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Past Players

Joe Waters

JOE WATERS

Bestall, Boylen, Waters. All legendary midfielders (in today's parlance) and not one of them over five feet five! What's more, all three played virtually all their football for the Mighty Mariners!

Joe Waters had been born in Limerick, Republic of Ireland, and had won Schoolboy and Youth caps for his country before being snapped up by Leicester City, for whom he turned professional in December 1973. He struggled to gain a First Team place at Filbert Street - Leicester's ground at that time - though he did win the BBC Goal of the Month competition while there. Perhaps this was the only time when a player with such little experience did win the accolade?

In 1976, he arrived at Blundell Park on loan, and made a scoring debut on 24 January at Millwall, literally in the Lions' Den, to earn Town a share of the points.

However, the usual story was that Town, though they would like to have kept the diminutive midfielder, were strapped for cash, and £10,000 was out of the price range of Town's boss Tom Casey. There was such an outcry from the fans, that with a £2,000 donation from the now-defunct Supporters Club, Waters was signed, and he made a total of 19 appearances in what remained of his initial season as a Mariner.

While Tom Casey's ability to sign talent such as Waters is now near legendary in itself, he was destined not to see it flourish into a successful team, and was sacked in November 1976. A couple of months later John Newman arrived from Exeter City, and Waters served him, and his in-club promotees George Kerr and Dave Booth loyally.

However, in Joe's first season with Town, things were at a low ebb, and the Mariners were heading for the Fourth Division. Casey, and then Newman used a total of 25 players. At a time when just one substitute was allowed, that figure alone tells its own story; if you want to find a season when Town struggled, simply look for an unsettled line-up! Only four players made 40 or more appearances, and though Joe was one of those, even he had appeared in three different positions, including full-back.

He made his full international debut in 1977 in a match versus Turkey. While Newman took a season in Division Four to find his best side, Joe was popping up into scoring positions and knocking in a good tally of 8 goals from midfield. His 'penalty king' status had yet to be conferred on him - these were all goals from open play. Waters had also made the number 4 shirt his own - just once appearing at full-back in making the full 46 league appearances.

The 1978-9 season saw Town runners-up in Division 4. Joe was captain for the

assault on the Division Four promotion spots. Waters again made the full complement of games, along with Nigel Batch, Kevin Moore, and new-boy Dean Crombie - brought from Lincoln City by Newman's number 2 George Kerr. Mike Brolly missed just 2 games and Tony Ford three. By the end of the season, the settled side was: Nigel Batch, Dave Moore, Kev Moore, Joe Waters, Clive Wiggington, Dean Crombie, Mike Brolly, Tony Ford, Kev Drinkell, Mike Lester and Bobby Cumming.

After this success Newman left, and his replacement, George Kerr's first task was to persuade the Irishman to stay at Blundell Park to captain the side for a similar assault on Division 3. Fortunately for Town, George was successful in his attempts, and Waters stayed to play a significant part once more in Town's promotion as Champions.

Though elsewhere you may read that Joe's large goals haul was down to his penalty taking, this is not borne out by the facts. By the beginning of the 1979-80 season he had scored 25 league goals, and 22 of those were from open play. The 1979-80 season saw Town with a forward line that would have tried the best in the land - DID try the best in the land! With Drinkell, Kilmore, Ford and Cumming raiding in the box, penalties came on a regular basis as defenders sought to stop the incessant Town onslaughts. Waters skill from twelve yards now began to pay huge dividends as half of his eight goals came from the spot, with another couple 'open-play' goals in the FA Cup. Under the charismatic Irishman, the Mariners prospered in the League, and both the League and FA Cups. The League Cup run went to 9 games, including a three-times-played fifth round tie with Wolves. The FA Cup ran to four matches before Liverpool won decisively at Anfield. 59 matches for the Mariners, 59 matches for Waters. And when Sheffield United came to Blundell Park on the last day of the season, a hat-trick from Kevin Drinkell, and the inevitable through-the-middle goal from the Captain - Waters - saw the Championship Trophy safely into the hands of Town's Captain Courageous.

A third successive promotion under the skipper looked on the cards during 1980-81. Despite a tentative start, Town had a marvellous run from Mid-November to the end of March, during which time they lost only two matches. Of his 10 league goals, 6 were from the spot, as Joe again chalked up a full set of appearances. Town's form deserted them right at the end of the season as they ended just 5 points from promotion.

By the time Waters limped off after 12 league matches of the 1981-2 season he had created a new record for consecutive appearances - 226 - on the trot (since beaten by Paul Groves). Though the league season was not one of Town's best, it will be remembered for the 6-1 FA Cup win over Millwall followed in the next round by a 2-1 win at Newcastle. The League Group Cup saw Town win every game including the final against Wimbledon at Blundell Park, and Waters picking up the cup - which Town still hold as the competition never ran again.

The following season, Joe was second top scorer with 8 goals, as Town struggled, but 1983-4 almost saw the miracle of Town once more in the elite of English football. Indeed, finishing fifth, these days Town would have been in the play-offs, but back in the early eighties the idea had not yet arisen. From early October to the end of February Town lost just one game, but as the season drew to an end, Town lost their captain, and with it possibility of a return to Division One. It was Joe Waters' swansong at Town.

He moved to the USA where the 'American 6s' were fashionable, and he inevitably enjoyed success there too.

However, in 1987, following the disastrous fall from the (then) Second Division under Mike Lyons, it was rumoured that Joe was a serious contender for the Manager's post at Blundell Park. Town fans everywhere were hoping that it was true, and that once more the genial Irishman would strut his stuff at Grimsby, if not actually on the pitch. It would have been a decision that would have brought an enormous boost in interest and in gates. In the event Bobby Roberts was appointed ... and Town slipped unceremoniously into the (old) Fourth Division.

In the complete record of Joe Waters' Town career below, the 'other' columns include games from the Anglo-Scottish Cup (1980), the League Group Cup (1981-

2), and the League Trophy (1982).

Season	League		FAC		FLC		Total	
	A	G	A	G	A	G	A	G
1975-76	19	2	0	0	0	0	19	2
1976-77	45	5	3	0	2	0	50	5
1977-78	46	8	5	2	3	3	54	13
1978-79	46	10	1	0	3	1	50	11
1979-80	46	8	4	2	9	0	59	10
1980-81	42	10	1	0	2	1	45	11
1981-82	36	7	2	0	2	0	40	7
1982-83	40	8	3	1	4	0	47	9
1983-84	37	7	1	0	4	0	42	7
Totals	357	65	20	5	29	5	406	75

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