

The Unknown Jimmy Hill

By **Alexander Baron** - Dec 20, 2015



Jimmy Hill

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Jimmy Hill who died Saturday at the age of 87 will be known to most UK TV viewers over the age of about fifteen as a sports presenter, but he was a lot more than that, indeed the sport of association football owes him a great deal, including the telephone number salaries today's leading players are paid. On the announcement of his death, tributes flooded in to especially **the BBC**.

Hill was born at Balham, South London in 1928, and became a football player, retiring at the age of 33. Although he never played for England, he excelled at club level including in what was then the First Division. While still playing, he became Chairman of the Professional Footballers' Association in which role he campaigned to abolish the maximum wage, which at that time was £20 per week. In 1961, the average salary was around £800 per annum, and a house could be purchased for less than £3,000, but today the very top players are earning well in excess of £1 million a year, so rather than

the statue to Hill that was unveiled in July 2011, players might well build a shrine to him.

At Coventry City he became first Manager and then Chairman. It was while he was at Coventry he introduced pre-match entertainment, special trains for away games, and even penned *The Sky Blue Song*, set to the music of the *Eton Boating Song*. He also took a stand against football hooliganism, making the sport family-friendly, and came up with sponsored shirts, an idea that was not popular with the football authorities at the time.

From Coventry, Hill moved into TV with first ITV, then the BBC and then again to commercial television, which is how he ended his career. He is said to have created the sports pundit, at least in the UK, and was still working up until 2007.

Other landmarks in his career were riding a horse across the Coventry pitch, stepping in as an emergency linesman in a 1972 match, advertising the Remington electric shaver, and taking the game to America, which was not a success then, but it is quite likely it would never have taken off Stateside but for this venture. He also argued for what is now the norm, the 3 point win to increase the competitiveness of the game; (chess player Mike Basman has argued for a similar system in his game, to discourage the *grandmaster draw*).

Hill was also a plain-speaking individual who never took himself too seriously, and for all these reasons he will be sadly missed.

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