

By Paul McParlan

GEOFF BARNETT: BLUES YOUTH CUP HERO AND GUNNERS WEMBLEY KEEPER!

In the 1960s Everton were in the fortunate position of having three top English goalkeepers on their books: Gordon West, Andy Rankin and Geoff Barnett - who was the youngest of the trio and would always struggle to escape from their shadow at Goodison.

Born in Northwich in 1946, Barnett's accomplished performances for Mid-Cheshire schoolboys put him on the radar of several professional club scouts before Harry Catterick brought him to Everton in July 1962, despite competition from Matt Busby at Manchester United.

Barnett played in the first Everton side to ever win the FA Youth Cup, when they beat Arsenal in the 1965 final. In the second leg, before a crowd of almost 30,000 at Goodison Park, his brilliant last-minute save from John Radford ensured Everton held on to win 3-2 on aggregate.

At the age of 19, he made his First-Team debut in a 2-0 win over Sunderland on 4 December 1965 and kept his place for eight more games. Unfortunately, after the infamous 2-0 defeat at Blackpool on 15 January 1966 (when Joe Royle replaced Alex Young), Barnett found himself replaced by Gordon West. That was effectively the end of his senior career at Everton. He made only one more appearance – a 1-1 draw at West Ham in a side with key players rested in preparation for the 1968 FA Cup final.

Unbeknown to Barnett, however, his FA Youth Cup final heroics had been noted by Arsenal. The Gunners desperately needed a deputy for Bob Wilson and his understudy, Malcolm Webster, had proved unreliable.



Geoff Barnett, Gordon West, Brian Labone and Roger Kenyon



Barnett with Arsenal in the 1972 FA Cup final at Wembley

Manager Bertie Mee swooped to sign Barnett, then aged 22, in October 1969 for a fee of £35,000. He made his debut three days later in a 1-0 defeat to Coventry City and featured in the next 13 Arsenal matches.

During his time at Highbury, Barnett made 49 appearances, deputising for Wilson when Arsenal defeated Stoke City in an FA Cup semi-final replay at Goodison in 1972 and again in the Wembley final defeat to Leeds United.

He moved to the Minnesota Kicks in 1976 and reached the Soccer Bowl final where he conceded two goals to the legendary Eusebio in a 3-0 defeat to the Toronto Metros Croatia. Later, he rejected the chance to join Pele at New York Cosmos and after spells coaching and running the George and Dragon pub in Holmes Chapel, he retired to Florida before his sad passing on 15 January 2021.

Three years after leaving Everton, Gordon West had lost his place in the starting XI and Andy Rankin had moved to Watford. There are many who still believe that if Barnett had stayed at Goodison Park, he would have become Everton's first-choice keeper in the 1970s.