

= Johnny McNichol =

John " Johnny " McNichol (20 August 1925 ? 17 March 2007) was a Scottish footballer who played more than 500 games in the Football League in England . An inside forward , he played more than 150 games for Brighton & Hove Albion and more than 200 for each of Chelsea and Crystal Palace .

McNichol graduated from junior footballer and apprentice motor mechanic in his native Scotland to a professional contract with English First Division club Newcastle United . After two years , he had found success with the reserve team but was never selected in the first eleven . Brighton & Hove Albion , struggling in the Third Division , broke their transfer record to sign him . McNichol spent four years with the club , acquiring " the reputation as the finest inside @-@ forward in the Third Division " , before moving to the First Division as Chelsea manager Ted Drake 's first signing . He was part of the Chelsea team that won the League championship in the 1954 ? 55 season . In 1958 he joined Crystal Palace , whom he captained to promotion from the Fourth Division , and finished his on @-@ field career in the Southern League as player @-@ manager of Tunbridge Wells Rangers . He then spent 25 years working on the commercial side of football with two of his previous clubs .

= = Early life and career = =

McNichol was born in Kilmarnock , Ayrshire . His father , Danny , died when he was five , so McNichol and seven siblings were raised by their mother , Catherine . He attended St Joseph 's School in Kilmarnock , and started work as a messenger boy for a local draper 's shop when he left school . His shop work stopped him playing football on Saturdays , but he was able to play some midweek football for Junior club Hurlford United . When he was taken on at the local bus garage as an apprentice motor mechanic , he became available on Saturdays as well . Hurlford paid him ten shillings a game , nearly as much as his apprentice 's wages . During the Second World War , McNichol was called up to the Fleet Air Arm as a mechanic , but was able to play friendly matches for Inverness @-@ based club Clachnacuddin . Because of the number of professional players stationed around the country , such matches were played at a fairly high standard .

= = Newcastle United = =

After the war , McNichol returned to Hurlford , but , amid interest from other clubs , he accepted a trial with Newcastle United . After two trial matches , he signed professional forms with the club on his 21st birthday . McNichol spent two years at Newcastle , but never made a first @-@ team appearance . Behind the likes of England international forwards Roy Bentley and Len Shackleton in the pecking order , he doubled his income working as a motor mechanic for a local funeral director whose " two or three Rolls @-@ Royces [made] a nice change from working on bus engines " . In his second season , he was part of the reserve team that won the Central League title , but a disagreement over personal terms on his contract renewal ? the Newcastle management felt a lower wage was justified because of the player 's earnings outside the game ? prompted McNichol to seek first @-@ team football elsewhere .

= = Brighton & Hove Albion = =

Brighton & Hove Albion had finished bottom of the Third Division South the season before and were struggling financially , yet manager Don Welsh persuaded the directors to break the club transfer record by paying £ 5 @,@ 000 for a player yet to make his debut in the Football League , and persuaded McNichol to sign . He made his first appearance in the League on 21 August 1948 , at the age of 23 , as Brighton drew with Swindon Town at home . The club finished sixth in the division in McNichol 's first season and eighth , despite having no regular goalscorer ? McNichol 's nine goals made him top scorer ? in 1949 ? 50 . The next year , McNichol played in all of Brighton 's games , the only man so to do , and again finished as top scorer for the season , this time with 14 goals . According to Carder and Harris , he " had a superb season with a brand of play which won

him the reputation as the finest inside @-@ forward in the Third Division " . Appointed club captain when Billy Lane took over from Welsh as manager , McNichol flourished under Lane 's attacking policy . He scored 14 goals in the 1951 ? 52 season as Brighton narrowly failed to mount a successful challenge to Plymouth Argyle for the title , " was again the star of the side " , and " was thought by many to be the most stylish inside @-@ forward to play for the Albion " .

That season , McNichol scored a hat @-@ trick against eventual runners @-@ up Reading , which caught the eye of manager Ted Drake . Shortly before the next season started , he became Drake 's first signing for his new club , Chelsea , at a fee of £ 12 @,@ 000 plus the player Jimmy Leadbetter , a club record fee received for Albion . He had scored 39 goals in all competitions from 165 appearances . Although scouts from bigger clubs had been watching the player since soon after his arrival at the club ? he had apparently already turned down moves to Manchester City , Everton and Huddersfield Town ? Brighton 's supporters were disappointed , seeing his sale as a backward step .

= = Chelsea = =

On his Chelsea debut away at Manchester United , McNichol found himself playing at right back after ten minutes when Sid Tickridge sustained an injury . Once restored to the forward line , his goals helped Chelsea avoid relegation to the Second Division at the end of his first season . A " dramatic last @-@ minute goal ... enabled Chelsea to snatch a lucky victory at West Bromwich " with three games left , and he scored the third goal of Chelsea 's 3 ? 1 defeat of Manchester City in their last fixture of the season which confirmed their escape from the relegation positions .

Two seasons later , Chelsea won the First Division title for the first time . As they beat Charlton Athletic in March 1955 to " maintain their challenging position in the Championship " , The Times ' reporter described how " McNichol filled the role of general , and was instigator of many dangerous movements " . Two weeks later , McNichol , " the most effective of their forwards " , scored twice as a Chelsea team displaying " a propensity to play the man in preference to the ball " beat Tottenham Hotspur 4 ? 2 , and the title was confirmed with one game still to play . McNichol had missed only two games in the 42 @-@ game season , and scored 14 goals , a good return for a player in his position ; an inside forward was normally more a creator than a scorer of goals , but his profile on Chelsea 's website describes him as " clever , astute and most of all a clinical finisher " .

He stayed at the club for three more seasons , but later lost his place in the side to the young Jimmy Greaves : " There was no disgrace in losing my place to him . I couldn 't grumble about that . We used to get on very well , and he would listen to the instructions I gave him . Then he became world famous ! " The respect was mutual : though Greaves described the Chelsea title @-@ winning side as " almost certainly one of the least talented teams ever to win the title " , he made an exception for McNichol , " the ball player of the team " . In all competitions , he made 202 appearances for Chelsea and scored 66 goals .

While at Brighton , McNichol had worked in a local garage , wanting to keep up his skills in case injury put an early end to his football career . When he joined Chelsea , his decision to remain living in the area had upset Drake . In addition , he bought a newsagent 's shop in Hove , so not only did he have to travel by train from the south coast ? as did teammates Stan Willemse and Eric Parsons ? he further annoyed the Chelsea management by getting up even earlier each morning to open the shop before coming in to training . His wife Connie , whom he had known since childhood , ran the business in his absence . He claimed to have " earned more working in that shop than playing for Chelsea . Even in that championship season . "

= = Crystal Palace = =

Just ahead of the transfer deadline in March 1958 , McNichol signed for Third Division South club Crystal Palace . He was expected to fill a role " similar to the one he has performed so well at Stamford Bridge ? helping in the development of promising young forwards " , and was appointed captain . He scored on his debut for the club , and produced seven goals from the twelve games he

played in what remained of the 1957 ? 58 season . By October 1958 , manager George Smith felt the player was feeling the strain of his dual role , so relieved him of the captaincy . As McNichol grew older , his playing position became more defensive , as he became first a wing half , then a full back . Palace had been placed in the Fourth Division when the Football League structure was reorganised on national lines prior to the 1958 ? 59 season , and McNichol , long since restored to the captaincy , led them to promotion to the Third Division in 1961 , their first promotion for 40 years . Soon afterwards , he applied for the managerial post at former club Brighton & Hove Albion , then in the Second Division , but was unsuccessful . A broken arm suffered in August 1961 forced McNichol to miss a Palace match for the first time in a three @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half @-@ year club career . He played on for two seasons , but his professional career was brought to a close by facial injuries , a fractured cheekbone and broken jaw , sustained during the 1962 ? 63 season . In all competitions , he scored 15 goals from 205 appearances .

= = Later life and career = =

McNichol remained in the South of England , spending four years as player @-@ manager of Tunbridge Wells Rangers in the Southern League . Having sold the newsagents , he returned to Crystal Palace to work in the commercial side of the game , where he was responsible for the establishment of weekly pools and bingo competitions as a means of raising funds for the club . He moved back to Brighton & Hove Albion to occupy a similar role from 1979 to 1992 , and after retirement continued to live in the Saltdean area of Brighton .

Despite the successes of his career , McNichol had regrets . He described Chelsea 's decision not to accept their invitation to participate in the inaugural season of the European Cup as his " one big disappointment " , and " thought it was strange at the time " , despite the national team selectors ' preference for players plying their trade for Scottish clubs , that he was never chosen to represent his country .

McNichol retained contact with his previous clubs . One of 24 former players and managers nominated as " Albion Legends " as part of Brighton 's centenary events in 2001 , he took an active role in the celebrations . The surviving members of Chelsea 's 1955 title @-@ winning team used to meet for an annual dinner , and were guests of the club at the last match of the 2004 ? 05 season as they celebrated their second League title , 50 years after the first .

He died of a stroke on 17 March 2007 at the age of 81 .

= = Honours = =

Newcastle United Reserves

The Central League winners : 1947 ? 48

Chelsea

Football League First Division winners : 1954 ? 55

Crystal Palace

Football League Fourth Division runners @-@ up : 1960 ? 61