

Former Hibs' star Gerry Baker dies aged 75



Former Hibs' striker Gerry Baker has passed away aged 75 following a short illness.

In just over two seasons with the club, Gerry scored 43 goals in 84 games, and whilst never reaching the same world class standards as his younger brother Joe, he had a highly successful career on both sides of the border.

Gerry was born on 11 April 1938 in New Rochelle in New York State, where his English father and Scottish mother had settled, but after a year in the States, the family moved to his father's native Liverpool, so that he could assist the war effort. During their short spell there, his younger brother Joe was born thus preventing him from turning out in the dark blue of Scotland, but that is another story.

A few weeks after Joe's birth, the family were evacuated over the border and the football mad brothers were brought up in Motherwell, playing football first for his school sides of Park Primary and St. Joseph's Secondary, as well as Craigneuk Boys Club.

Gerry's form soon brought him to the attention of Larkhall Thistle, and after only six games, the 15 year old headed south to join Chelsea where he starred in their youth, third and reserve teams (scoring four goals in six starts), before making one appearance for the Chelsea first team, against Luton Town in a Southern Floodlight Cup match on 26 September 1956. He returned to Scotland later that year suffering from homesickness, and was quickly snapped up by his home town team of Motherwell. Players of the quality of Pat Quinn, who would later star for Blackpool and Hibs, and Ian St John who had a

successful career under Bill Shankly at Liverpool limited his chances and Motherwell manager Bobby Ancell regularly played Gerry at outside left, which was not his favoured position. He was delighted therefore to move to St. Mirren in early 1959 and scored on his debut in a 2-1 win over a Hibs side which contained his brother Joe.

He also helped his new team-mates to the Scottish Cup final, scoring seven goals en route, and then netted the third in the clubs historic 3-1 win over Aberdeen, a result which is still fondly remembered in Paisley.

The following season, Gerry made history by scoring an incredible ten goals in a Scottish Cup tie against Glasgow University, which St Mirren won 15-0. (Unbelievably Joe scored nine against Peebles Rovers for Hibs a year later.)

In 1961 Gerry caught the eye of Manchester City who paid a reporter £30,000 for his signature and he crossed the border again, where he played alongside the great Denis Law, but once more did not settle in the south. Coincidentally Law would join brother Joe at Torino.

Following the shock resignation of Hugh Shaw in November 1961, speculation surrounded his successor with Jock Stein and Bobby Brown amongst the names mentioned. Chairman Harry Swan told supporters who were desperate to see new faces that no new signings would be made until a new manager was in place however as the team had not won in nine games, Swan decided not to wait until Shaw's eventual replacement Walter Galbraith took over and persuaded Manchester City to part with Gerry Baker, brother of Joe who had recently moved to Torino for £65,000.

His thoughts were that whoever took over would be happy to have a player of Gerry's quality in the team, and he was proved correct.

Gerry made his debut in a 2-0 win over St Johnstone at Muirton

Park on 18 November 1961 alongside team-mates including Ronnie Simpson, Tommy Preston, Ally McLeod and Eric Stevenson. He scored his first goal for the club against former club St Mirren two weeks later in a 3-2 win in front of new manager Walter Galbraith.

Before the end of the campaign, Gerry scored an impressive 12 goals in 23 games, including doubles against Partick Thistle and Dundee United.

The following season, Gerry started in style, scoring four goals in the League Cup group stages, including a hat-trick against Third Lanark, before sampling European football, scoring in a 4-0 home win over KB Copenhagen in the Inter Cities Fairs Cup.

In the next round, he scored against Dutch side Utrecht in a 2-1 win at Easter Road in a game best remembered for the debut of 16 year old Jimmy O'Rourke. Unfortunately Spanish giants Valencia put paid to hopes of European success in the quarter final, but Gerry ended the season in style scoring a superb 10 goals in the last 11 games, including a hat-trick against Dundee at Dens Park.

With four games remaining in that season, Hibs were in considerable danger of being relegated but Gerry's contribution helped the team win their last three games, scoring the winner against St Mirren, two against Queen of the South and one against Raith Rovers to narrowly secure top flight status.

On his final half season with Hibs, Gerry scored 11 times in 19 starts. His last game in the green and white jersey was a 2-0 win over Aberdeen on 30 November 1963, then former Newcastle legend Jackie Milburn paid £25,000 to sign Gerry for Ipswich Town, and he stayed at Portland Road until 1967, when he signed for Coventry City.

Over the next two seasons, Baker scored only six times in

thirty games with Coventry, but at the end of his career when it became apparent that he would not be selected for Scotland, he made himself available for the U.S. team as it began qualifying matches for the 1970 FIFA World Cup. His first caps came in a 4–2 World Cup qualifying defeat to Canada on 17 October 1968.

Over the next month, Gerry started six games with the U.S and scored twice in a 6–2 qualification victory over Bermuda. His last game with the U.S. came in a 1–0 loss to Haiti which put the U.S. out of contention for a spot in the finals.

In October 1969, Coventry loaned Gerry to Brentford where he scored two goals in eight games and was released at the end of the season.

Gerry then signed as a player-manager with non-league Margate, but was limited by several injuries, first a dislocated shoulder in August 1970, then broken ribs in November. Despite these injuries, Gerry played a total of 48 games and scored sixteen goals before leaving the club in September 1971. He then joined Nuneaton Borough before finishing his playing career with Bedworth United.

After hanging up his boots, Gerry worked for Jaguar Cars in Coventry, and spent much of his leisure time on the golf course.

Gerry was inducted to the St. Mirren Hall of Fame in May 2007.

A statement on the Hibernian website read: "Everybody at Hibernian was saddened to learn out former striker Gerry Baker has passed away. He was 75. Gerry attended Lawrie Reilly's funeral at the beginning of the month and was his usual personable and engaging self before falling ill at the beginning of last week.

"His association with Hibernian may have been brief, but he was out first 'foreign' player and he left a lasting

impression at Easter Road. Once a Hibeer, always a Hibeer are there will always be a special place for the Baker brothers in Hibernian folklore.

“Everybody at the club would like to express our condolences to the Baker family at this time. Gerry was a fine player and popular character.”

Acclaimed author and Hibs fan Irvine Welsh tweeted; “Sad to hear of the death of Hibs and United States of America international striker Gerry Baker.”

Sky Sports Luke Shanley tweeted; “Sad to hear about the death of Gerry Baker, St Mirren legend for his exploits in the 1959 Scottish Cup Final. Decent at Hibernian too. Gerry told me the only time he and Joe argued as kids was over who got to be Lawrie Reilly at football.”

Sadly Gerry’s wife Anne, who was a champion sprinter, passed away last year and he is survived by daughters, Karen and Lorraine who were both international athletes. Lorraine was selected for the 1984 Summer Olympics where she finished fifth in the 800 metres.

The Edinburgh Reporter also sends our condolences to the Baker family at this sad time.