

Louis Bookman - From Foreign Fields

by Ian Hemmens

These days , club football is a very cosmopolitan affair with players appearing from all corners of the globe to ply their trade and become fans favourites.

In the early days of the 20th century though, such players were few and far between mainly due to the FA's attitude of isolationism and superiority towards any other than the Home Nations.

Into this, in fact in the Golden Year of 1911, when Bradford City were enjoying the greatest season in their short history, came a diminutive character with an exotic background which would have well suited the Bradford of the era where its position as the centre of the worlds textile industry had led to immigration from many parts of Europe and beyond looking for work and riches.



It has been mentioned that for a short period, Bradford citizens actually owned more Rolls-Royces than London, such were the fortunes of the wool barons of the time.

The football club had risen in 8 short years from the struggles of Manningham RFC to the pinnacle of the booming Association football code culminating in the FA Cup Final victory at Old Trafford.

Citys canny Scottish manager, the legendary Peter O'Rourke had always used his contacts to scour the British Isles for talent to add to his roster of talent with young up and coming players given a chance as well as established stars like the England International winger Dickie Bond, pinched for a bargain fee from Preston North End because they thought he had dodgy knees.

Citys left winger of the time was Irish International Frank Thompson, provider of the cross from which City skipper Jimmy Speirs had headed the

winning goal in the Cup Final.

Peter O'Rourke returned to the emerald isle for an understudy to Thompson and found his man at the famous Belfast Celtic club.

Louis James Arthur Oscar Buchalter was born in the small Lithuanian village of Zagare, then part of the Russian Empire. The family were Lithuanian Jews and emigrated to Ireland in the 1890's to escape the growing anti-semitism in Russia at that time. They settled in Dublin and thought it prudent to Anglicize their name to avoid any further problems. Thus Louis Bookman was born and took out Irish citizenship.

The young Louis was a bright lad and also showed an aptitude for sport excelling at both football and cricket whilst at Cabra Junior and then Dublin Grammar School.

A diminutive but speedy 5'8", he was an ideal winger and after playing for Dublin junior clubs Adelaide and Frankfort, he took the eye of the famous hoops of Belfast Celtic. He continued to prosper and won an Irish amateur International cap breaking into the Celtic first team along with fellow future City trialist & Irish International keeper Frank McKee, and finishing with a runners up medal for the Belfast Charity Cup in 1911.

In 1911 at 21 years old, the emerging Bookman was spotted by the wily Peter O'Rourke and was offered professional terms to play for the top English side Bradford City. Although hugely promising, City had a very strong squad of top players and Louis found himself in competition with not only the aforementioned Frank Thompson but another Cup Winner, the hugely versatile Peter Logan who in his 17 years at City played all across the front line except Centre Forward. Also still on the books was highly effective left winger George Handley, a star of City's promotion campaign a couple of years earlier.

Despite the strong competition, he made his first team debut on February 11th at Valley Parade against Preston North End and that season managed to make a further 4 appearances in the team. 1912-13 saw him make only 7 first team appearances as Logan played the majority of games.

1913-14 was a big season as he was expected to make the breakthrough to

become a regular in the team. He managed 20 appearances and also scored 2 goals, his first coming on November 1st at Everton followed by another at home to Sheffield Wednesday in a 3-1 victory on March 21st.

A week later though away at Bolton, a 0-3 reverse saw Louis' last appearance in the Claret & Amber as Logan regained the shirt & another youngster from Scotland, Peter Currie was given a chance in the last few games of the season.

1914 had been the high water mark of Bookmans City career, he gained his first full cap for the conquering Ireland team that won the Home International tournament that year. In that fateful summer of 1914 though, he left for West Bromwich Albion, his path to regular football blocked at Valley Parade.



Louis Bookman pictured for Ireland in 1914, front row, 2nd right. Also pictured is goalkeeper Frank McKee who had a short spell at Valley Parade without making a first team appearance.

As war intervened, he made only 16 appearances for WBA before returning to Ireland to play for Glentoran and Shelbourne. After the war in 1919, Luton paid £875 for his services, a decent sum in those days and this spell saw the most productive spell of his English career. Further International caps followed before he moved to Port Vale and finally, back to Shelbourne.

During this time he was also a fine cricketer, a left hand bat & slow bowler representing Ireland on many occasions and playing Minor Counties

cricket for Bedfordshire during his spell with Luton .

After his football career ended he continued with his cricket whilst working for the Irish Railway Service and then in the jewellery business.

When he died in June 1943, he was just 52 years old but this son of a Lithuanian Rabbi had lived a lifetime of experience and been a true sporting character of the era and a multi sportsman of no little talent.

As far as i can tell, he was Bradford Citys first 'foreign' player long before it was fashionable and the norm to have players from all over the world in your team.