

= Ernie Cooksey =

Ernest George Cooksey (11 June 1980 ? 3 July 2008) was an English footballer , who was described as a utility player . He could play as a left @-@ sided defender and midfielder as well as in a central @-@ midfield role . He started as a trainee with Colchester United , before joining non @-@ League clubs Heybridge Swifts , Bishop 's Stortford , Chesham United and Bromley . In 2002 , he joined Southern Football League Premier Division side Crawley Town before turning professional with Football League side Oldham Athletic in 2003 .

He then moved to Rochdale in 2004 and Boston United in 2007 , totalling 140 appearances in the Football League over a four @-@ year period . He dropped down back into non @-@ League football , joining Conference National club Grays Athletic , making 19 league appearances .

Cooksey had a form of skin cancer removed from his back in 2006 , but was diagnosed with a recurrence of a malignant melanoma in February 2008 . He died in the early hours of 3 July 2008 , aged 28 .

= = Football career = =

= = = Early career = = =

Cooksey had started his career as a trainee with Colchester United , prior to moving onto a number of non @-@ League clubs . His first move was to Heybridge Swifts before joining Bishop 's Stortford in 1998 . He then moved onto Chesham United in 2000 , leaving in 2002 to have a brief spell at Bromley .

He joined Southern Football League Premier Division club , Crawley Town in July 2002 , ready for the 2002 ? 03 season . Cooksey made his debut for Crawley on 26 August , against Welling United coming on as a substitute , after he returned from coaching schoolchildren in Las Vegas , United States for six @-@ months . He made 34 appearances , scoring once during his spell with Crawley , helping them to finish seventh in the Southern Football League Premier Division .

= = = Turning professional = = =

Cooksey joined Oldham Athletic on trial in July 2003 . At the age of 23 , he stepped up three leagues into professional football permanently when Iain Dowie signed him on for financially troubled Oldham in August , who were in the Second Division . Bob Dowie , who was Cooksey 's former manager at Chesham United , recommended the player to his brother , Iain . He followed in the footsteps of Fitz Hall and Wayne Andrews who also joined the club from Chesham as recommendations from Bob Dowie . Cooksey scored twice in Oldham 's 3 ? 0 home victory over Carlisle United in their FA Cup first round match on 8 November 2003 . When the new season , 2003 ? 04 , started Cooksey was unable to make his debut due to suspension . He made 37 Second Division appearances for Oldham in the 2003 ? 04 season , scoring four goals .

Cooksey started the 2004 ? 05 season with Oldham Athletic , playing one match , away against Luton Town on 7 August . He was released by Oldham on 15 September , after he was left out of manager Brian Talbot 's plans . He dropped down into the Third Division , newly renamed as League Two and signed for Rochdale a day later on 16 September , despite discussing terms with Carlisle United . He made his debut , away against Mansfield Town in the 1 ? 0 away defeat on 18 September . During his first season with Rochdale , Cooksey picked up six yellow cards and two red cards on the field . However , his first red card of the season against Notts County was later overturned and downgraded to a yellow after a successful appeal to The FA .

At the start of the 2006 ? 07 season , he signed a 12 @-@ month extension to his contract . He spent more than two years with League Two side Rochdale , before joining Boston United in the January transfer window of 2007 . Boston United were reduced to just 12 professionals on their books in the closing stages of the 2006 ? 07 season , as the club could not afford to pay players

wages . Cooksey had not been paid since February , and was spending £ 30 a day in fuel travelling from his Manchester home . He spent six months at Boston United and played 16 League Two games , but was unable to prevent them from being relegated from The Football League on the final day of the season .

== Return to non @-@ League ==

Following his release from Boston United , Cooksey stated that he 'd like to reunite with former Boston manager Steve Evans , who was now manager of Cooksey 's previous club , Crawley Town . He had an unsuccessful trial at Barnet , before joining Conference National side Grays Athletic in July 2007 . He made his debut in Grays ' first game of the season away to Torquay United in the 0 ? 0 draw , on 12 August . Cooksey was sent @-@ off in Grays ' 1 ? 0 home defeat on 8 September , for a mistimed tackle on Michael Brough , as his trailing leg caught the opposition player . His last ever game before his death was for Grays Athletic at home in a Conference National match , against Exeter City on 16 February 2008 . Cooksey played the full 90 minutes in the 2 ? 0 defeat . During the 2007 ? 08 season , he made 19 appearances in the Conference for Grays .

== Playing style ==

Cooksey was a utility player , due to his versatility on the left @-@ flank and in the centre of midfield as a box @-@ to @-@ box midfielder . He was predominately a midfielder , throughout his career playing in the centre or on the left @-@ wing . During his spell with Grays Athletic , he was used as a defender , playing as a left full @-@ back .

== Personal life and illness ==

Before joining Oldham Athletic in August 2003 , Cooksey worked as a builder fitting false ceilings , leaving the better @-@ paid job to fulfil a lifelong ambition to become a professional footballer .

In early 2008 , he was diagnosed with malignant melanoma , a severe form of skin cancer . He had fought the disease before , when he had a form of skin cancer removed from his back in 2006 . Cooksey suspected his cancer originated from a six @-@ month spell coaching schoolchildren in the searing heat of Las Vegas in the United States . In April 2008 , Grays Athletic staged a benefit match for Cooksey . The match consisted of former professional players , as well as current professionals such as Leroy Lita , Nicky Shorey , Aaron McLean , Ray Parlour , Justin Edinburgh , Iain Dowie , Bob Dowie , Clive Allen , Scott Fitzgerald and Paul Merson . He returned to his former club Oldham Athletic in May 2008 , where another benefit match was staged for his appeal at Boundary Park , attended by 1 @,@ 500 fans to see such former players as John Barnes , Luther Blissett and Chris Waddle as well as television actors from Coronation Street .

Cooksey was born in Bishop 's Stortford . He died in the early hours of 3 July 2008 , at the age of 28 , five weeks before partner Louise Newlove was due to give birth to their first child . Newlove gave birth to their daughter , Isabella @-@ Georgia Cooksey , on 27 July 2008 .

== Tributes ==

Before the League Cup match between Oldham Athletic and Rochdale on 12 August 2008 , both sets of players and management emerged from the tunnel wearing special Ernie Cooksey t @-@ shirts bearing the number 4 , the shirt number he wore at both clubs . The t @-@ shirts bore both clubs ' crests on the front along with the slogan " ERNIE COOKSEY ? A TRUE GENT " , and the reverse read " 4 ERNIE " . A bucket collection also took place with all the proceeds going to a fund set up in Cooksey 's name . Additionally , his family , including partner Louise , were present at the game .

Oldham Athletic fans had a St George 's Cross flag made in his honour , which was due to be displayed at Oldham 's matches , as well as being taken abroad for England international fixtures .

The tribute flag was stolen in February 2009 , when Spanish hooligans attacked English fans in Seville before an international friendly on 20 February , stealing England flags from fans as trophies . The flag was replaced after a number of donations helped to cover the costs .