

Hibs pay tribute to Scottish football legend Billy McNeill



Hibs have paid tribute to former Celtic captain Billy McNeill who died aged 79 on Monday.

Born in Bellshill, North Lanarkshire, Billy made his Celtic debut on 23 August 1958.

He went on to make over 800 appearances for the club where he won nine league titles in a row, seven Scottish Cups and six League Cups with the European Cup final win over Inter Milan in 1967 the highlight.

He was capped 29 times for Scotland. In two spells as Celtic boss, he won four titles and four cups. He managed Clyde, Aberdeen, Manchester City Aston Villa and for one match Hibernian.

Acting as a mentor to then-manager Jim Duffy, Billy was a popular and hugely respected figure at Easter Road and took over as caretaker prior to the arrival of Alex McLeish.

Chairman Rod Petrie said: "Billy was brought to the club at Jim Duffy's suggestion to mentor Jim and subsequently helped transition to the Alex McLeish era following Jim's departure.

"Billy looked back fondly on his time with us and as a club we were glad to have someone of his stature in the game – a legend – with us.

"He always carried himself with great dignity and is affectionately remembered by all who were fortunate enough to meet him

." The thoughts of everyone at Hibernian are with Billy's family and friends at this difficult time."

A statement from the McNeill family said he "fought bravely to the end, showing the strength and fortitude he always has done throughout his life".

It added: "We would also like to note our love and appreciation to our mother, Liz, for the care, devotion and love she gave to our father throughout his illness. No one could have done any more.

"Whilst this is a very sad time for all the family and we know our privacy will be respected, our father always made time for the supporters so please tell his stories, sing his songs and help us celebrate his life."

Billy was awarded the MBE in 1974, and is in the Scottish Sports Hall of Fame and the Scottish Football Hall of Fame.

He was voted Celtic's greatest captain in a 2002 fans' poll and was given a Celtic ambassador role in 2009.

A statue of him lifting the European Cup was erected at Celtic Park in 2015.