

= Len Boyd =

Leonard Arthur Miller " Len " Boyd (11 November 1923 ? 14 February 2008) was an English professional footballer who played 333 games in the Football League in the 1940s and 1950s . After serving in the Royal Navy during the Second World War , Boyd signed for Second Division club Plymouth Argyle , where he spent two seasons playing as an inside forward . When he began playing as a wing half , a position to which he was better suited , he attracted attention , and soon secured a transfer to the First Division with Birmingham City for what was for Plymouth a record fee .

Though his club was soon relegated , Boyd established himself in the first team and was appointed captain . He was chosen to represent England at " B " international level . An industrious , dynamic player , described by his goalkeeper Gil Merrick as " a good player and a bloody good captain " , Boyd led the team to the championship of the Second Division in the 1954 ? 55 season and to the FA Cup Final and sixth place in the league , still , as of 2013 , Birmingham 's record league placing , the following year . He played only once more for Birmingham , forced to retire by the back injury which had disrupted his final season with the club .

= = Playing career = =

= = = Early career = = =

Boyd was born in Plaistow , east London . He played for the West Ham Schools team alongside Ken Green , who was later to be a Birmingham team @-@ mate , and as a youth played for Ilford F.C. The outbreak of the Second World War when Boyd was 15 delayed his entry into football as a career . He joined the Royal Navy , and while serving in Malta was spotted playing for a Navy team by a Plymouth Argyle supporter , who recommended him to the club . After a trial , Boyd signed professional forms in December 1945 .

He made his debut on 12 October 1946 , taking over at centre @-@ half from Alf Miller for a Second Division game away at Leicester City which Plymouth lost 4 ? 1 . In his first season , Boyd played 16 league games , mainly in the inside left position , and scored four of his five Plymouth goals . He played regularly on the right side of the forward line in the following season , but failed to score , and was regarded as " a promising but not exceptional inside @-@ forward " . When manager Jack Tresadern switched him to right half for the 1948 ? 49 season , it became clear he was better suited to that position . After three consecutive seasons helping the Devon club avoid relegation from the Second Division , Boyd was sold to First Division club Birmingham City in January 1949 for a fee of £ 17 @,@ 500 , the first five @-@ figure fee ever received by Plymouth for a player .

= = = Birmingham City = = =

He went straight into the first team as replacement for Frank Mitchell who had joined Chelsea earlier that month , and made his debut in a goalless draw away at Preston North End . In the 1949 ? 50 season , his first full season with Birmingham , he established himself in the first team but was unable to prevent his new team 's relegation to the Second Division . When Fred Harris retired at the end of that season , manager Bob Brocklebank appointed Boyd as his successor as club captain , a post which he retained for the remainder of his Birmingham career .

Under Boyd 's captaincy Birmingham reached the semifinals of the 1950 ? 51 FA Cup , when they were defeated by the powerful Blackpool side of Stanley Matthews and Stan Mortensen only after a replay . They twice came close to winning promotion , missing out by three points in the 1950 ? 51 season and then on goal average the following year . Boyd 's performances were rewarded with selection for England B against Netherlands B , a match played in front of a crowd of 60 @,@ 000 at the Olympic Stadium in Amsterdam , but this , and a selection as reserve for a Football League

representative side in 1954 , was as close as he came to full international honours .

Manager Brocklebank significantly strengthened Birmingham 's playing staff , but although the club nearly reached another semifinal in the 1952 ? 53 FA Cup , losing in the sixth round to Tottenham Hotspur after two replays , their league results failed to improve . In late 1954 , Arthur Turner was appointed manager , and his ability to instil a positive approach in the players transformed a team stagnating in mid @-@ table into one needing to win the last game of the season , away at Doncaster Rovers , in order to be promoted as champions on goal average . Boyd led the team to a 5 ? 1 win , later recalling :

The ground was packed and alive with supporters wearing the colours of Birmingham City . We knew we would win ? and so too did those fans ? and our performance that day was quite brilliant .

The same squad of players carried their promotion form into the 1955 ? 56 season in the First Division , achieving the club 's highest league finish of sixth place , and reaching the FA Cup final . They became attractive to the media ; after the FA Cup semifinal victory , Boyd signed an exclusive contract committing himself and his team @-@ mates to appearing only on BBC programmes in the weeks leading up to the final .

Fellow wing half Roy Warhurst injured a thigh in the sixth round at Arsenal and played no further part in the season . Boyd himself had for some time been suffering from a debilitating back problem , and relied on injections to keep him playing ; he missed five of the last seven games of the season , but was passed fit on the Wednesday before the game . In the event , Boyd played , in Warhurst 's position at left @-@ half , and the 22 @-@ year @-@ old Johnny Newman came in on the right . With Warhurst missing and Boyd out of position and not fully match @-@ fit , Birmingham 's strength and balance was disrupted , leaving them particularly vulnerable to Manchester City 's unconventional style of play , known as the " Revie Plan " . At half @-@ time , a row erupted between the manager and some of the players , Boyd included , about their fitness ; in the second half , whether due to physical and mental exhaustion or the effects of the row , Birmingham were soundly beaten .

On their return to Birmingham , the team received a civic welcome ; Boyd told the thousands outside the Council House that the team felt they had let the supporters down . Though the crowd roared " No ! " , recriminations followed . Speaking fifty years later , goalkeeper Gil Merrick refused to attribute blame for the loss to Boyd 's lack of fitness :

The reason why we lost , in my opinion , was nothing to do with Boydy who some claimed was unfit . Why we didn 't perform in the second half was mainly because nothing was said in the dressing room at half time about stopping the damage caused by Don Revie . He was a good player and ran the game but at half time we should have talked about stopping him . Tackles should have been talked about , but they weren 't . It was a lack of tackles that caused us to fold in the second half , and that 's all I 'm going to say . Don 't put all the onus on Len Boyd . Len was a good player and a bloody good captain .

Boyd played only one more game for the club , two weeks after the Cup Final . Not risked in their first game in the Inter @-@ Cities Fairs Cup , against Internazionale on a hard pitch in the San Siro , he played in their next , a 1 ? 0 win against a Zagreb Select XI in Yugoslavia . Following a favourable specialist 's report during the close season , Boyd took part in pre @-@ season training , but his back still troubled him . On 17 August 1956 , the day before Birmingham were to open their 1956 ? 57 League campaign , Boyd 's contract with the club was terminated at his own request .

= = Style of play = =

Boyd was a tall man with a long stride . He was hard @-@ working , combining industry with composure and skill on the ball . His dynamism was regularly mentioned ; The Times ' match report of the 1953 FA Cup sixth round replay against Tottenham Hotspur , a 2 ? 2 draw in which Boyd scored the equalising goal and had his name taken , attributed Birmingham 's second @-@ half comeback to their captain 's performance :

And behind it all there was the constant driving force of Boyd , their captain , at right @-@ half . Boyd , in fact , one would say , was the final hero of a desperate day . Up in attack and back in

defence he played a magnificent game to inspire and keep his colleagues going .

Against Arsenal in the 1956 cup run he was " a champion who covered every inch of Highbury 's mud , a dynamo and a man of steel " , and , later the same season , The Times ' correspondent wondered rhetorically " was there ever such a human dynamo at wing @-@ half ? "

Birmingham based their success of the 1950s on " their acutely drilled and disciplined defence ? founded upon the authority of their half @-@ backs Boyd , Smith and Warhurst " , though these three did much more than protect their defenders .

... the towering young Smith , centre @-@ half in the England Intermediate (Under 23) XI , is flanked by two men , Boyd and Warhurst , who keep the ball flowing forward quickly all the time . There are no superfluous frills about them . Their accent is on a quick release along the lines of longitude . They are the real driving force .

They acquired a fearsome reputation : Boyd himself once played four matches carrying an injury which turned out to be a hairline fracture of his leg . Team @-@ mate Alex Govan , preferring to describe Boyd as " hard , very hard " rather than a " dirty player " , recalled :

I used to think ' thank God I 'm playing in front of them and not against them ' ! Birmingham probably had the hardest defenders in the First Division in those days , with Len , Trevor Smith , Roy Warhurst , Jeff Hall and Ken Green ? no one liked the idea of playing against them .

= = Life outside football = =

Boyd was married to Dolly , and had two children . He enjoyed oil @-@ painting as a hobby . According to Govan , " Len was a typical cockney really . He was hard on the pitch but soft off the field , he wouldn 't do anybody a bad turn . "

Boyd suffered from a fear of flying , which had on occasion caused difficulties in his football career . Chosen by the Birmingham County Football Association for a representative match in Hamburg in 1953 , the players were already at the airport when he requested to be omitted from the side . While his teammates flew to Birmingham 's Fairs Cup match in Milan , Boyd travelled across the English Channel by boat and then across France and into Italy by train .

When Boyd retired from professional football , the Birmingham City directors " had stated their readiness to help him in any venture he decided to take up " . He chose to enter the licensed trade , and kept a public house in Birmingham . Having once said that " if I can 't play in first @-@ class football , I don 't want to play any football at all " , after two @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half years out of the game he changed his mind . In early 1959 he attempted a comeback with Leicestershire side Hinckley Athletic , but found himself unable to play a full game . He remained involved with football for a few more years , acting as coach and scout for Redditch of the West Midlands (Regional) League between 1960 and 1965 . Settling in Melton Mowbray , Leicestershire , he went on to become one of the town 's first traffic wardens . In later life he moved into a care home in Melton , where he died in February 2008 at the age of 84 .

= = Honours = =

with Birmingham City

Football League Second Division champions : 1954 ? 55

FA Cup finalists : 1956

= = Career statistics = =