



Gerry Hitchens: The Making of a Villa Legend

Simon Goodyear

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When you mention the name Gerry Hitchens to Villa fans of a certain age you begin to conger up memories of a big, powerful, blond striker who scored goals for fun and was a gentleman on and off the pitch.

Gerry Archibald Hitchens was a boyhood Villa fan and his dream was to one day play for his team. In December 1957, seven months after Villa had lifted the FA Cup, Gerry's ambition had been fulfilled when Eric Houghton signed him from Cardiff City for a club record of £22,000.

It took Gerry a season or so to find his feet and establish himself to the Villa Park faithful after an indifferent start to his Villa career, but on 14th November 1959, Gerry Hitchens embarked on a goalscoring streak which will probably never be matched again when he grabbed 10 goals in 3 games, including 5 in one match against Charlton in a record 11–1 home victory. From then on, Gerry Hitchens would become a household name and a Villa 'icon.' He scored 42 goals in the 1960–61 season under Joe Mercer and he became seemingly irreplaceable for Villa. England came calling shortly afterwards and his name was soon on everyone's lips.

After nearly four years at Villa and 96 goals later, Gerry Hitchens had seemingly 'outgrown' Villa and a wonderful display for England in Rome, where he scored two goals in a 3–2 victory, stamped his arrival on the international scene and scouts from Italy and Spain were asking who this "Itchens" was. The Italians soon found out in June 1961 when Gerry signed for Inter Milan for £85,000 and a huge signing on fee.

Still today, the name of Gerry Hitchens creates discussion among the Villa fans who idolised him during 'the good old days' and he certainly was Villa's first 'iconic' footballer and a true 'legend' without a doubt.

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