

“They wouldn’t have done that to Jimmy McNab.”



Those words often passed between me and George who had the misfortune to sit in front of me for a number of years in my old, full price seat in the middle of the badge in the East Stand.

They were often uttered when one of our lightweight midfield players was shrugged aside by someone of superior strength and ability or when a referee booked one of ours for an innocuous tackle in the middle of the park. We oldies shook our heads and wept a little inside as the football that we grew up with seemed light years away from what we were watching now.

The reference to Jimmy was not to extol the “virtues” of a dirty player. He was no Johnny Giles, Ron Harris or Bobby Collins. He was a genuine hard man, a player who tackled ferociously but fairly and who played an absolutely crucial part in the team that Alan Brown built in the early 1960s.

The half back line (those under 40, ask yer da) that Brown put together was a great one, consisting of three internationals and Jimmy. Stan Anderson was the right half until he was usurped by Martin Harvey, Charlie Hurley ruled the roost at centre half and there, a permanent fixture on the left-hand side, was James McNab.

Like many of our great players of the past, he was a Scot, from the Stirlingshire town of Denny who Sunderland spotted as a Schoolboy international and joined as an amateur when he was 16. A year later he signed professional terms, made his league debut at 18 alongside Stan and Charlie and went on to pull on a Sunderland shirt another 283 times before he left for Preston North End (another club with a long tradition of signing Scots) in 1967.

During his ten years as a Roker regular, he broke his leg twice and his nose showed the scars of more than one break but he never, ever flinched a tackle and always played in a firm and fair manner.

He was not a prolific goal scorer (13 in his 284 games) but George, M. Salut and many others of the “Golden Generation” that fell in love with SAFC in the 60’s, remember his goal against League Champions Everton in the FA Cup in 1964 as he swept the ball past Gordon West in the



Jimmy scores against Everton.

third minute. Half an hour later, we were 3 up and the 62,817 squeezed into Roker (M.Salut and self were in the Clock Stand Paddock) were dreaming of glory.

Jimmy left Roker when Jim Baxter arrived and made another 222 appearances at Deepdale, before winding up at Stockport County. He was a player who was much admired and deserves his place in the pantheon of Sunderland players who gave their all – something that is sadly lacking in the modern game.