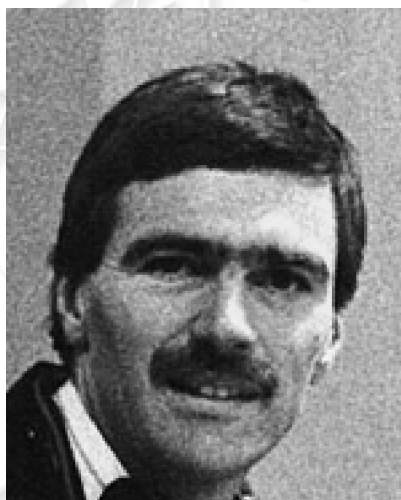


SPORTING LEGENDS: IAN TAYLOR

SPORT: HOCKEY

COMPETITIVE ERA: 1977 - 1988

Ian Taylor first started playing hockey as a pupil at King Charles School in Kidderminster, but his early experiences as a goalkeeper were far from pleasant. As a 12-year-old he was asked to stand between the posts while the seniors got in some shooting practice. The very first shot hit him straight between the eyes and fractured his skull!



My headmaster visited me in hospital and told me never to play a game that I wasn't good enough at or adequately equipped for, he recalls. We never forgotten his advice.

Although equally talented on the soccer pitch and cricket field, Ian began to devote more and more of his time to hockey. His efforts were rewarded with selection for county and Midlands schools sides, followed by a call-up to play for England in the Schools Home Countries tournament.

On leaving school Ian decided on a career in teaching and took a job in London. He continued to commute back to Worcestershire at weekends to play for Stourport, but eventually the travelling proved too much and he joined Slough. After a string of impressive displays, he was selected to go with England to the Six Nations tournament in Amsterdam.

Taylor spent most of the early part of his international career as understudy to John Hurst until the England's first choice keeper contracted dysentery while on tour in India in 1977. Taylor duly grabbed his chance, and made the number one spot his own.

SPORTING LEGENDS: IAN TAYLOR

After gaining rave reviews for his World Cup performances the following year, Taylor set his sights on the 1980 Moscow Olympics - only to have his dream shattered when Great Britain boycotted the event. He spoke out strongly against the decision, gaining a certain amount of notoriety in the process.

But when one Hockey Association official hinted that Taylor should quit because of it, the goalkeeper's blunt reply was: "You won't retire me until you find someone better!"

Four years later Great Britain's hockey team did get their chance in the Olympics. Although they only scraped through the qualifying round in Los Angeles due to a Russian withdrawal, they stunned the critics by taking the bronze.

Taylor was delighted with the result, but he had set his heart on the gold medal and gave himself one last chance to win it - at the 1988 games in Seoul.

Hockey may not be the biggest spectator sport in Britain, but the spirit of Taylor and his teammates guaranteed them an army of armchair fans for the Games. Even an early defeat by West Germany could not dent Taylor's ambition, and Great Britain stormed past Australia in the semis to gain revenge over the Germans in a thrilling final.

Throughout his career Ian Taylor has been a tireless ambassador for the game of hockey. At the 1988 Olympics he was selected to carry the Union Jack and lead the British squad in the opening ceremony. But even then he didn't think of the honour as a personal one; to him, it was simply a triumph for his sport.

Taylor retired after the 1988 Seoul win, but he returned that November to take part in a celebration game at Luton. "The game was to mark the Olympic triumph", he explains. "It was a fantastic occasion - nearly 9,000 people at a hockey match in Britain."

Their presence was as much a testament to hockey's greatest goalkeeper, the man who has done more than anyone to put the game firmly on Britain's sporting map.

SPORTING LEGENDS: IAN TAYLOR



Scott Burton's Final Thought

Despite competing in a minority sport, it can be said that Ian Taylor went on to establish himself as a major sporting legend.

The sport of hockey rarely fills our TV screens these days, but I can remember watching the GB Hockey Team at L.A. 84 with great enthusiasm.

Being very young at the time, I can remember very little about the matches themselves, yet I'll never forget the penalty save made by Ian Taylor - which helped Team GB win the Bronze Medal.

It was a pure reflex action, and a save of immense importance. Watching the GB Team win Olympic Gold at Seoul 88 was also very satisfying, and Taylor was yet again rock-solid for the majority of the matches there. For sporting fans like me to be able to remember Taylor's achievements more than 20 years after the fact - the guy must've been something rather special.



Ian Taylor was the complete Hockey keeper - fast, strong, and a great leader.