

Jimmy Hill ODNB

Hill, James William Thomas (Jimmy) O.B.E. (1928 - 2015), professional footballer, football manager, administrator, television executive and sports broadcaster was born on 22 July 1928 at 57 Pentney Road, Balham, south London, the son of William Thomas, a Royal Marine and milkman, and his wife Alice Beatrice, late Panton, née Wyatt. He had an elder brother and sister, Wally and Rene, from his mothers first marriage. He attended Cavendish Road Primary School in Balham from 1933 to 1939. He was due to start his secondary school education at Henry Thornton Grammar School, Clapham on 3 September 1939, but instead, with the declaration of war, was evacuated for six months to Pagham and then Chichester. Hill played football for the Henry Thornton School as well as the 88th London Company of the Boys Brigade.

He left school in 1945 with designs on a career in journalism, but instead took his first job with the London and Lancashire Insurance Company, of Chancery Lane, London. He then worked for a London firm of stockbrokers, H. J. Garrett and Co., but in 1946 at the age of eighteen left to conduct his National Service in the Suffolk Regiment based in Bury St. Edmunds. He was transferred to the Royal Army Service Corps in Cirencester attaining the rank of Corporal, before finally being billeted to Blackdown Garrison in Farnborough where he played in various sports teams including football. He also guested for Folkestone F.C..

Hill's development as a teenage player blossomed among a team of professionals, and on leaving the army in 1949 had amateur trials for Reading, then in the Third Division South. Rejected by Reading's manager Ted Drake, Hill was scouted by Second Division side Brentford, signing for the club in 1949. He made his first team debut against Leicester City on 3 September 1949. A month later Hill married Gloria Mary Flude, a school teacher and daughter of Frederick Hastings Flude a journalist with *The London Gazette*. They had three children, Duncan (b. 1955), Alison (b.) and Graham (b.). The couple divorced in 1961.

Initially starting as a centre-forward Hill moved to wing-half, playing in a half-back line that included Tony Harper and Ron Greenwood, the future England manager. He made 87 appearances, scoring 10 goals. Following a chance meeting at a local golf club Hill set up a chimney-sweeping business with Ossie Noble to supplement his income as a professional footballer. It was an early signal of Hill's enterprising character.

Hill was transferred to Fulham in exchange for Jimmy Bowie and £5000 in March 1952 following a dispute with Brentford manager Jack Gibbons. Hill scored on his Fulham debut away to Blackpool but the season ended poorly as the club was relegated to Division Two. At Fulham Hill played at inside-right, and his hard-working style enabled skilful players such as Johnny Haynes the opportunity to shine. He played 276 league matches and scored 41 goals for Fulham (1953-1961), helping them to the FA Cup semi-final in 1958-59 by scoring in every round, and playing in the side that gained promotion to the First Division in 1959-60. In 1958 Hill set a Football League record by scoring five goals in an away fixture against Doncaster Rovers. Hill retired from playing football in 1961 following a serious knee injury.

In 1955 Hill had become Fulham's delegate for the Association of Players' and Training Union, then commonly referred to as the 'Player's Union'. Hill soon became a member of the management committee, and in 1956 was elected Chairman of the Player's Union replacing Jimmy Guthrie of Portsmouth. "I can safely say", he later recalled, "those extraordinary four years, 1957 to 1961, irrevocably changed my life. Suddenly I was having to argue my case in different parliaments, deal with the media as well as my fellow men in the most delicate matters. A university degree in politics and philosophy couldn't have been more rewarding; the PFA simply gave me a crash course in life and maturity" (*The Guardian*, 2001).

Hill's greatest challenge and triumph came during his second two-year term as Chairman of what he had renamed the Professional Footballers Association. The crux of the debate between the players, the Football League and the clubs was premised on two key principles: the freedom of players to negotiate their salary, and the freedom to leave a club once a player's contract had

expired. Hill worked on various fronts to consolidate the strength of the PFA's members and foster public support for the players' campaign to end the maximum wage and the retain and transfer systems. Canvassing players in London, Manchester and Birmingham in November and December 1960, Hill persuaded PFA members to vote overwhelmingly for strike action by 694 to 18, giving the Football League one month notice of the proposed action. Following a meeting on the 18 January 1961 a seven-point-plan for changes to players contracts was agreed, removing the maximum wage and paving the way for Johnny Haynes to be the UK's first £100 a week player. Hill later remarked, "If Mary Tudor had Calais written on her heart, that date's written on mine!" (Hill, 1998: p.74). Hill's challenge to the governing powers of football earned him the epitaph 'the bearded beatnik' by fellow professionals, and he recounted the details of his role at the PFA in his first book *Striking For Soccer* published in 1963.

In November 1961, Hill became manager of Third Division Coventry City following an introduction from the cricketer Jim Laker to the club's chairman Derrick Robbins. With the backing of his chairman, Hill introduced a number of innovations and changes to the club which have since been referred to as the 'Sky-Blue Revolution' (Brown, 2011). In what were viewed as radical moves at the time Hill introduced a number of innovations including: a charter train for fans to travel to away matches; pre-match and half-time entertainment on the pitch; a Sky-Blue radio station and glossy match-day programme; the first electronic scoreboard in a football stadium; closed-circuit-television coverage of a match to fans in the stadium; and 'pop and crisps' nights where players handed out free snacks to young fans and signed autographs. The innovations were all part of the family-centred experience Hill wanted to create at football, and his espousal of all-seater stadiums predated the modernisation of many British stadiums which followed the Lord Justice Taylor Report following the Hillsborough disaster in 1989.

In January 1962 Hill married his second wife Heather Christine Flora Harding, a school teacher and daughter of Walter Harding a stock checker for a furniture retailer. They had two children Joanna (b. 1963) and Jamie (b. 1967). The couple divorced in 1982. By the end of Hill's first season in charge Coventry City won promotion to the Second Division, and in his final year as

manager in 1966-67 the club won the Second Division title and were promoted to the First Division. His scientific approach to coaching was published in his second book *Improve Your Soccer* (1966). After a negotiations to extend his contract failed Hill left the club as manager, promising to the Coventry fans he would never manage another club, which was a promise he kept. That summer Hill also separated with his second wife Heather and moved in with a new partner Veronica Hopcraft who he had met during a football tour of the Caribbean.

In August 1967 Hill's agent Bagenal Harvey arranged a meeting with the Managing Director of commercial television franchise London Weekend Television, Michael Peacock. Hill became the first Head of Sport for the channel which launched in Greater London and the Home Counties in August 1968. Hill's previous role as a television pundit for the BBC during its 1966 World Cup coverage had given him an insight in to the production of sport, and in an coup for ITV he persuaded BBC radio commentator Brian Moore to sign for LWT to front a new highlights programme *The Big Match*. Working alongside his executive producer John Bromley, LWT relaunched its Saturday afternoon sports programme *World of Sport* anchored by another new face Dickie Davies. For the first time, ITV had two landmark sports programmes to rival the BBC's *Match of the Day* and *Grandstand*. Hill and Bromley also introduced new innovations in football analysis with an array of former players and managers recruited for ITV's coverage of the 1970 World Cup. In 1972 while attending an Arsenal v Liverpool match for ITV at Highbury, Hill, a qualified referee, stepped in to cover for an injured linesman, receiving bountiful boos among the 47,000 spectators. For a brief period in 1973 Hill was Deputy Controller of Programmes at LWT.

In September 1973 Hill switched broadcasters and signed a contract with the BBC to front its Saturday evening highlights programme *Match of the Day*. Doubling his salary, Hill became the first professional player to front and provide match analysis on televised football. Between 1973 and 1989 when succeeded by Des Lynam, Hill anchored more than 600 programmes, becoming a household name and nationally recognised for his trademark trimmed beard.

In 1975 Hill returned to Coventry City as managing director of the club, and then Chairman from 1976, a role he kept until 1983. Hill's desire to maintain Coventry's first division status met controversy at the end of the 1976-77 season when the club faced relegation on their final day fixture against Bristol City. Hill delayed the kick-off by 15 minutes due to fan congestion, which meant the defeat of relegation rivals Sunderland could be announced over the tannoy prior to the end of the game. What ensued were 15 minutes of farcical football as Coventry and Bristol City played out a two-two draw ensuring both clubs staved off relegation. Hill was reprimanded by the Football Association and forever pilloried by Sunderland supporters. While Chairman of Coventry /City Hill proposed and persuasively argued for the Football League to introduce three points for a win in order to promote attacking football. His idea was introduced in 1981 and subsequently adopted by FIFA in 1994. Hill had spells as a director of Charlton Athletic (1984-85) where he oversaw the controversial ground sharing of Selhurst Park with Crystal Palace, and as chairman of Fulham (1987-97) where he helped form a consortium to financially save the club and merger with rivals Queens Park Rangers.

He continued working for the BBC on television and radio in to the 1990's as a football analyst, gaining a reputation for his forthright views on players, managers, referees, and the governance of the sport. His opinions on the game divided fellow pundits and viewers alike. Often derided in Scotland for his English bias, with the Tartan Army chant of "We hate Jimmy Hill", he nevertheless played along with such criticism in good humour. Hill provided television analysis on nine World Cups until he was dropped by the BBC in 1998.

In September 1998 Hill was signed by Sky Sports News to present a new programme *The Last Word* where he interviewed former players, managers and other celebrities about the game. This was followed in 2003 by *Jimmy Hill's Sunday Supplement* where sports journalists discussed the weekends football. In May 2004 Hill courted controversy after admonishing former manager and commentator Ron Atkinson following his racist outburst off screen. Many called for Hill's resignation, but he continued to work for Sky until July 2007. Later that year Hill was diagnosed with the early onset of Alzheimer's disease.

Away from broadcasting and football Hill was a passionate horse-rider, attending many foxhunts, and on one occasion jumping a couple of fences of the Grand National course at Aintree. He also played golf, appearing in pro-celebrity competitions and the BBC 2 programme *Pro-Celebrity Golf* on numerous occasions in the 1980's. He was also heavily involved in charities, helping to establish Sport Aiding Research into Crippling Diseases for Kids (SPARKS) in 1960. He also did much work for the football charity Goaldiggers, the Lords Taverners, and the National Advertisers Benevolent Fund (Hill, 1998: p.285). In 1976 he began an affair with his then secretary Bryony Ruth Jarvis, daughter of Trevor Jarvis an estate agent, before she became his third wife when they married in January 1991.

Hill was awarded an O.B.E. for services to football in 1985. He was inducted into the National Football Museum's Hall of Fame for his Special Achievement in football in 2010, and presented with the League Managers Association Service to Football Award in 2011. Hill unveiled a statue of himself outside Coventry City's Ricoh Arena in recognition of his achievements at the club in 2011. Hill died from Alzheimer's disease on 19 December 2015, and was survived by his wife Bryony and five children.

References

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