

Potts, Harry

Contributed by Warren
Thursday, 08 May 2008
Last Updated Wednesday, 28 January 2009

Name : Harry Potts.

D.O.B: 22nd October 1920, Died 16th January 1996.

Previous Clubs, Player: Burnley, Everton.

Previous Clubs, Manager, Burnley, Shrewsbury,Blackpool

Burnley Playing Record: 181 Games, 50 Goals

Honours Player, FA Cup finalist 1946/47, Second Division Runner Up 1946/47.

Honours Manager: 1959/60 Division One Champions, 1961/62 FA Cup Finalists, 1978/79 Anglo-Scottish Cup Winners

Harry Potts will go down in history as one of Burnley Football Clubs finest, for this there is no doubt.

Potts was one of the Pioneers of Burnley's now famous Youth system, when in 1937 he made his way down from County Durham, in the North East of England for a trial for Burnleys Junior sides, a League game would be contested against Blackpool juniors. Potts gave a performance deemed good enough for Burnley to take a chance, he was given a job at Burnley as part of the ground staff, he would become a Burnley professional later that same year when he turned 17.

Potts as a youngster was turning out on regular occasions in the central league, and but for the outbreak of the Second World War, would have made his Burnley debut so much earlier.

The War years saw Potts stationed in India, serving with the RAF, he would guest for Fulham, Bury and Sunderland during the time of conflict, towards the end of the war Harry was a member of Denis Compton's all star team which toured India, quite an honour.

But with the war over, Harry came back to Burnley to continue his fledgling career, nine years after he signed he was to make his Burnley first team debut, against Coventry City on 31st Aug 1946. And Potts played his part in the season which saw Burnley take to the Wembley pitch to contest the FA Cup final against Charlton Athletic.

Potts in his first season became top goalscorer, his partnership with Billy Morris was a joy to behold, with Jackie Chew, Arthur Woodruff, Allan Brown, George Bray, Goalkeeper Jimmy Strong, Kippax, Mather and Spencer, Burnley were to bring the good times Back to Turf Moor.

Potts goalscoring would be a major factor in his playing career at Turf Moor, although he didn't make his Burnley debut till he was 25, he went on to become top goalscorer for 3 out of his 4 full seasons, his average was a goal every 3.6 games, 50 goals scored in 181 appearances.

In 1950 while still a Burnley regular, Potts handed in a transfer request, former Burnley manager Cliff Britton signed the front man for his new club Everton for a fee of £20k, Britton lasted just one more season with Burnley after taking them back into the top flight. Potts who had just turned 30 at Everton didn't have the best of starts at Goodison, with the Toffees men getting relegated that first year.

Everton now down in division two, started to look past Potts, when selecting the team, and with this Potts started coaching the junior sides, until his release in 1956.

He went from Everton to Wolverhampton Wanderers to continue his coaching, but in the summer of 1957, Shrewsbury Town came calling, and Potts took his first steps into football management.

Burnley's proud history would forever have Harry Potts in its mantle, when in February 1958, after the illness of Billy Dougall and subsequent resignation due to ill health, Harry Potts would become Burnley's 4th post war manager after Britton, Hill and Billy Dougall.

The back room at Burnley, like at so many successful clubs was unchanged, this was the case when Potts arrived back at Turf Moor, with Billy Dougall taking up a physiotherapy roll and Ray Bennion who were both there when Potts himself was making his way in the professional Football ladder.

Harry Potts was lucky, he took over a team which oozed class, Although he lost the unfortunate McDonald just a month after he took the reigns, he had Jimmy McIlroy, John Angus, Jimmy Adamson, Cummings, Pilkington the list goes on.

With such good foundations, could Harry take Burnley to the next level? well the answer was a resounding yes!

Sixth place in 57/58 followed by seventh place in 58/59, but this was just the foundations for the greatest ever Burnley side, and the greatest ever period in Burnley's illustrious history.

Champions 1959/60, Potts had done what John Haworth had done 39 years earlier, and to this day they are the only managers to lift the top division championship, while Haworth did this in 1920/21 with the greats Halley Watson and Boyle with the Legend that is Jerry Dawson in goal. Potts and his team will also go down in the list as the greatest Clarets of all time, names such as Jimmy McIlroy, Brian Miller, Jimmy Adamson, John Connelly and Potts himself will become the greatest Ever.

Potts continued to create great teams and take Burnley on journeys we fans can only dream of now, the European Cup taking on such greats as Real Madrid, Hamburg, the Fairs Cup with such teams as Stuttgart and Napoli.

The FA Cup final were we took part in one of the best footballing occasions of all, all this while continuing bedding in the Youth players, players who signed as kids and made into men, made into Footballers, creating to generate funds for this small mill town club, who were the footballing force all feared, all looked to, all admired, this is all credit to Harry Potts, a man who created a force in football, created Burnley as the front runner for others to follow.

Potts angered all Burnley supporters when he sold one player, not a big deal until you consider that one player was Jimmy McIlroy, although as time has past and books have been released, it was Burnley larger than life Chairman Bob Lord who sanctioned the deal. And Potts was left to carry the can.

Harry Potts wasn't stuck in the past, he knew football was changing after his first signing Alex Elder in 1959 for a fee of £5k, he spent Big £30k on a yorkshireman by the name of Frank Casper, the first time Burnley went out and purchased a

player rather than, bring through a youth player to take the mantle, this was in 1968 when money started to flood into football, and with Jimmy Hills "minimum wage" debate, Football became serious business.

In 1970 Harry Potts who had been at the helm for Burnley's greatest times, would step down and allow one time Burnley captain Jimmy Adamson to take control of first team affairs, Potts himself became General Manager.

Potts left Burnley in 1972, and after a small interlude away from football, he took over as manager of Blackpool, it a cruel twist of fate, a twist that always seems to occur in football, it was Potts and his Blackpool side that put one of the final nails in Jimmy Adamson's Burnley career when Blackpool beat Burnley in an FA Cup tie in 1976. Adamson who's Burnley Playing career ended against Blackpool in 1964 his Burnley Managerial ended against the same side. Potts however stayed in the Blackpool hot seat for just 4 more months, and he was sacked along with his youth team coach Ray Pointer.

In July 1976 Potts was reunited with his beloved Burnley when he was appointed as chief scout, a position he held until the following February, where with Burnley just above the relegation places in Division Two, manager Joe Brown was dismissed, and Potts almost 40 years to the day when he first walked through the Turf Moor door, here he was again.

Potts who was there when all in the garden was rosy, would be at the reigns again when all of Burnley were talking, he payed out again to bring back prodigal son Leighton James, and he was the man in charge when he took his Claret n Blue heroes up to Celtic Park, to defeat the former European Champions on there own door step, Potts brought the Anglo-Scottish cup to Burnley.

The sucess of the Anglo-Sottish Cup was his one last hurrah, in 1979 with the worst start to a season ever! Burnley without a win in there opening 11 games saw Potts replaced by yet another of his former players, this time it was Brian Miler.

Potts who passed away in January 1996, will be remembered as a pioneer, a leader, a manager, a gentleman, a man of honour, a man of stature, a man of Burnley.

RIP, Harry Potts legend in ever sense of the word.

Dave Thomas - Harry Potts 'Margarets story'

Contact Dave on beehivethomas@aol.com

THE STORY OF HARRY POTTS & MARGARET'S STORY

It was Ray Simpson who rang up one night and asked me if I was interested in writing this book. Ray, some time ago, had already worked on it with Margaret Potts, he had spent months recording interviews, transcribing them and then sorting chronologically all the boxes and boxes of Potts memorabilia. That in itself was a monumental task. When Ray willingly agreed to hand over the results of all his groundwork, and Sportsbooks expressed a tentative interest, it didn't take long to decide to go ahead.

Then there was the first meeting with Margaret. First impressions count. We hit it off from the start and it helped that she knew I'd already written Burnley books.

Source material is the key to the writing of any biography. So all Margaret's memorabilia, plus the three dozen scrapbooks containing seemingly everything ever written about Burnley from 1960 to 1980, that were bequeathed to me by lifelong Claret Alan Bailey, and I was all set and ready to go. I went through every folder that I brought home, pulling out yet more press cuttings, old letters, documents, old programmes and picture after picture. One letter was from Leeds United in the fifties when Harry was at the end of his Everton career. It invited him to join the Leeds coaching staff. If he had accepted, just think how the course of Leeds United and BFC history might have been changed. I read through everything relevant to Harry Potts the man and the Harry Potts years already on my shelves — the Ray Simpson books and the Tim Quelch, *Forever and Ever*, surely worth a reprint by some kind sponsor.

But where do you begin? At the beginning is the obvious enough answer, but publishing is a precarious business and Sportsbooks wanted an 'angle'. A publisher wants to know that his books have at least a sporting chance of selling well. Randall Northam and I therefore met Margaret in late March 2005. Randall wanted to test the water, talk to her, see her marvellous collection of pictures, and see if his instincts came up with anything. Randall used to be a journalist; he has a nose for the things that make the heart of a story. After an afternoon of talks we came up with the basic idea that this was a love story, a love story involving Harry, Margaret, and Burnley Football Club. The sub plots were there as well — Harry's mother, Bob Lord and Jimmy Adamson. And underlying it all there is the story of a small town club defeating the giants until at last they are no longer able. So many Burnley games in the sixties were the story of David and Goliath, and there's the beauty, David won not just once but over and over again.

The title was obvious from the start. Unlike the Willie Irvine book where we didn't come up with a title until the very last minute, the Harry book was easy. This would be Margaret's story as well as Harry's story, and it would be her story because she has such a phenomenal memory, and even in her eighties a pin sharp mind, plus her diaries.

The one problem was that Harry rarely talked football with her. He would come home and by and large leave Burnley FC behind him. He brought his disappointments and moods home on occasions but rarely told Margaret anything about his day job.

So the two of us tell the story together, Margaret tells of Harry the man at home, the way the football affected her daily life, Margaret the mother and then Harry the family man. I tell the story of Harry the manager, a man without an ounce of deviousness in his body, a man in love with football. Between us we try to get to the heart of the man.

So the writing of it took 13 months before it was handed over to Sportsbooks. Then, when a book goes to the publisher the editing begins and a book becomes a partnership between writer and editor. An editor sees things, spots things, repetition, a paragraph that can be moved, an error with a date or a name, spelling inconsistencies, he does the fine tuning, and when an author waxes lyrical and uses ten words where five will do, some pruning as well. And then that's not counting the proof reading, where a total stranger, an expert, corrects your punctuation and grammar, a salutary experience. Your work comes back with errors marked and annotated in red. Now I know what children felt like years ago when I marked their work.

But there's trust involved. I know that Randall won't take out whole pages, but I do know he will make suggestions, improve the flow, focus things, tighten it, smooth the edges, basically 'cut the waffle' and add his own little bits of knowledge.

For thirteen months I made the trip to Read initially every week and then once a fortnight as I visited ex players and colleagues of Harry in between. And on top of all those visits were the dozens of phone calls. Margaret talked, I wrote, sometimes she wrote, letters, her own notes, sometimes writing things that could just be worked straight in. Much of the time I wrote for her, trying to be her, writing what she might have thought. I had my fingers smacked several times. 'Oh no, that doesn't sound like me at all,' she would say

The draft pieces went back and forth to be corrected; changed and re written, shredded would be a fair word on some occasions, sometimes more than once. A chapter would be drafted, Margaret would read it, correct it, alter and annotate it. Her notes filled the margins. Back they would come either on a Tuesday when I visited her or in the post. Painstakingly, the completed chapters, which satisfied us both mounted up. She had the most amazing things in her collection of memorabilia – an essay written when she was a small schoolgirl about a trip in a charabanc to Hardcastle Crags a few miles away. Hardly a day out to make the mouth water today when you can jet off to hot beaches and warm seas anywhere in the world, but then, a real adventure.

Only the final chapters became difficult. Just when I thought we were winning, quite amazingly she sent me in the post another 24 pages of handwritten notes, 12,000 words to go through. What I thought would be the final chapter became three final chapters and all ending with the most difficult of all… the postscript… a mother writing about roots and wings, the way in which we give our children their roots and then we must be strong enough to give them their wings and freedom so that we can let them go and they must make their own way in the world.

At this point I don't think Margaret will mind me saying she was tired and weary; don't forget she and Ray had first mooted this book as long ago as 2000. I was tired too. This was the point I realised we had spent thirteen months on it. We couldn't get the Roots and Wings right. I used to be a head teacher in my other life, I've torn a strip off people once or twice, now this was Margaret the headmistress, demolishing the chapter, telling me in no uncertain terms to do it again, and again, and get it right. And I did (I think) and we're both smiling again. And at last the thing was done and we think it's a good un. With a bit of luck it will sell outside of Burnley and the publisher will be happy. We're just happy it's done, or at least our bit is done.

The publisher says writing a book is like giving birth. I partially agree, but I'd say it's more like a journey with obstacles and landmarks all along the way. For me this was a journey where I met so many great people, heard so many great stories, drove 40 miles each way back and forth to Burnley, through the bottleneck that is Colne, more times than I care to remember, met other people in Bolton and as far away as Dave Thomas in Sussex. Even when I'd sent the finished article off to the publisher somebody sent me the address for Harold Rudman who had played in the 46/47 team with Harry, and then Dave Hickson the legendary Everton player who had been a colleague of Harry at Goodison There was the pleasure of having enormously long telephone calls to Ralph Coates on three different Sunday mornings. I thought one trip to Brian Miller would be enough. It took three visits. I trumped up reasons to visit Jimmy Mac three times; he's such a pleasure to listen to. The most entertaining meeting was with Steve Kindon. We met at 5 o'clock in The Kettledrum. I asked the first question and never got another word in. He finished talking at 6. I didn't hear a full stop; it was just one long sentence. When he starts you just sit back and listen and laugh. I was spellbound as Dave Thomas told me the story of how he chose Harry the man, in preference to Revie and the holdall of money he put on the carpet in his living room. I smiled to hear that Harry was as skilled and frequent a 'diver' in the penalty area as any modern player. The difference was there weren't endless TV replays and Andy Gray analysis. The list of people I talked to is a who's who of Burnley Football Club history. Sadly the ones I didn't get to see were Jimmy Adamson and then Jimmy Holland passed away before I got to see him. Jimmy Adamson deserves a book of his own. Broken Dreams would be an apt title.

Harry Potts fulfilled his dreams until Lord and Adamson had no further use for him. Jimmy Adamson had his own dreams broken for him. Bob Lord had begun the process of his own self-destruction and then turned to Harry once again to rescue him in the late seventies. Harry had a damned good try, but it was a forlorn attempt and then after the last harvest of young players under Brian Miller and a promotion, the real wilderness years began, which Harry could only watch from the distance.

So many stories at this eventful football club, so much drama, so many events; there can't be a club with a

history quite like it.

Dave Thomas April 2006