

SPEED, GARY ANDREW (1969 - 2011), footballer

Name: Gary Andrew Speed
Date of birth: 1969
Date of death: 2011
Spouse: Louise Speed (née Reynolds)
Child: Thomas Huw Speed
Child: Edward Joseph Speed
Parent: Carol Speed (née Huxley)
Parent: Roger Speed
Gender: Male
Occupation: footballer
Area of activity: Sports and Leisure Pursuits
Author: Gwynfor Jones

Gary Speed was born on 8 September 1969 in the local hospital at Mancot, Flintshire, the second of two children born to Roger Speed (born 1943) and Carol Speed (née Huxley, 1945), who were both born in Chester. Gary's sister Lesley Ann was born in Chester in 1967. Roger Speed worked for Vauxhall car manufacturers at Ellesmere Port and then as a fireman.

Gary was brought up at the family home in Aston Park, Queensferry, and he attended Queensferry Primary School. After he moved to Hawarden High School, Gary played for Flintshire under-13, under-14 and under-15 teams. He was also a talented schoolboy cricketer and represented the Wales schoolboys side for two years when he was 12 and 13. The young Gary supported Everton football club - just to be different to his father who followed Liverpool!

When he was 15 Gary joined the Leeds United youth system, progressing into the professional ranks on 13 June 1988. He made his Football League debut on 6 May 1989, a 0-0 draw at home to Oldham Athletic in the Second Division. Gary earned a regular place in Leeds United's team towards the end of the next season when Leeds secured promotion to the First Division.

On 19 May 1990 Gary won the first of three under-21 caps for Wales against Poland at Penydarren Park, Merthyr Tydfil, followed by his first senior cap the next day when he appeared as a 75th minute substitute against Costa Rica at Ninian Park, Cardiff. That was the beginning of an illustrious international career which came to an end on 13 October 2004 after 85 appearances. Gary captained his country 44 times between 1997 and 2004, and he scored seven goals. Wales came close to qualifying for the finals of two major competitions during his international career. It was Gary who won the infamous penalty during the defeat to Romania in the 1994 World Cup qualifier at Cardiff Arms Park, and under his captaincy Wales reached the play-offs for the 2004 European Championships, losing 1-0 to Russia at the Millennium Stadium. Twice Gary and Wales had come within one match of fulfilling a dream.

His dedication to the red shirt meant that Gary rarely missed a match, friendly or competitive, in Europe, Africa or South America. When Wales visited the United States of America in 2003 the injured captain was there to give his support to the depleted squad.

In season 1991-92 Gary missed only one match for the Leeds United team that won the First Division championship, the last season before the advent of the Premiership era. The heart of the team crowned champions of England was the formidable midfield quartet of Gary on the left flank, the Scottish pair Gordon Strachan and Gary McAllister, and the combative local boy David Batty, and Gary was the one named by manager Howard Wilkinson as his player of the season. That championship medal proved to be Gary's only one at club level.

On 24 May 1996 Gary married his childhood sweetheart Louise Reynolds (born 1970) at St Deiniol's Church, Hawarden. They had two sons, Edward Joseph (born 1997 in Chester) and Thomas Huw (born 1998 in Newcastle upon Tyne).

In July 1996 Gary moved to Everton, his boyhood favourites, for £3.5 million. At the same time he also moved from the left wing to a central midfield position and on 16 November 1996 he scored his only hat-trick as Everton beat Southampton 7-1. Gary was made captain for the 1997-98 season, following in the footsteps of Kevin Ratcliffe, captain during the club's golden era of the 1980s and whose home was on the young Gary's paper round. After just 58 league games Gary's dream of playing for Everton was over when he moved to Newcastle United in February 1998 for £5.5 million, making him, at the time, the most expensive player in Welsh football history. Gary never revealed why he had left the club he loved, because, as he said at the time, that would damage the good name of Everton football club, and he was not prepared to do that.

During his six years in the famous black and white colours of Newcastle United Gary played in two FA Cup final defeats and in UEFA's Champions League. He was approaching his 35th birthday when he left for Bolton Wanderers for £750,000 in July 2004. In December 2006 Gary became the first player to reach 500 English Premier League games.

On 1 January 2008 Gary left the highest level when he moved to Sheffield United for £250,000. He continued to play until 25 November 2008 when he made the last of his 677 league appearances, scoring a total of 104 goals. He also played 125 cup matches (scoring 31 goals), and when his 85 international appearances are added, Gary's grand total is an impressive 887 senior matches.

With the 2010-11 season just three matches old Sheffield United sacked their manager Kevin Blackwell and Gary was promoted to the post from his coaching role. Gary was at the helm for 18 league matches before taking up the offer he could not refuse - to be manager of his country. The appointment was announced on 14 December 2010, with the Football Association of Wales paying Sheffield United £200,000 in compensation.

During Gary's reign of 10 matches (5 wins and 5 defeats) Wales rose from the 117th position in the FIFA world rankings to 45th. On 12 November 2011 Wales recorded a resounding 4-1 victory over Norway.

Early on Sunday morning, 27 November 2011, Gary was found dead at his home in Aldford Road, Huntington, Cheshire, less than 24 hours after he appeared on *Football Focus* on BBC television. The football world was united in grief, and tributes and expressions of condolence were made world-wide, with the Welsh flag flying at half-mast at football's governing body FIFA headquarters in Zurich. Gary's private funeral was held at St Deiniol's Church, Hawarden, and Pentre Bychan Crematorium, on 9 December 2011. At the inquest held in Warrington on 30 January 2012 Cheshire coroner Nicholas Rheinberg recorded a narrative verdict, and he adjudged that the evidence did not sufficiently determine whether the death was intentional or accidental.

The Gary Speed Memorial Match was played at Cardiff City Stadium on 29 February 2012 with Costa Rica the visiting team. The match was attended by a galaxy of sporting stars and a number of former Welsh international players were introduced to the crowd at half-time. The Wales team had been led out on to the pitch by captain Craig Bellamy and Gary's sons Ed and Tom. At the Canton end of the stadium red cards were raised to reveal GARY on the background of the national flag. On an emotional night the result (Wales - 0, Costa Rica - 1) was of no importance. It was all about remembering and paying tribute to Gary Speed.

Gary was the only member of his family born in Wales but he was a staunch Welshman, as his mother Carol explained on the television programme *Pleidïol wyf i'm gwlad?* [True am I to my country?], S4C, 18 September 2014. She said that he was passionate about players being able to sing the national anthem and he recruited Courtenay Hamilton, the classically trained singer and current Miss Wales, to inspire his players. On 5 August 2011 Gary visited the National Eisteddfod at Wrexham where he named the squad to face Australia on 10 August, the first Wales manager to attend the event.

Gary was one of the first footballers to embrace sports science and his knowledge of nutrition, rehydration, cryotherapy, analysis and yoga enabled him to have a long and almost injury-free playing career. As manager of Wales, Gary took the opportunity to appoint handpicked nutritionists, masseurs, sports psychologists and analysts. The results of daily blood, urine and saliva tests enabled the head of performance to determine the level of fitness of each individual player. These were the high-tech methods the top players were used to daily at their clubs. On and off the pitch Gary had laid the foundations for Wales's success at the UEFA European Championship, Euro 2016.

In 1991 Gary was the first winner of the Wales Young Player of the Year award; he was appointed an MBE in 2010; and he was inducted into the Welsh Sports Hall of Fame in 2016 and into the English Football Hall of Fame in 2017.

Author

Gwynfor Jones

Sources

Information provided by Gary Speed's parents, Carol and Roger Speed

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Steven Jones, *Pêl-droedwyr Sir y Fflint* (Llanrwst 2005)

Paul Abbandonato, *Gary Speed remembered* (London 2012)

Phil Stead, *Red Dragons* (Talybont 2012)

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Further reading

John Richardson and Louise Speed, *Unspoken* (Trinity Mirror Sport Media 2018)

Wikipedia Article: [Gary Speed](#)

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