

SPORTING LEGENDS: SEAN KERLY

SPORT: HOCKEY

COMPETITIVE ERA: 1981 - 1992

Sean Kerly is a successful product of the national hockey coaching system. He appeared for England at both u-18 and u-21 levels before making his senior debut in March 1981 against Poland at Crystal Palace.



Kerly learnt the rudiments of hockey at Chatham House Grammar School, Kent, where he also proved a skilful performer in several other sports.

After winning selection to the England under-21 squad, Kerly perfected his technique under the coaching of Ian McGinn of the Southgate Hockey Club. It was at this stage that McGinn was able to form the nucleus of the successful England side. His under-21 squad also included the future internationals Richard Dodds and Paul Barber. McGinn was also responsible for Kerly's subsequent recruitment by the Southgate club, which has so dominated English hockey.

Kerly's goal-scoring career accelerated during the Eight Nation Tournament in Hong Kong in 1983. There, he bagged one against South Korea and another against China, but the British squad did not play well enough to qualify outright for the Los Angeles Olympics.

They were instead named as reserve nation and when the Soviet Union decided to boycott the Games, the British got their chance. Kerly went on to play some of the best hockey of his career, scoring a total of seven goals as Great Britain took the bronze medal in an Olympic performance.

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Kerly's 8 goals at Seoul firmly established him as hockey's deadliest goal-getter.

In 1985, Kerly helped Southgate to the first of four consecutive national titles before commanding public attention a year later in the World Cup at Willesden, London.

He scored four goals in a brilliant tournament performance as England outplayed everyone en route to the final, only to lose to the Australians.

As the 1988 Seoul Olympics approached and the demands hockey made on his time grew, Kerly resigned from his position with the Nextclothes company and decided to remain unemployed in order to prepare properly.

His loyalty and commitment were rewarded when, thanks in large part to his eight tournament goals, Great Britain recovered from a shaky start to take the gold medal with a 3-1 win over West Germany.

Kerly's deft touches belie the fact that it is not for stick work that he was best known. His primary attributes were speed, strength and power of shot. Blessed with a devastating change of pace, Kerly exploited the space behind defenders to create goal-scoring chances.

Like all great goal scorers, he was instinctively aware of his position in relation to goal and defenders, and was rarely found anywhere but in the right place at the right time.

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Scott Burton's Final Thought

Sean Kerly is synonymous with the success that GB Hockey Team achieved throughout the 1980s.

He was part of a well-organised and skillful team, yet it was always his vital goals that helped to undo most of his nation's opponents.

Many sporting journalists called him the Gary Lineker of Hockey, as he just seemed to score goals for fun.

Like his successful football counterpart, Kerly would spend many a game just drifting around, being seemingly ineffective, then in the flash of a moment, he would score two or three goals and win the match for his team.

His defining success was certainly at Seoul 88, where he led from the front by scoring 8 vital goals for the GB Team. It was a most deserved Gold Medal for Kerly, who from time to time had taken his fair share of negative abuse from the media critics.

However, when it really counted, Sean Kerly could always be relied on for consistent performances. He was a pure goal-getter, and the best of his generation.



Sean Kerly was renowned for his predatory, goal-scoring instincts.