

Donald Colman – an abridged biography

Donald Colman was born Donald Cameron Cunningham on 14th August 1878 in Renton, Dumbartonshire.

He was a passionate football player from a young age and signed to play a junior club Glasgow Perthshire once he was of an age. This was when, fearing his parents disapproval of his wish to play football professionally he signed under the Colman name (family name of his Grandmother). Subsequently he played for a number of junior clubs before being contracted to Motherwell in 1905.

In 1907 he was transferred to Aberdeen where he played at right back, and within two years was given the captainship of the team, and was to remain with Aberdeen FC until 1920, when he was 42 years old.

He was capped for Scotland 4 times between 1911-1913.

The outbreak of war in 1914 was to see Colman on active service with the Gordon Highlanders along with most of his colleagues, this was to lead to Aberdeen being forced out of the Scottish League by 1917 as they could not actually field a full team. After the end of the war Colman was one of the few who returned and was able to resume his playing career at Aberdeen.

After leaving Aberdeen FC in 1920 (aged 47) he moved south to become player/manager of Dumbarton FC where he remained for five years. It was during his spell at Dumbarton that he launched an international coaching career, spending the summer months in Norway where he was coach to SK Brann of Bergen. This had a profound impact upon his training methods and he introduced many innovations to Dumbarton, and subsequently after being appointed coach at Aberdeen FC in 1931. This was when he moved into the flat at 342 King Street along with his family.

One of his training innovations was the concentration upon players footwork and would design boots specific to the players but only issue them one foot at a time in order to strengthen their weaker foot. He also made innovations to promote fitness and increase the skill levels of the players.

However, one of his most lasting innovations was the introduction of the touchline dugout. By 1934 this was a fixture near the centre line of Pittodrie. It allowed Colman to watch his players at foot level, so gaining a constant view of how the team was functioning and helping him adjust team tactics during the game. Admittedly it also kept him sheltered from the often biting wind coming from the North Sea. It was not long that the dugout became a national then regular international fixture of football stadia.

Colman died in 1942 due to Tuberculosis. His obituaries were many from far and wide and he is recognised both by his old club (he was inducted into the Hall of Fame 2018) and the Scottish FA as being a major figure in the development of football.

It is fitting that his great granddaughter Rachel Corsie is present captain of the successful Scottish Women's Football Team.