

Revered on Wearside as one of the legendary FA Cup class of 1973, Micky Horswill is today back where he belongs at his beloved Sunderland. But the return trip has not been without some turbulent ups and downs. MARK METCALF talks to the former Roker Park midfielder star

**H**E MIGHT have resembled a ginger version of the Milky Bar Kid on his first visit to Roker Park but like the bountiful and bespectacled gun-toting youngster, Micky Horswill's reputation had preceded him.

That initial trip to the Sunderland ground came at the same time as the precociously charitable cowboy was finding fame in television commercials on ITV dispensing white chocolate during the early 1960s.

Fame would come later for Horswill but, aged just 11, he discovered that he was already on the Second Division club's radar.

"I was a slightly built ginger-haired kid with NHS glasses," recalls the 67-year-old Horswill. "I had broken my arm and although I was off school I could not play any football. To cheer me up my dad took me by bus – it was three buses in total – to Cleaton to watch the first team train. It was raining heavily and as the squad left the pitch one asked what I was doing there."

When his dad explained the reason for their visit he was told to bring his son back to Roker Park where the players showered and changed. Full-back Cecil Irwin invited them in and showed them around while Horswill savoured his first walk on the Roker Park pitch.

Going up the stairs past manager Alan Brown's office, the door along side flew open and chief scout Charlie Ferguson emerged and inquired who he played for. When the answer came back West Stanley Boys, Ferguson asked if he was Micky Horswill.

"I thought it was a joke, a set-up but when Cec said he did not know who I was and my dad just went blank I looked at Charlie who told me that my appearance, especially my ginger hair and glasses, and the fact I was playing for West Stanley, meant he knew who I was. Fans had been writing to the club to take a look at me. Soon after, I was travelling over to Sunderland for two nights a week for training. I then signed as a schoolboy at 15 and made my debut at 19 at Preston North End late in the 1971-72 season."

Sunderland, with Horswill playing as a sweeper, won the match 3-1. He never looked back though admits he would, like many teenagers in a region of high unemployment, probably have joined the armed forces if

football had not given him his chance to shine.

And without doubt the brightest pinnacle of his career arrived in 1973 and the now legendary FA Cup final that is embedded in Sunderland folklore, more so as it remains the last significant trophy the Wearsideers have secured.

Horswill takes up the story on February 24, 1973 when the second-tier strugglers travelled to championship challengers Manchester City in the fifth round of the competition.

A massive following went with them, more in hope than expectation despite the galvanising effect of new manager Bob Stokoe, evident in a 4-0 thrashing of Middlesbrough the previous weekend, Horswill scoring his first goal for the club in defeating their local rivals.

Local lad Horswill was not concerned, however.

"The players had listened to the draw for the fifth round. When it came out as away to Liverpool or Manchester City (the Lancashire rivals had drawn 0-0 at Anfield before City won the replay 2-0) I was keen to play either side."

"Before kick-off I saw Mike Summerbee, Denis Law and Francis Lee. I thought this is the sort of place I want to be playing. I was raring to go." A crowd of 54,478.

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Luton Town at home was the prize for the victors and in a game generally regarded as one of the best post-war matches at Roker Park, Sunderland prevailed 3-1. Those who saw both consider it on



ONE AND ONLY: Micky Horswill (far left) celebrates with Dennis Tueart, Vic Halom, Richie Pitt and Billy Hughes at Wembley in 1973 and inset, Horswill's favourite football photograph from the semi-final at Hillsborough

# EARNING HIS STRIPES

boosted by some fans of neighbouring United whose game had been postponed, saw Tony Towers open the scoring for the home side as a predictable City victory looked on the cards. Sunderland's FA Cup final win in 1937 seemed destined to remain their solitary success in the final.

Then Horswill took a chance that turned the tie on its head.

Goalkeeper Joe Corrigan played a short goal-kick to Willie Donachie and the Sunderland midfielder sprinted towards the left-back, who stepped into the box to receive the ball and force a retake while Horswill jogged back towards the halfway line.

"I thought he might do it again, I gambled and as Joe Corrigan kicked the ball I began running forward and got there first. Then when Mike Doyle got between me and the goal I chipped the ball over him before driving it beyond Joe Corrigan. I went a bit mental."

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an par with the legendary victory that saw eventual champions Sunderland beat three-times title-winners Arsenal 5-4 in 1935.

And in front of an all-ticket crowd of 51,782, Horswill was again to the fore in his marking of the cultured thoroughbred Colin Bell, a player he admired greatly.

"Bell could be very quiet in a match. His side might be under pressure but then when City made a breakthrough and a cross from either wing came into the opposing box you would see him on the end of it to score. If he had been an athlete he would have made the Olympics. He was a great box-to-box player."

The side's resurgence was based on Stokoe's willingness to allow Dennis Tueart and Hughes to swap roles during games according to Horswill.

"Alan Brown, our previous manager, used tactics that were too restrictive and he refused to allow Billy and Dennis to play their natural games. Stokoe let them roam more freely and their pace destroyed sides."

Sunderland then dispatched Luton 2-0 with recent signing Ron Guthrie and Dave Watson both scoring from second-half corners before a crowd of 53,151. Arsenal at Hillsborough awaited in the semi. The Gunners had reached the final in the two previous seasons and were strong favourites to make it a treble but a mistake by centre-half Jeff Blockley allowed Vic Halom to beat Bob Wilson and give Sunderland an early lead. In the second half, Hughes rose to head past Wilson at the Leppings Lane End, the Scot joined in celebration by Horswill.

Porterfield tasked to keep Billy Bremner and John Giles quiet. Soon after the game started Montgomery punched away a Peter Lorimer corner to just outside the area.

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favoured and cup holders Leeds United with historical precedence hardly in favour of the underdog, West Bromwich being the last Second Division side to lift the trophy in 1931. Horswill had no such qualms.

"I knew we would win – I never doubted it for a moment. I think my young age meant I did not have time to get worried."

"On the day, no one in our side had a bad game and Dave Watson was the best player on the pitch. He was being told by the manager that he was concerned about Eddie Gray's ability out on the left wing. He had asked captain Bobby Kerr to support full-back Dick Malone out on the right. It worked so well that Eddie was taken off in the second half."

With Kerr out of midfield it left Horswill and Ian Porterfield tasked to keep Billy Bremner and John Giles quiet. Soon after the game started Montgomery punched away a Peter Lorimer corner to just outside the area.

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knew it was not going to be an easy time."

Horswill stuck to his job and Giles was to experience an uncomfortable 90 minutes with the Irishman often forced to rush his passes. It is history, of course, that Porterfield, rejected by Leeds as a youngster, struck a powerful shot with his "wrong" right foot to score the only goal of the game and Montgomery produced his 'double' save from Trevor Cherry's header and Lorimer's follow-up. In truth, Leeds created few real chances and towards the end Halom broke clear. "I was determined to get up and I was shouting like mad for him to pass the ball to me on his right as he got into the penalty box. I would have had an open goal. He shot into the side netting. I had run from our penalty area. I was knackered."

Sunderland deservedly hung on and when the final whistle sounded, Stokoe dashed on to the field to hug Montgomery in joyous celebration.

Not that Horswill remembers much about events that day.

"It all seemed to flash by. As a kid I would watch the final and then play in the little backyard we had. I would be both teams and I would go up afterwards to collect the trophy. I can remember those games more than Wembley in 1973. Fortunately I have watched it on TV since."

happily to go out and the heavy drinking and late nights took their toll. He made just 14 appearances for City before Plymouth Argyle offered him hope to resurrect his career with his former

Sunderland mentor influenza in the affair. "Alan Brown was like a father to me. He signed me and helped develop me as a player. When I was at a low ebb after I had moved to Manchester City it was him who persuaded Plymouth's new boss Tony Waites to take a gamble and sign me. When

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I was phoned and asked about moving by Alan I packed my bags and took the next train down to Devon where I was met by Alan, who by then was living in nearby Bodmin."

Horswill made his debut on the opening day of the 1975-76 season and a few weeks later was part of the newly promoted Plymouth side who beat Sunderland 1-0 at Home Park.

"We had a decent side with Paul Mariner and Billy Rafferty up front. I liked Plymouth and the people down there are great. Argyle fans are very passionate about their team."

Such was his initial good form that England manager Don Revie, who had included the City midfielder in the England squad along with his colleagues Bell, Marsh and Tueart, came to watch him play for Argyle. While his performance drew Revie's praise there would be no further recall-ups for his country.

Horswill made 33 appearances in 1975-76 but the following season Rafferty and Mariner were allowed to depart by the board and without them Argyle were relegated, Waites sacked.

In 1977-78, the Devon club continued to struggle. Horswill scored in a 3-3 draw at Port Vale and after Bradford City were thrashed 6-0 at Home Park on the final day, Horswill returned north to sign for Hull City. He had made 118 appearances for Argyle, who he later faced for his new side in the 1978-79 season. Following a typically robust challenge he was booked after seven seconds in a game the Tigers won 4-3!

His Mancunian connections had enabled his move to Hull, having befriended United's former player and manager Wilf McGuinness, who in his role as assistant on Humber side persuaded his boss Mike Smith to sign him.

After finishing in the top half of the Third Division in 1978-79 relegation was only just avoided the following season in 20th place. In 1980-81, bereft of finances, the Tigers finished in last place and were relegated to the bottom tier. The loss of prolific striker Keith Edwards at the start of the following season to Sheffield United, where Edwards scored the goals that took the Blades to top spot in the Fourth Division, meant Hull finished outside the promotion

LEGENDS: Malcolm Macdonald, Bernie Slaven and Micky Horswill



BIG STAGE: Horswill in action at Wembley in 1973

## HISTORY MAN

IN RECENT years Micky Horswill has worked as a personal escort for a long-term friend Linda Scanlon, who as a city councillor became Mayor of Sunderland. He performed a lot of work for charities, including many associated with the armed forces.

He is also a keen fan of the Sunderland Fans Museum (below). "It is brilliant," said Horswill. "Michael Gasley has used his own money to buy memorabilia and to set up and run this venue that is open daily."

"Any fan of either team, including opposing sides, who are coming to the Stadium of Light must come and visit. It is really fascinating."



returning to England, he played very briefly for Carlisle United and non-League Barrow before he went into the pub business. When the recession of the 1990s hit the north-east hard he lost everything. Friends who had businesses, including George Reynolds, the later failed owner of Darlington, helped look after him.

"My lucky break was when I got involved in a daily radio show on Real Radio and later Star Radio alongside Middlesbrough's Bernie Slaven and Newcastle legend Malcolm Macdonald. The Three Legends phone-in was so much fun and I also went to watch Sunderland play every weekend. I was able over eight years to save some

money which I have invested wisely in property" added Horswill, who is now back working for Sunderland by entertaining corporate guests on match days at the Stadium of Light.

A satisfying completion to the circle of life no doubt.

concern, scarcely being able to walk when arising from bed in the mornings. In his late 20s, like many of his peers, he underwent regular cortisone injections to be fit for purpose on a Saturday afternoon.

At 29 and set to retire, he was given an opportunity to sign for the Happy Valley Club in Hong Kong. Four owners of the club had arrived for a week in England seeking players but the weather was so bad that virtually the only game to go ahead anywhere throughout their stay was a match between Hull and Scunthorpe. After watching the action they asked Horswill and Hull striker Billy Whitehurst, who being slightly younger turned down the chance of an extended trip to the Far East. Horswill had made 84 appearances, scoring six times during his Boothferry Park tenure. Joining him in Hong Kong was Bobby Moore who signed for Eastern AA at the same time.

"First game I played I scored the winner in a cup final and hundreds celebrated by following me home. Whilst I was there I met the Harle in Glo betrotters basketball giants and I also visited places in China where they had never seen white people and I would have my skin flit. I enjoyed the time there, seeing places I would never have visited otherwise."

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