

ALLEZ LES BLEUS FRANCOPHONES!

In recent years, many players in the Toffees' dressing room have probably conversed in French.

But who was the first French speaker to turn out for the Toffees? It is hard, of course, to give a definitive answer but Stockport-raised early 20th-century Blues full-back, James Meunier, may have had some exposure to his France-born father's native tongue. However, the most likely candidate for a first fully-fluent French speaker in the Blues' ranks would be Elie Hurel.

Born in Jersey, in 1915, to French parents Emile André and Marie-Françoise Hurel, Elie was orphaned as a child and taken in by an older brother and a kind landlady.

At only 5ft 6in tall, 'Pat', as he was nicknamed, was a talented footballer who relied on skill and passing ability in an inside-forward role. An Everton player, David Murray, was based on the island and impressed by Elie, he penned a letter of recommendation to Blues secretary Theo Kelly.



Elie Hurel



James Meunier

The youngster made haste to Liverpool by boat and train for a trial in April 1936. Having impressed in two reserve team appearances, he was offered a contract, reporting back for the following season. Writing in his *Liverpool Echo* 'Stud Marks' column, Louis T. Kelly (father of Theo) noted: 'Like most Channel Islanders Hurel is a bilingualist and 'passed with honours' when Dean put him through his first test. 'Parlez-vous?' said Bill. 'The same to you,' replied Elie.'

After settling in, Elie graduated to the first team for a match at Bolton Wanderers on 12 September. He made a promising debut and would then score on his home bow with a smart, flicked header against Huddersfield Town. His fifth, and final, selection for the first team came in an away defeat to Middlesbrough on 31 October 1936, after which he returned to the second string. In April 1938, he was transferred to Northampton Town – managed by former Everton full-back Warney Cresswell. However, the outbreak of war in 1939 ended his professional playing career after 12 Third Division South appearances for the Cobblers.

Serving in the Royal Engineers as a sapper, Elie parachuted into Crete, survived when his troop ship was torpedoed and landed in France on D-Day+5. As he worked his way through France and Belgium towards Germany, his French language skills served him well with people being liberated.

With Jersey freed from German occupation, the former Toffee returned home and resumed his career as a plasterer. The war had taken its toll, but he lived out his life quietly and happily, passing away in 1986, two days short of his 71st birthday.