

JIM MARNER – THE BLASTIES’ PENALTY HAT-TRICK KING

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Jim Marner - Junior Scotland v the Republic of Ireland 1977

The record books will tell you that Paraguayan goalkeeper José Luis Chilavert is the only custodian to score a hat-trick of penalties in a match. Scottish Junior football has at least two ‘keepers who achieved that feat well before Chilavert - Sam McAloon (Springfield Athletic) in 1937 and Jim Marner (Kilbirnie Ladeside) in 1975. Jim told me about his hat-trick and this is his story but first let me put Jim’s amazing achievement into context.

In research I occasionally find a ‘keeper with a goal against his name. Further investigation usually reveals that if it was from the days before substitutions then the ‘keeper was usually injured, put out on the wing, replaced in goal by an outfield player and then made the most of his outfield opportunity. George Farm (Armadale Thistle, Hibernian, Blackpool, Queen of the South & Scotland) injured his arm playing for Blackpool against local rivals Preston North End on 29 October 1955. After the early injury he tried to play on but in the end he had to come off. George insisted with the manager that he could play on in the outfield. He returned after seven minutes with his arm bent and heavily bandaged to play at centre forward. In the 37th minute, and after just seven minutes, on the pitch he headed home a Stanley Matthews cross. The Lancashire Evening Post described it as *“a goal worthy of Dean, Lawton or Mortensen”*. Other ‘keepers have scored direct from a kick from their own penalty area or in the dying moments of a match when all eleven players crowded their opponent’s penalty area in the hope of a last-minute equaliser.

Hamish McAlpine (Dundee United) was one of a small band of ‘keepers that had a short spell as their team’s penalty taker. Joe Shortt (Shettleston, Albion Rovers, Armadale, Airdrieonians, Rochdale, Stenhousemuir, King’s Park, Clydebank Juniors & Parkhead) scored four penalties in Scottish League matches in the 1920’s. Many years after his retirement from the game the Motherwell Times recalled: *“Joe Shortt was an absolute “pinch bet” from the twelve yards mark”*. Hans-Jorg Butt became the first ‘keeper to score a penalty double in a Bundesliga match and then repeated the feat a few months later. However, he blotted his copy book

when after scoring from the spot against Schalke and accepting the congratulations of his team mates he was eventually approaching his own goal only to see the ball from a quickly taken kick-off fly over his head and end up in his own net!

Goalkeepers have scored hat-tricks but only when they found themselves playing as emergency strikers. In the days of only one substitute Jim Platt (Middlesbrough and Northern Ireland) travelled as 13th man with the Middlesbrough reserves to a match at Lincoln City. One of the team fell ill on the journey promoting Jim to the bench. A hamstring injury to a player early in the game saw Jim in action as a striker and he scored three goals including a header.

Hat-tricks for outfield players are infrequent. The term hat-trick was adopted from cricket where in an early match a bowler took three consecutive wickets and the spectators made a cash collection and bought him a hat. Today in football the match ball is presented to the player. In Scottish senior league and cup football I believe that a hat-trick of penalties in a match has only been achieved 15 times and never by a goalkeeper. Little is known of Sam McAloon's achievement for Springfield Athletic against Duntocher Hibs on 14 August 1937. The Kirkintilloch Herald match report under the headline "*Deadshot Sam M'Alloon's hat trick*" recorded that:

"Goalkeeper Sam picked up his musket and thundered all three past vis-à-vis Easton in the Hibs goal. His was a feat Springfield football folks will talk about until they lose their power of speech."

Sam appears to have taken on the role of regular penalty-taker for his team after that performance.

Jim Marner's achievement was on 30 August 1975 in a Jackie Scarlett Cup tie at the home of their fierce local rivals Beith. The Jackie Scarlett Cup was the Ayrshire League Cup named in memory of the father of Ayr hotelier John Scarlett who, along with his brother George and others, revived the fortunes of Whitletts Victoria FC. José Luis Chilavert also scored his hat-trick in a derby match this time in west Buenos Aires for Vélez Sarsfield against Ferro Carril Oeste in the Clásico del Oeste in November 1999.

Jim told me that his approach to penalty-taking very rarely changed. On the award of a penalty he would run forward and stop at the half-way line to tie his laces to give him time to gather himself and to keep his opposite number waiting. As Jim approached the penalty area he would not look at the 'keeper. The referee would have already put the ball on the penalty spot, however, Jim would then pick it up. If there was any hint of a delay he would keep the ball and walk away with it still not looking at the 'keeper. He would re-position the ball when he was ready to take the penalty kick. He would then turn around and stride up before striking the ball hard with the outside of his right foot. The 'keeper would be facing a ball that was bending away from his left side with pace. The first penalty was scored at the top end of Bellsdale Park that has a slope. The other penalties were awarded at the bottom end. Perhaps it was those moments tying his laces made Jim decide to change his mind on where his third penalty kick was destined. After all Maurice "Mo" Dunne (ex-Dumbarton and Clydebank) in the Beith goal may have worked out what to do having had two unsuccessful

attempts already. His mind may well have been made up when Mo shouted: *"I bet you a fiver I save this one Jim"*. Although Jim cannot recall it, it was reported that Jim replied: *"you're on"*. Jim struck the ball with the inside of his right foot to the 'keeper's right side and scored. Before running back to his own goal he shouted to Mo: *"That's a fiver you owe me"*.



Jim Marner scoring the third of his three penalties against Beith. With thanks to the Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald for permission to reproduce this photograph.

By all accounts the match was a typically feisty Garnock Valley derby. Jim scored his first penalty after five minutes when Beith's Stuart Hodge and Ladeside's John McCool collided and the Beith player was judged to be at fault. After just 10 minutes the referee took the players off the pitch for 15 minutes to allow order to be restored after a pitch invasion by young spectators. After the play resumed Ladeside scored two more goals through Ronnie Cooke and John McCool to go in at half-time leading 3-0. Five minutes into the second-half Beith were on the attack and a good move gave George Headley an opportunity from 20 yards that beat Jim. Thoughts of a Beith come-back came to nothing when Tommy McGill beat three Beith players to lay on Ladeside's fourth goal for Ronnie Cooke. Twenty minutes from the end Ronnie Cooke was pulled down in the Beith penalty area and Jim was called forward for the second time. He completed his hat-trick with a penalty five minutes before the end to seal a 6-1 win after Ronnie Cooke was fouled again.

Jim told me that in all his penalties the only time he changed corners was in the third penalty in his hat-trick match and a game against Hurlford United. All his penalties? Due to failings by his team mates he volunteered to take a penalty. They found he was good at it and was given the job permanently. When Jim was inducted into the Kilbirnie Ladeside Hall of Fame in December 2019 his presentation was made by former captain and coach Jim Hughes (ex-Dumbarton, Airdrie, Ayr United and Stranraer) who recalled going to a Ladeside match with his dad when Jim took a penalty and said: *"in usual circumstances if your 'keeper took a penalty you would xxxx yourself, but with Jim we did not as we knew he would not miss. He would score and it was a goal every time"*.

Jim recalls that his first penalty was the tenth goal in a 10-0 demolition of Maybole in the Supplementary Cup in 1975. The match report said: *“Goalkeeper Marner was elected to take it and to the biggest cheer of the day he ran up the park and scored off the post”*. Jim continued as regular penalty-taker and scored 7 or 8 penalties in the 1975/76 season. These included in key games at the end of the season. In the National Dryborough Cup Final against Carnoustie Panmure at Prestonfield, Linlithgow on 5 June 1976 when he blasted home a 79th minute spot kick awarded after Jim Inglis was floored. Ladeside won 6-1 and the professional players shared a £600 bonus pot from the club. Two days later on 7 June he was called on again. This time it was the semi-final of the Whitbread Cup against Cumnock at Dam Park, Ayr. He scored from the spot to see Ladeside into the final against Shettleston at Somervell Park, Cambuslang on 12 June. Jim’s services from the penalty spot were not required in the final. The ordering off of full back George McFarlane early in the first-half did not help the Ladeside cause. Two goals by Paul McGuire (later Shrewsbury Town, Stoke City, Tacoma Stars and Port Vale) could not prevent Kilbirnie losing 2-3. Ladeside met Cumnock again when the two clubs contested the Ayrshire League championship decider at Merksworth Park, Dalry. Jim was on target from the spot once again in Ladeside’s win.

Moving into the 1976/77 season Jim continued his penalty-taking and started in a pre-season friendly. Jim believes that he had scored 19 penalties before he missed one. He did not neglect his conventional duties and thinks at one stage in the season he had scored eight and saved five spot kicks. Jim played in a great Ladeside team but even with very good players in front of him he was at one time second top goal scorer behind Ronnie Cooke. In the 1976/77 season Jim says he scored 10 penalties although newspaper reports of his extraordinary deeds puts that number at 13 or 14. Unfortunately Jim is not aware of his penalty-taking ever being recorded on film. The closest was the televised Junior Cup final in 1977 between Kilbirnie and Kirkintilloch Rob Roy but Jim’s services were not called upon that day. In the 1977/78 season he scored four penalties and after a spell playing in Australia he returned to score three in the 1978/79 season. More penalties followed and Jim reckons his tally at Ladeside was at least 35.

When Jim started in the Junior game Jim quickly made a reputation as one of the best goalkeepers due to his *“his staccato step, air of cool assurance and goalkeeping feats”*. He vehemently denied that his lack of height was an issue and was rightly upset when his height of 5ft 9¼ins was mis-reported in a local newspaper. He had a trial with Notts County and later rejected offers from both Stranraer and Dumbarton as he was getting better terms playing in Junior football.



Jim Marner in action in his own penalty area. With thanks to the Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald for permission to reproduce this photograph.

Jim was born on 8 March 1955 and grew up in Greenock. He had not always been a goalkeeper and as a youngster he had played outfield in the under-14 age group but was a goalkeeper in the under-15's. He played for his school team and had his first experience at a big ground when he played in a schools cup final at Cappielow. His PT teacher was a former footballer, Canadian-born John Little (Queen's Park, Rangers, Morton and Scotland – amateur & full). Jim modestly told me that many club scouts wanted to talk to him. However, he heeded the advice of his school teachers to sign for a local team. Future Morton manager Eric Smith (Celtic, Leeds United, Morton and Scotland) was a coach at the Cappielow club at the time Jim was leaving school at 15 years of age. Legendary chairman Hal Stewart was selecting the team but Eric signed the young 'keeper on an S-form (schoolboy form) in May 1970. He went full-time on the groundstaff with Michael Hepburn and Charlie Brown. Already on the groundstaff were future Scotland international Joe Jordan and Neil Orr (West Ham United, Hibernian, St Mirren and Queen of the South). Jim would train with the first team alongside Lief Neilson and Erik Sørensen, the goalkeeping element of Morton's Viking Invasion. Jim's fond memory is as a 15 year old travelling to training with Lief in the Dane's Ford Mustang. After training he would work on the pitch under the direction of Cappielow groundsman Dick Asbury. Jim had already played in the Morton youth team and at just 15 years of age he made his debut in the reserves at Central Park, Cowdenbeath on 6 February 1971. It was a baptism of fire for Jim with Cowdenbeath winning 5-2.

In July 1971 the Morton youth team participated in an international youth tournament ("Cowal '71") hosted in Dunoon for teams from West Germany, Norway, Iceland and Scotland. A tournament highlight for Jim was selection in the 15-man pool for the Scottish team, selected from Morton, Glasgow Rangers and Cowal Boys Club, that played West Germany (CfB Cologne, Frankfurt 1899 EV and SV Viktoria). In the pool with Jim was Neil McFarlane (Cowal) and Archie Petrie (Morton) who both went on to be play for Scottish Schools (under -18) and Neil went on to play for the Scottish amateur youth team. Neil McNab (Morton) went on to represent Scotland at under-18 and under-21 levels. The Scottish star of the

tournament was Billy McNicol (Cowal) who Rangers signed a month after “Cowal ’71” and went on to play for Scotland at under-18 level.

Jim left Morton in October 1971 when Hal Stewart had seemed less than enthusiastic for Jim to put pen to paper on a professional contract. Jim had done his homework and knew that without a contract offer within six months of leaving school he was a free agent. Jim joined Ventura Juniores for the rest of that season to keep playing. He moved on to Shamrock Juniores where he played for two seasons (1972/73 & 1973/74). At 19 years of age he signed for Kilbirnie Ladeside in March 1974 and enjoyed four trophy-laden season with the club. Ladeside were Ayrshire Regional Junior League – North champions in 1974/75 conceding a miserly 18 goals in 18 matches. In 1975/76 they went one better and defeated South champions Cumnock, with Jim scoring a penalty, to become Ayrshire League champions. In 1976/77 with the league now converted to a first and second division set-up Ladeside were crowned league champions again. The club enjoyed cup success as well. As I have mentioned, the Junior Cup was won in 1976/77. The season before they had won the National Drybrough Cup competed for by the champions of the junior leagues around the country. They also won the Ayrshire Cup twice in 1974/75 and 1975/76. Jim earned a Junior cap when he played against the Republic of Ireland on 17 September 1977 at Tolka Park, Dublin. Alongside Jim were Kilbirnie team mates Ian Baillie and Tommy McGill and on the bench as team manager Bobby Davidson from Ladeside. Unfortunately Scotland lost 1-2. At the end of the 1977/78 season Jim left for Australia and joined Melbourne club Fitzroy Alexander FC that played in the National Soccer League at Olympic Park. The club changed its name to Heidelberg United the following season. Many Scottish players played in Australia at this time and many top players, including Graeme Souness, could “guest” for clubs for six matches.

Jim played eight league matches for the club together with other cup ties that included a penalty against Canberra City in a penalty shoot-out. Jim returned from Australia in May 1979 and re-joined Kilbirnie for the 1979/80 season. He was soon back in his old ways scoring a penalty in the first league match to secure a 4-3 win at Irvine Meadow XI. Jim continued to play at Valefield Park until he signed for Kilwinning Rangers in December 1982. He moved on to Arthurlie for the 1984/85 season. He later played for Ardrossan Winton Rovers in 1985/86 before joining his last club, Largs Thistle, in 1987 where he remained until he hung up his gloves (and shooting boots!) at the age of 34 in 1989.

Junior football is full of stories and one of his concerned team mate Ada McLaughlin in a friendly against Campsie Juniores. Jim lined up a wall of four players including Ada, to defend a free kick. The Campsie player struck the ball, Ada ducked and Jim dived full length to save the shot Ada should have stopped. Jim’s dive ended when he hit the goalpost and was carried off with a neck injury. He was still being treated by the local doctor when the players trooped in at the end of game. Jim asked Ada: *“Why did you duck and not head the ball?”* He replied: *“I just got my hair done this morning and I’m going out in Irvine tonight”*.

In talking to Jim it is clear that he cannot quite believe his own football career. Training beside Joe Jordan as a 15 year old, winning all the top Junior honours and representing his country at Junior level, playing against some of the top players of the day in Australia and, of course, his penalty tally. It has made a fascinating story.



Jim Marner (left) with former Kilbirnie Ladeside coach Hugh McDonald