



NORTHERN SHRIMPER - BOB DUNCAN



Our aim continues to be to try and track down every former Shrimper and invite them to join our ever-growing family. It is a tall order, and some are easier than others.

Now, not untypically, 78-year-old Bob was not exactly leaving a red-hot trail on the internet for us to pick up on, but some clues were there, and one of our SUEPA Agents noted that our man had once played for Dunfermline Athletic and so shot off an enquiry to the club. They helpfully put us in touch with their wonderful historian Duncan Simpson who told us quite a bit about Bob's time with 'The Pars' where Bob started out as a striker but then changed to become a left-back. However, there were some gaps in the records, and Duncan had no clues about Bob's whereabouts. So, we tried a tactic that has worked before, took a punt that someone in his old Scottish club town might know of him, and posted up an appeal on the 'Dunfermline Billboard' Facebook page. Within two days we had a result!

One of Bob's friends spotted our post, got in touch with him, and our former Shrimper tasked his granddaughter Mackenzie to send us an email – Bob was thrilled to learn of our interest and a phone call was booked.

Bob started his story by telling us he had left school at the age of 15 and, having been spotted by us playing for Bowhill Strollers in the Kirkcaldy & District Youth League (our scouting network was clearly far-reaching back then), Bob travelled south as soon as he reached his birthday milestone. Straight away he was thrown into a youth match against Portsmouth, scored, and then bagged a hat-trick in his next match. However, education rules in England were different to those north of the border at that time, and Bob was forced to attend school in Southend which he felt was of no use ... and so ultimately went back home to sign for Dunfermline. Not long after though, and without breaking into The Pars first team, he had two offers to continue his love for football –

from West Brom, and from us, so he opted for the familiarity of the Essex Riviera and found himself back at Roots Hall. "There were quite a few Scots there at the time, so I instantly felt welcome and never got homesick. I was also on the maximum wage at the time of £20 per week so felt I was doing ok."

Bob, now moved to a left full-back position, ultimately only made one appearance for us, in the 1961/62 season, a 2-1 win against Torquay United at Roots Hall, coming into the team for the injured Sandy Anderson. However, Sandy was an established player at Roots Hall and was back for the next match and kept his place - Bob never got another look in. "I had some good times though at Southend, the squad was a real friendly one, and me and Bobby Kellard had some fun. He once dared me to climb one of the floodlights, which I did right to the top – getting back down was a bit tricky though!" Bob was pleased to learn that our 'four candles' are still a proud Roots Hall feature, though as the conversation turned to his former teammates, he was naturally sad to learn that many had passed away including his old pal Bobby Kellard and, back in 2020, our record-breaking right back Arthur Williamson.

Bob left us to join Crawley Town where he said he had never felt so wealthy as his weekly pay, boosted by a part-time job, jumped up to £52 per week. After that he moved back up to Scotland and joined Forfar, though often found it to be frustrating as the first team was decided 'by committee' in the absence of a manager, but he did fare better after that playing for Scottish 'Junior' club Glenrothes who he helped to a cup final win at Hampden.

Life after football included time working as a 'tool hardener', a period with a company that made shopping trolleys, and being a transport manager. A triple heart bypass operation a few years ago now means that he takes life a little more easily in his retirement, enjoying life with his two children, two grandchildren, and also from time to time taking advantage (thanks to a good friend) of some free hospitality at Ibrox to watch his beloved Glasgow Rangers ("though the hospitality is far better than the football" he wryly remarked).

It was wonderful to speak to Bob, and Mackenzie said how delighted he was that SUEPA had made the effort to seek him out and get in touch.

Andy Leeder, November 2022