

Willie Hunter 1940 – 2020 Obituary by Hibernian FC Historian Tom Wright

Willie Hunter who played for both Hibs and Motherwell during the late 1950's and 1960's has sadly passed away in Edinburgh aged 80.

Born only a few hundred yards from Easter Road it was almost certain that Hunter would turn out to be keen Hibs supporter as a youngster. A product of the well-known juvenile side Edinburgh Norton that had supplied many players to the senior ranks including Hunters future Fir Park team mate and great friend Bobby Roberts, Willie joined Motherwell in 1957 and soon became an almost immediate first team regular in what was soon to become famously known as the 'Ansell Babes,' making 11 league appearances that first season. Equally comfortable at either the inside forward position or on either wing, his mesmeric ball skills and intelligent play would soon make him a great favourite with the fans, and along with the future Hibs player Pat Quinn he was part of the Motherwell side that defeated Hibs 3-1 at Easter Road in 1959 when Ian St John had famously scored his hat-trick in just two and a half minutes.



Hunters intelligent and direct play would soon come to the attention of the then Scotland manager Andy Beattie and he would win the first of his three full caps for Scotland, plus several more at inter-league level, when lining up at inside left alongside his Fir Park team mate Andy Weir against Hungary in Budapest in June 1960, making a scoring debut in the 3-3 draw.

Unfortunately, a serious arm injury received during the 1962-63 season would keep him out of the game for some time, but he would recover to once again thrill the fans with his nonstop action, his intelligent passes from midfield helping to set up many goals for his colleagues while also managing to figure regularly on the score sheet himself.

After ten seasons and just over 300 appearances in all games wearing the claret and amber, during which time he had scored over 60 goals, in the summer of 1967 the Motherwell fans would be disappointed to learn that Hunter would be leaving Fir Park to spend a brief spell on loan with Glentoran, and he was just in time to accompany the Irish side on a six week all expenses tour of America including games against the Detroit Cougars. However, he would decide to remain in Detroit and would spend the remainder of the North American league season playing with the Cougars before returning to Scotland to sign for his boyhood favourites Hibs, where he would renew acquaintance with his former Motherwell team mates Pat Quinn and Joe McBride.

However; although he was still only 29 it would appear that his best years were already behind him and at Easter Road he would struggle to command a regular first team place. Refusing to change his style of play that had relied so much on pace and industry from midfield, some of his former Easter Road team mates would be of the opinion that he could well have extended his career by playing further back where he could have used his considerable football brain and experience to far greater effect.

Hunter made his Hibs debut in a 2-1 home victory against Clyde on 1st February 1969, one of only 13 appearances he would make for the first team during a little over two and a half seasons at Easter Road, including an 2-1 away defeat by the Portuguese side Guimaraes in the Fairs Cup, his only goal for the club in a 4-3 defeat by Morton at Cappielow on 8th March 1969. An unused substitute in Hibs heavy 6-2 defeat by Celtic in the

League Cup Final at Hampden a few weeks later, Hunter would later confess that he had been so disappointed at the defeat that he would later throw his losers medal into the sea. His final appearance in the famous green and white jersey came as a substitute in a 2-1 home defeat by Dundee on 7th November 1970.

His lack of first team action at Easter Road would be scant reward for his undoubted talents, but much of his time at the club would be spent in the reserves where he could put his considerable experience to good use in helping the youngsters.

On leaving Easter Road Hunter would spend brief spells with the South African sides Hellenic and Cape Town City before returning to take up the position of assistant manager at Portsmouth under his former team mate and great friend Ian St John. Later he would enter management in his own right with Queen of the South and Inverness Caley before retiring completely from the game he had graced so eloquently for so many years to take up employment in the insurance business.

In ill health for some time, Willie Hunter was yet another giant of yesteryear who gave so much enjoyment to those who were fortunate enough to have seen him play, and he will be fondly remembered at both Fir Park and Easter Road.