

Cliff Holton - the other centre-forward on Feb 7, 1959!

Contributed by John Walsh
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The piece on Alan Blakeman's hat-trick we used yesterday has produced a follow-up.

My old school-chum and ex-Deer Orchard team-mate Tom Allen also remembers the game well – but from a different perspective as he was there.

Watford had splashed the cash in an effort to get out of the Fourth Division at the first attempt and in October 1958 paid £9,000 to Arsenal for Cliff Holton (pictured).

Initially a full-back with non-League Oxford City he was converted to centre-forward and helped the Gunners to reach the 1952 Cup final and land the First Division title the following season.

He became quite a utility player at Highbury, playing as a centre-half, a defensive wing half and a centre-forward.

Although he was often tipped for an England place, he never won a cap for his country. His move to Watford, nevertheless, was a surprise.

Holton spent three seasons with the Hornets, mostly at centre forward and formed a successful partnership with Dennis Uphill, scoring a club record 48 goals in 1959/60 which also saw the club promoted to the Third Division.

But that was still to come in February 1958 as Tom takes-up the story.

“You failed to mention that on the day we played Watford they had £9,000 Cliff Holton as their centre-forward.

Ours was free transfer Alan Blakeman.

“Those of us from school who were there, that had not succumbed to the flu, yelled ‘what a waste of money’ at their spearhead.

“What a game. I can still see Blakeman's bald head shining in the rain and the Borough Park floodlights!”

So here's a reminder Tom - and remember Alan was only 22 at the time, and starting to show signs of losing his hair. Well yes, I should have included Holton in my earlier piece because my dad actually made reference to him in his bedside report.

“They had this centre-forward from Arsenal who was a big stiff. Needed an acre to turn round in, was as near to it as I can recall.

Mind you over the years, in dad's eyes there were a few big stiffs - for and against us – who couldn't trap a bag of cement, were as slow as a box mangle and always needed an acre to turn round in.

As for Cliff Holton he helped Watford to promotion in 1959-60 and then for the second time in his career was controversially sold to Northampton Town in 1961 where he scored a club record 36 goals in 1961/62 thus achieving the rare feat of holding the all-time goals in a season record at two different clubs.

Holton went on to play for Crystal Palace, signing in December 1962 and was part of the Palace side which achieved promotion to the second tier in 1964, with 43 appearances and 20 goals.

He then signed for a second time with Watford (for a second time) before moving on to Charlton Athletic (in a deal which saw Stewart Scullion move in the opposite direction) and subsequently Leyton Orient.

Ex Reds boss Ken Furphy would be in charge when Holton joined Watford for a second time in 1965.

He finally retired in 1968, due in part to a knee injury, and left the game completely to take up a career in engineering. He died suddenly while on holiday in 1996, at the age of 67.

In his pro career Holton scored 301 goals in 537 -not bad for ‘a big stiff and a waste of money’ against Workington!