

No.81 Brian 'Nobby' Horton

Brian Horton, born in Hednesford 4 February 1949, became the finest, local born, creative midfielder to leave the Cross Keys since Jack Martin departed for Aston Villa in 1935.

From his early school days at Chadsmoor Central School, he loved scoring goals, getting 47 in 12 games for the Under-13s. Those goals helped shoot him into the Cannock Schoolboys Under-14s team, with a year to spare.

At the age of 15, after playing a Birmingham & District Schools game, Brian signed for Walsall. However, having played regularly in their West Midland League side for two years, without a chance to progress, Walsall released him (how wrong can you be?) to be snapped-up by Hednesford's player-manager, Dick Neal.

At the beginning of the 1967-68 season, Granville Palin replaced Dick as player-manager to build a most successful team during the next three-years, culminating in 1970 with a 3-1 aggregate defeat of Kidderminster to lift the Staffordshire Senior Cup. That would be Brian's last game (or 'Nobby' as the fans preferred to call him); former Hednesford hero, Gordon Lee, convinced him that even at 21, a quite advanced age for a player in modern times; League Football was where he belonged.

Brian signed for Port Vale, 1 July 1970, making his debut within a week of the move in a 1-0 win over Preston, going on to make 254 senior appearances in all competitions and score 38 goals before accepting Peter Taylor's offer to join Brighton in a £30,000 move, 1 February 1976. Immediately he went into the first-team to play his inaugural game, again against Preston, in a 1-0 defeat at Deepdale.

The 1976-77 season ended with promotion to Division Two, with the side having never been outside the top three throughout that campaign. Promotion to the First Division came two-years later as Newcastle was beaten 3-1 in the 1978-79 season's final game. Brian had captained every League Football team he had represented and was now skipper of a First Division side - the first former Hednesford man since Villa's Alec Talbot during the 1930s.

He had scored 47 goals in 251 senior outings for Brighton when Second Division Luton Town acquired him, 1 August 1981, to run their midfield and gain promotion to the nation's top division, which they did at the first attempt. Brian's contribution for Luton had been; played 131, scored 14, before he was on the move again, this time to promotion seeking Hull City.

Signing for them as player-manager, 1 July 1984, he immediately drove his side to Division Two. Along with his managerial duties, he made 46 appearances before retiring from the playing side of the game in 1986.

Though he played 683 senior games, scoring 92 goals for four League Football clubs over a period of 16 years, Brian became even more prolific as a strong-minded, tactically astute manager. He took the reins at Hull City (1984-1988), Oxford United (1988-93), Manchester City (1993-95), Huddersfield Town (1995-97), Brighton (1998-99), Port Vale (1999-2004) and Macclesfield Town (2004-06), boasting a win ratio at all clubs in excess of 30%. He is one of the few managers in English football to have taken charge of teams in more than 1,000 games.

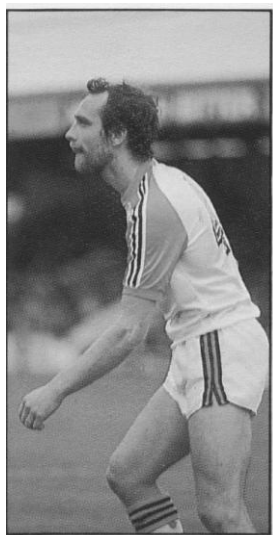
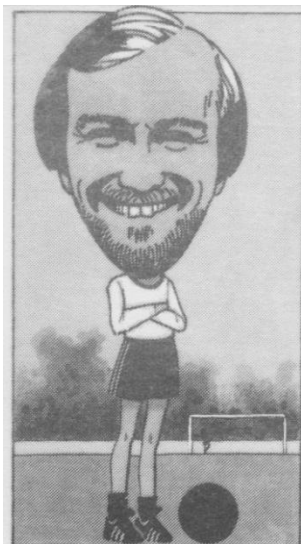
In May 2007, Brian returned to Hull to assist manager Phil Brown, helping the club win promotion to the Premier League via the play-offs, 24 May 2009. It had taken Hull 104-years to reach the top-flight.



The Villa defence is in trouble as 'Nobby' drives forward.



From the Dave Shaw archive.



From a set of 24 by Dave Shaw.

