the first one you've scored... and it probably won't be the last!'"

Despite this ribbing, Des is thankful for the good times he enjoyed and the players he enjoyed them with: "It's not who you're playing against that's important, but who you're playing with."

Des expects to return to the sport at some point, and Pearce agreed that it was inevitable due to his love of the game:

"He can't stop talking about football. I got into the habit of going to sleep while he was talking about football and waking up half an hour later and he'd still be talking."

Stuart Pearce himself shared a few of the secrets to his success thus far as manager of Manchester City, revealing that his first approach to motivation was a promise to double wages if they won the next game. When his charges duly delivered and demanded their increased pay, Pearce said: "Sorry lads, I was lying. But if you win the next game, then I'll double your wages."

The only time he looked somewhat nervous was when the nagging subject of returning to Forest as manager arose. "Have you seen where they are in the league?" he parried quickly.

Des had his own nervous moment when grilled about *that* night out. He apologised with the sheepish manner of a recalcitrant teenager after a parental dressing-down. With the looming prospect of an after-dinner party at nightclub Bluu, Des promised to be one his best behaviour. His absence from the papers the next day suggests he managed it!