

GLOBE POTTER

Terry Lees (below) was the local lad made good but it became a case of today Stoke, tomorrow the world. He tells PHIL SHAW how he sampled the football culture on four continents in a career that saw him tangle with past and future icons

WEDGWOOD and Royal Doulton. Arnold Bennett and Robbie Williams. Never forgetting Sir Stanley Matthews. To the list of Stoke-on-Trent's exports to the world we can add the name of Terry Lees, who plied his trade as a utility player in six countries across four continents.

Lees, who will be 70 in June, served Stoke City and Port Vale as well as playing briefly for nearby Crewe Alexandra and Stafford Rangers. While he was born and still lives in the Potteries, his playing career was anything but parochial, encompassing clubs in South Africa, the United States, the Netherlands and Hong Kong as well as England and Wales.

The globetrotter's tale features encounters with Pele, Marco van Basten, Gordon Banks, Ian Botham and myriad other household names. The Van Basten episode is recalled with guffaws through gritted teeth. Lees also babysat for a World Cup legend and 'sang' on a hit record.

As a boy his heart was with The Potters. "Like thousands of kids kicking a ball about on the street I had the dream of playing for Stoke. Luckily mine came true."

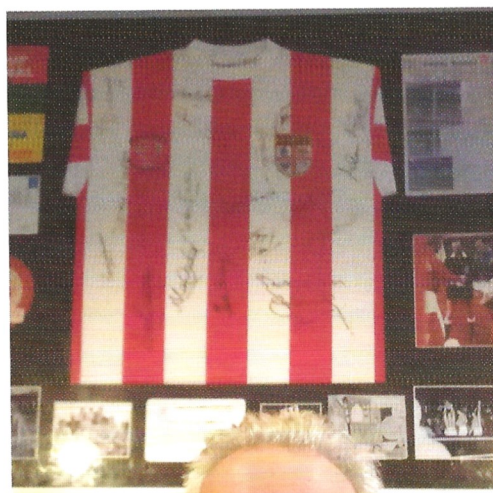
Lees, whose father Jack was a bricklayer, saw football as an escape route. "I had a fear of going to work in the pit. I had mates who worked at Shelton Bar (an iron-and-steel works) or in pot-banks. My thinking was that if I played professionally, I wouldn't have to do the jobs other lads did."

He had been a free-scoring schoolboy striker. Stoke coach Harry Gregg, the former Manchester United goalkeeper, changed all that. "He said I was a decent footballer but also a hard little bastard, so there might be more chance for me at the back."

"I was 7st 2lb and 5ft 2ins when I signed. In school people thought they could pick on me because I was small. So I learned to look after myself. Dad used to say 'Terry, you won't be the best footballer in the world, but why don't you be one of the fittest?' I used to run everywhere. I thought 'If I'm fit, I can compete'."

In 1967, aged 15, he made his debut for Stoke reserves at Blackburn, playing centre-back alongside former England left-back Tony Allen. "My mind went back to 1963. Me and my best mate Jimmy Elkin bobbed off school to watch England play Brazil at Wembley live on TV. Bryan Douglas got England's equaliser. Four years later, I'm facing him in the Central League."

"Tony was a great old pro. He warned me 'You're not playing for your school now. This is men's league. So be careful'. Early on I chested the ball down when 'Wallop!', this Blackburn lad belted me hard. Tony looked down and said 'You'll have to learn quick'."



Born Stoke-on-Trent, June 30, 1952

CAREER GAMES & GOALS

Stoke City 1969-75 (19+9 games, 0 goals), Crewe Alexandra 1975 (6, 0), Port Vale 1975-76 (46+1, 2),

Birmingham City 1979-81 (18+1, 0),

Newport County 1981-82 (30, 1),

Scunthorpe United 1984-85 (35+1, 0)

TOTAL 154+12 games, 3 goals

Others: Cape Town City 1973, San Jose Earthquakes 1975,

Sparta Rotterdam 1976-77, Roda JC Kerkrade 1977-79,

Morning Star (Hong Kong) 1982, DS79 Dordrecht 1982-84

When Lees was still an apprentice, Stoke manager Tony Waddington took him to Torquay to play in a benefit match for Robin Stubbs, whose wife Anthea Redfern went on to marry Bruce Forsyth.

"Dad told me 'When you go for your meal in the hotel, sit there and wait a few seconds, and see which knives and forks they use'. I just watched what the older players did and copied them."

Lees became first-choice defensive understudy. "As well as the flair Waddo loved, he always had 'Waddington's wall', a line of rugged players he could rely on. In my time it was Jackie Marsh, Denis Smith, Alan Bloor and Mike Pejic. I always wished I'd played more but when I think of that lot, I feel lucky. Thousands of lads like me never got near it."

His first outing in Division One came in 1971 as a substitute at Southampton. Coach Frank Mountford ordered him to "sort out" Brian O'Neil. "O'Neil was combative, shall we say. I would've got hold of him, though I'm not saying he didn't get hold of me!"

Stoke lost at The Dell but beat Manchester City 2-0 on his full debut. "Banksy said 'Watch Francis Lee. Anywhere in or around the box, stay on your feet, don't go over'. He also said he was going to give me an early touch, roll the ball to me. I was nervous, thinking 'No, don't!' I trod on it three times and gave it him back."

"I went to the match on the bus with my dad and travelled home the same way. He didn't have a car. Afterwards we went into Stoke Market and he bought me a pork roll and a coffee in a glass to mark the occasion. My mum had left when I was five so I was proud for him."

The following year, he came tantalisingly close to a place in Stokelore. "I was in the 13 for every match bar one in the 1972 League Cup run and never once got the

sub's shirt. For the first game, at Southport, Alan Bloor wasn't fit. I was down to play but Bluto had an injection and played. But you can't change history. Looking back now, I was privileged to be part of that."

He never felt he knew Waddington, and old colleagues Denis Smith and Jimmy Greenhoff have told him the same. "But he had a way about him. He couldn't tell Stan Matthews, Peter Dobing and George Eastham how to play yet he knew how to get the best out of them. He might say to Eric Skeels 'We're playing Tottenham tomorrow, get on Jimmy Greaves's toes'. That was the extent of any tactics."

"The only time he got more involved was when they installed a