

MEREDITH, WILLIAM ('BILLY'; 1874 - 1958), footballer

Name: William Meredith
Date of birth: 1874
Date of death: 1958
Spouse: Ellen Meredith (née Negus)
Parent: Jane Meredith
Parent: James Meredith
Gender: Male
Occupation: footballer
Area of activity: Sports and Leisure Pursuits
Author: Geraint H. Jenkins

Born 28 July 1874 in Chirk, Denbighshire, the son of James and Jane Meredith. He was one of ten children; his brother Samuel became a football player with Stoke City and Leyton and won eight international caps for Wales. But Billy was the most talented player of the family. He profited greatly from the early training he had received from his teacher at Chirk school, Thomas E. Thomas, the first executive president of the Welsh Football Association. His father worked as a machine operator at Parc Du Colliery, Chirk, and Billy himself worked there after leaving school. He joined the Northwich Victoria football club in 1893 and his skill as a nimble winger soon spread throughout the north. Manchester City persuaded him to join them and he played his first game for that team on 27 October 1894. On the playing-field he could change a half chance into a goal: during the season 1898-99 he scored 36 goals in 33 games, and that record still stands for a winger to this day. In 1904 he scored the goal that won the F.A. Cup for Manchester City; he was the first Welshman to captain an F.A. cup-winning side. Because of financial problems, Meredith was transferred to Manchester United in 1907 for £50. He moved for more pay. Earlier, in 1901, he had married a girl from Barnsley, Ellen Negus; they had two daughters. He was a constant inspiration to his new team: the First Division championship was won twice (in 1908 and 1911) and in 1909 Bristol City was beaten 1-0 in the final contest for the F.A. Cup at Crystal Palace. By the outbreak of World War I it seemed that his best days had come to an end. But he continued to play and in August 1921 he returned to Manchester City to reinspire the team for three years. On 29 April 1925 Billy Meredith, by then fifty years of age, left the game. Between 1894 and 1925 he had played 1,568 games and had scored 470 goals.

Meredith had had a brilliant international career. He had been first choice as right winger for Wales between 1895 and 1920. He had won 48 official caps - 20 against England, 16 against Ireland, and 12 against Scotland. He had scored a number of crucial goals for Wales, but he had to wait until his last game for Wales before experiencing the thrill of beating England (2-1 on 15 March 1920) on their home ground.

In many respects Billy Meredith was ahead of his time in both talent and intellect. He had a long and tough body; he was called 'Old Skin' by his friends. He looked very innocent, loitering along the flank wearing long loose trousers; one of his strangest whims was sucking a toothpick. But when the ball came his way, he glowed at once. He agonised backs mercilessly as they could not predict his next move. He had full awareness of the essentials of the game and experimented constantly while taking a penalty or corner kick. Though he was a shy man, he stood bravely for his rights on and off the field. He was not one to suffer personal injustice and laboured steadfastly in persuading authorities to acknowledge football as a profession and for players to be paid worthy salaries. In 1931 he returned to Manchester United to act as a trainer and after giving of his best in that capacity, he became a publican in the city. He died at eighty-one years of age in Withington, Manchester, on 19 April 1958. Before World War II there was no better Welsh footballer than Billy Meredith.

Author

Professor Geraint H. Jenkins

Sources

Information from Billy Meredith's daughter, Mrs. Lilian Pringle

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P. Corrigan, *100 Years of Welsh Soccer the official history of The Football Association of Wales* (Cardiff 1976)

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J. Harding, *Football wizard the Billy Meredith story* (1985?)

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Billy Meredith](#)

Sound and Film

NSSAW: [International Association Match. England v. Wales. Played at Wrexham, March 11th, 1912](#)

Additional Links

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