



BILLY GOODWIN



In 1920 virtually the whole Southern League made up the newly formed Division Three. In that inaugural season Southend finished 17th out of 22 with Albert Fairclough scoring 15 goals, but in March Fairclough, 'The idol of the Crowd' was transferred to Bristol City.

For 1921/22, replacements for Fairclough were tried but proved to be unsuccessful. Goalscoring was a huge problem, full back Jimmy Evans chipped in with 10 penalties, but the best any of the forwards could manage was four. Southend finished bottom of the newly regionalised Division Three (South) (and the reserves bottom of the Southern League) and the Shrimpers suffered the indignity of having to apply for re-election. Fears of going back in to the non-league world were allayed when Southend United topped the voting poll.



For 1922/23 finding a new goalscorer was the number one priority, and new manager Ted Birnie reacted by signing Billy Goodwin from Manchester United. Billy had made seven first team appearances for them scoring once. It was a bit of a gamble - Billy was 30 years old, world war had deprived him of perhaps the peak of his career, and he had not exactly set the world alight in a footballing journey that had seen him start at Blackburn Rovers 1913 and end up at Exeter City either side of the hostilities. But, despite their relegation at the end of the 1921/22 season, Manchester United were still a big name in the footballing world and for the Shrimpers to sign someone from Old Trafford was a bit of a coup - it met the approval of the Southend public.

On his debut Billy scored against Newport, and again in the return fixture at the Kursaal. He scored a hat-trick against Aberdare, and by the end of September he had scored seven in eight matches. The highlight of his season was the home game against Millwall in February, when Goodwin was the one player out of 22 who stood out - with cool but scintillating footwork, his precise passing proved to be too much for the Millwall defence. Billy scored four times, Southend won 4-0. By the end of the season he had netted 22 times enabling Southend to finish a much more respectable 15th.

Expectations therefore were more optimistic for the 1923/24 campaign, but ultimately it proved to be disappointing. There was uncertainty regarding who was selecting the teams, the manager or the directors. Strange selections lead to some poor results, and the team bobbled just above the re-election zone. Billy had scored 11 goals by Easter, and was still the club's top scorer, but then came a fateful match.

The match away at Brighton on Good Friday will remain in the memory for one thing and one thing only, the disastrous accident to Billy Goodwin. Just after half-time, Billy was involved in an incident with a Brighton defender and fell back with his right foot in the air, writhing in agony. In times when no one left the field lightly (there were no subs so injured players were usually just made to hobble along the wing), within a few minutes with his leg bound in splints Billy was lifted on to a stretcher. He was reported as saying that the pain was intense but bore it well and as he was carried from the field raised his head to say *"tell the boys to play up"*. It was confirmed that he had a compound fracture near the ankle and a dislocation, and in December 1924 it was announced that Billy had to finish his playing career.

A benefit match was finally arranged for him on Wednesday 28th April 1926, a London Combination match against Brentford Reserves. A crowd of about 3,000 were in attendance but as 5,000 tickets had already been sold it showed the respect which Billy commanded. It raised £130 11s 11d and Billy stated: *"I would like to thank the Southend Supporters for the way they have treated me since my accident. I had hopes of settling down in Southend and was promised work. However, due to the coal strike I suppose the arrangement was upset"*.

Against all the odds Billy made a surprise return for the reserves in November 1926 against Watford at the Kursaal, the Shrimpers winning 4-3 thanks to two goals from the returning hero - and captain of the day - Billy Goodwin. Then, on 27th December 1926 he played for the first team, his first start in three years, and scored both goals in a 2-1 win over Bristol Rovers. The hero was back, he looked a little apprehensive about his leg at times, but his presence acted as a huge boost for everyone connected with the club. By the end of the 1926/27 season he had made eight appearances albeit without adding to his goal tally, whilst for the reserves he made 14 appearances and scored 10 times.

At the start of Season 1927/28 Southend had centre-forwards Billy Hick and Fred Baron on the books, so at the age of 35 Billy Goodwin finally called it a day at the southern club he had grown to love and joined Dartford, ultimately returning north to join the likes of Oldham, Congleton, Mossley and Droylsden. He passed away on 9th July 1951 aged just 59.

Pete Baker

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