

Erich Schaedler by Tom Brogan

Originally published on the State of the Game website in August 2006

“A superb full back who never really got the recognition he deserved in the game.”—Pat Stanton.

THE son of a German Prisoner of War who had played for Borussia Moenchengladbach, Biggar-born Erich Peter Schaedler signed for Stirling Albion from Juvenile side Melbourne Thistle in 1969. After 24 games for the club, he moved to Hibs in a £7,000 deal. A left-back, nicknamed Shades, he was famed for his no-nonsense style on the pitch.

When Hibs boss Willie McFarlane signed Schaedler he described him to his senior players as, “A cross between [legendary Italian defender] Facchetti and [Lisbon Lion] Tommy Gemmell.” He also added that that he could, “take really long throws as well.”

Hibs legend Pat Stanton told hibs dot net, “We didn’t quite know what to expect and when Erich arrived we could tell pretty quickly that Willie’s assessment was really spot on, at least in relation to the long throws!” He went on to say, “What Erich did though was to make up the skills shortfall in his game by being ultra good at everything else. A tremendous tackler and a tireless worker up and down that left side, Erich was a fitness fanatic and when you played alongside him he never let you down”.

In 1971 Eddie Turnbull, one of Hibernian's 'Famous Five', took over as manager. Schaedler became a mainstay of the side that came to be known as 'Turnbull's Tornadoes'. The early seventies were a particularly successful spell for the club. The side finished 3rd in the league in 1972-73 and were runners-up in the 1974-75 season. Erich won a League Cup medal in 1972, was a Scottish Cup Finalist the same year and a League Cup runner-up in 1974. He was also part of the Hibs sides that won consecutive Dryburgh Cups in 1972 & 73, most memorably beating Celtic 5-3 in the former. Erich also played in the team that beat city rivals Hearts 7-0 on New Year's Day 1973, a match that is widely considered to be the greatest victory in Hibernian's history.

Although his father was a German who had married and settled in Scotland after World War II, Schaedler only ever considered himself a Scot and was said to be fiercely patriotic about his Scottish nationality. He played for the Scottish national team only once, in March 1974, in a 2-1 defeat to West Germany, at Frankfurt’s Wald Stadion.

Schaedler did not actually receive a cap from the Scottish Football Association for this game. Under the rules that were in place from 1929 until the start of the 1976-77 season, players only received a cap from the SFA if they played in a Home International Championship fixture.

It was only earlier this year that the SFA began to correct this oversight.

The book "My Father and Other Working Class Heroes" by Gary Imlach brought the situation to light. His late father Stewart, a former Nottingham Forest winger, had played for Scotland at the 1958 World Cup Finals, but had never been awarded a cap to commemorate his service.

A campaign called 'The Cap Fits' was then started by the Edinburgh Evening News. Hibs chairman Rod Petrie took a personal interest and wrote to the SFA's chief executive David Taylor, calling the rule 'arcane'. The SFA finally buckled under the pressure and decided to award retrospective caps in April of this year.

In total 83 Scottish internationals were denied caps.

Erich's brother John accepted his cap on 30th of April 2006, at a ceremony organised by Hibernian to honour Schaedler and the 5 other Hibs players denied caps.

That game in Frankfurt wasn't the only time Erich was involved with the national team however. He was a member of Scotland's 1974 World Cup Squad in West Germany. As cover for full-backs Sandy Jardine and Danny McGrain he was allocated the squad number 22. He didn't play a game as Scotland were knocked out of the competition on goal difference.

In November 1977, Schaedler moved to Dundee. The fans there took to his committed playing style and he became a firm favourite on the terraces. He helped the Dens Park side to the First Division in 1979, was a League Cup finalist in 1980, and went on to play 101 league games.

During the late 1970s and early 80s his love for the game was such that he helped out at Edinburgh side Salvesen Boys Club which then included future Hearts stalwart Gary MacKay.

He returned to Hibs in 1981. He was a hugely popular player with the fans in both his spells with the club. With the Hibeers he made a combined total of 282 league appearances.

Schaedler owned a pub called Shades in Easter Road, not far from Hibs' Easter Road ground. In 1984 he helped two police officers disarm a shotgun raider who had tried to rob his establishment. For this act of bravery he was awarded the Lothian Police Meritorious Award, presented to him by Scottish Secretary George Younger.

He moved to Dumbarton on a free transfer before the start of the 1985/86 season. He turned part-time and in total made 14 appearances for The Sons.

A few weeks before Christmas of 1985 Erich and his wife divorced. On Christmas Eve he went on a shooting trip alone. A field sports enthusiast, he regularly took his 12 bore shotgun to go rough shooting in the Borders.

He failed to pick up his dogs that evening, from neighbours who had been looking after them, and a search was launched. On the 27th of December his body was discovered in his car in a remote wood at Wallace Hill, Cardrona on the banks of the Tweed. He was 36.

Naturally, his death shocked Scottish football. His Dumbarton team-mate Gordon Arthur told the Daily Record at the time, "He seemed a bit down before Christmas...but I never thought for a minute he was so depressed."

Dumbarton's New Year game with Alloa was postponed and Hibs fans observed a moving moment's silence before their match with Clydebank.

Hard as nails, eccentric and loyal, the Hibs fans who remember him in the green and white still regard him as one of their greatest ever players.