

# The Fabulous Baker Boys – The Greatest Strikers Scotland Never Had



The eagerly anticipated book, 'The Fabulous Baker Boys – The Greatest Strikers Scotland Never Had' by Tom Maxwell, highlighting the lives of two brothers Joe and Gerry Baker who lit up the terraces at Easter Road over 50 years ago will be available from Monday.

The pair scored over 200 goals in the green and white jersey, and but for outdated eligibility rules at the time, could have changed the course of football history had they been allowed to play in the dark blue of Scotland.

The mere mention of Joe Baker's name evokes countless fantastic memories amongst those fortunate enough to have seen him play, and few would argue that he was one of the finest footballers ever to grace the Scottish game. Four goals against Hearts at Tynecastle as a 17 year old, goals against European giants Barcelona and Roma and nine against Peebles Rovers in the Scottish Cup immediately spring to mind, but those too young to have witnessed the great man at his peak need only look at the record books: 141 goals in 160 games and five England caps as a teenager whilst playing for Hibs demonstrates his talent.

His performances caught the attention of Italian sides, and coincidentally, after leaving Easter Road for Torino for a record transfer fee, Joe's position was taken by his older brother Gerry who also knew the route to goal, scoring an impressive 43 goals in 83 games, and whilst he probably never received the adulation of his sibling, there was no jealousy, only mutual pride in each other's achievements.

Gerry started his career with Chelsea before returning to Scotland and joined hometown club Motherwell then St Mirren where he gained immortality by scoring in the 1959 Scottish Cup win over Aberdeen, which amazingly is the only senior trophy won by either brother.

There is much more to this story than their goal-scoring exploits however. Although both were brought up in Lanarkshire, neither was able to represent their beloved Scotland.

Liverpool-born Joe became the first man to make his England debut having never played in the English league and only narrowly missed being part of Alf Ramsey's squad for the 1966 World Cup.

Many observers speculate that had been eligible to play for Scotland at that time then the dark blues may well have qualified for the tournament where they would have been a match for anyone.

US-born brother Gerry was the first top-flight European footballer to turn out for the USA, although his goals failed to secure a place in the 1970 World Cup in Mexico.

The Fabulous Baker Boys is a unique tale of Scotland's most celebrated sporting siblings and contains exclusive interviews with the likes of Denis Law, Lawrie Reilly, John Robertson (Nottingham Forest), Alex Young, Pat Stanton, Bob Wilson, Ron Flowers and George Eastham.

Today, the Edinburgh Reporter talks to Tom about what inspired him to embark on this project and the memories he has taken from it.

He said: "I first came across the name Joe Baker while working as a sub editor at the Evening News. Hibs were playing Barcelona in a friendly at Murrayfield and the newspaper did a piece on Joe. I asked a journalist, David Hardie, about him,

and he told me that Joe had scored 100 goals for Hibs before he was 21, had played for England as a teenager. Not only that, but he had a brother, Gerry who played for America.

“I thought that this was an incredible story and that set me on my way. I discovered that Gerry was still alive and managed to get in touch with him through the Motherwell former players association and I managed to get in touch with Joe’s son Colin through Wishaw Golf Club and we all met up, along with Joe’s daughter Nadia. I started the interviews about two years ago and finished in January this year, so the whole process took about 18 months.

“What was very important to me was that I spoke to at least one player from each of the clubs the brothers played for and from their international teams as well. Some of the bigger names included Lawrie Reilly, Pat Stanton, Tommy Preston, John Fraser and Jimmy O’Rourke from Hibs, Denis Law who played with Gerry at Manchester City and then with Joe at Torino, Hearts players Gordon Marshall and Alex Young, Doug Moran from Ipswich, George Eastham and Bob Wilson from Arsenal, Ian Storey-Moore and John Robertson from Nottingham Forest and Dennis Tuart and Jim Montgomery from Sunderland. There are also contributions from England legends such as Sir Bobby Charlton and Ron Flowers.

“From the USA, I spoke to Gordon Jago who was the assistant manager and Willy Roy who was a German-born striker who played alongside Gerry, and Bob Gansler, a Hungarian-born defender who subsequently managed the USA when they eventually did qualify for the World Cup in 1990.”

Given the fact that Joe was a world-class footballer and although Gerry had a fine career on both sides of the border, he never reached the heights of his younger brother, so it would be understandable if there was some envy, however Tom insists that was not the case.

He continued: "Gerry was a fantastic person, and any time I spoke to him he seemed to be laughing. That's the most apt description I can give of him. He always seemed to have a smile on his face and was a very genuine happy-go-lucky person.

"Any time Gerry spoke about Joe, it was always in glowing terms. He was Joe's biggest fan, and Colin said that the feeling was mutual. There was no rivalry between them at all. Ironically, although Joe was considered to be the better player, it was Gerry who enjoyed Scottish Cup success, and amazingly Joe never won a trophy, and must be one of the greatest players never to do so.

"Gerry started his career with Chelsea although he only played one first team game, but he said that he spent most of his time in the youth team passing the ball to Jimmy Greaves to score then, when he moved to Motherwell, he spent most of his time passing to Ian St John.

"It was only when he moved to St Mirren that his career took off, scoring in the Scottish Cup final win against Aberdeen then scoring 10 in a cup tie against Glasgow University.

"Amazingly, a year later Joe scored nine in the same competition against Peebles Rovers, and Tommy Preston told me that the crowd were getting on his back because he wasn't shooting, but instead kept trying to feed Joe and get him up to ten goals to match his brother. It didn't quite happen in the end – much to Gerry's delight!

"Gerry told me that he and Joe had the greatest affection for Hibs and had both been big fans of the Famous Five. He knew that he had done a really good job at Easter Road. Although he hadn't reached a Cup final like Joe did, he did score the goals which saved the club from relegation."



Whilst Tom was able to glean much information from Gerry and his family, much of Joe's career was covered anecdotally, although detailed research ensured that his life is covered in full.

Tom explained: "Because I had access to vast amounts of newspaper cuttings, I was able to take quotes from Joe from throughout his career and although he passed away in October 2003, his voice is very much heard throughout the book.

"Apart from being a prolific goal-scorer, the main thing that makes Joe stand out was the fact that he played for England while at Hibs, and for England to give him that chance was amazing. He should really have had more caps. He made his debut against Northern Ireland, replacing Brian Clough in the line-up. He scored the first goal and made the second in a 2-1 win.

"Gerry was at the game and told me he was sitting next to a couple of English guys who were saying 'Why have they picked a bloody Scotsman for England instead of Brian Clough?' A few minutes later, Joe cracked the ball into the net from 20 yards and Gerry, who had been biting his tongue, said to them: 'That's why they picked a Scotsman for England!'

"Joe then played in the next four games but didn't score and lost his place. But he was in Alf Ramsey's very first squad in 1963, although he didn't play until 1965 when he again scored against Northern Ireland in a 2-1 victory, playing inside-right as Jimmy Greaves was injured. His next game was against Spain. Ramsey played his famous 'Wingless Wonder' 4-3-3 formation. Joe scored the first goal in a 2-0 win but England tore them apart. It was after this game that Ramsey said he truly believed England could win the World Cup, which goes to show that Joe was very much part of the manager's plans even at that stage.

"Eventually when the 66 World Cup squad was announced, Joe

wasn't picked but he was very close."

Although Joe was clearly proud to have represented England, he considered himself to be a Scot having been brought up in Motherwell, and fans can only speculate about the difference his presence in the Scotland team of the mid-Sixties would have made.

Tom continued: "Joe said that he would have loved to play for Scotland, not least because he would have played a lot more games. Denis Law told me that Scotland wouldn't have been a good team with Joe Baker in it...they would have been a great team. That says it all.

"Joe had actually played twice for Scotland Schoolboys, scoring in a 5-2 win over Wales then scoring both goals in a 2-2 draw with England that was played in front of 40,000 people at Goodison Park. At that stage, he was under the impression that he could play for Scotland and it was one of his teachers who told him that he could not do so. He described that experience as having the rug pulled from under his feet.

"These days you can qualify for international teams through birth, marriage, grandparents and education, but none of this was open to Gerry or Joe, yet when Gerry made his debut for the USA against Canada in 1968, he was only one of only three players who had actually been born in the country as it was only the Home Nations which had this strict rule about a player's birthplace."

Returning to a former club is never easy, and over the years, a few reputations have suffered, however this was not the case when Joe returned to Hibs in January 1971. He made an immediate impact, scoring an impressive eight times in 15 games before the end of the season, and he remained a fans' favourite long after he retired. Tom explained: "Joe was a bit concerned about returning to Easter Road because, after a

successful career at Arsenal and Nottingham Forest, the goals had started to dry up a bit, especially during his unhappy spell at Sunderland, but when he went back to Hibs it seemed to give him a new lease of life. His first game back was against Eddie Turnbull's Aberdeen who had not lost a goal in the previous 12 games, but Joe scored in a famous 2-1 win in front of 23,000 fans."

Injury hampered his second spell at Easter Road, and Joe's last game for his beloved Hibs was in a 1-1 draw with Rangers at Hampden in the Scottish Cup semi-final. He subsequently spent two seasons at Raith Rovers before hanging up his boots.

Joe's involvement with Hibs did not end there, however, and he was a popular match-day host for several years, but many younger fans remember his involvement at the 'Hands off Hibs' rally at Easter Road following the abortive takeover by Hearts' Chairman Wallace Mercer.

Tom concluded: "If there was one moment that defined what it meant to Hibs fans not to lose their club, it was when Joe kissed the turf at Easter Road and I think that really captured the feeling.

"Writing this book has been a fantastic experience, I have really loved it. Unfortunately Gerry passed away a few weeks before it was due to be published, but he had read the manuscript and really enjoyed it. I hope this book serves as a fitting tribute to him and to Joe."

Author Tom Maxwell was born in Edinburgh, was brought up in Berwick-upon-Tweed and became a lifelong fan of Berwick Rangers, the subject of his first book: *The Lone Rangers – An English Club's Century in Scottish Football* (2011). A freelance journalist based in East Lothian, Tom's work has been widely published, particularly in *The Times*, *The Scotsman* and *The Edinburgh Evening News*. *The Lone Rangers* was critically acclaimed in the media and by sports fans – Phil

Shaw, writing in Backpass, described it as 'A strong contender for best football book of the year'.

The Fabulous Baker Boys, published by Birlinn, is available from all good bookshops and online from September 19.