

## **BÖRJE LEANDER †**

**28 DECEMBER 1920 - 4 JANUARY 2004**

Olympic Gold medallist in football 1948, Börje LEANDER, born at Avesta 7 March 1918, passed away at Mora 30 October 2003. He was centrehalf for AIK, one of Sweden's oldest and best known clubs, for 14 years, 1939-1953.

His family moved, after a spell in Björneborg, Finland, to Stockholm in 1925. He began playing for suburban Vasalunds IF (which is situated next to Råsunda, site of the Swedish national football stadium, home ground of AIK). In 1938 he joined AIK and played his first league game 1939-04-23. In the autumn of 1939 he took over as the regular centre half, a position he retained for the next 13 seasons until he called it a day after the 1952-53 season. In all he played 245 1st division games and one season, 1951-52, in the 2nd division.

AIK did not win the Swedish (league) Championships during his 15 years with the club,

but was 2nd in 1947, 3rd in 1941, 1944 and 1947 (AIK was 2nd in 1939 but with only 2 games he was not entitled to a medal). He was Swedish Cup Champion in 1949 and 1950 and losing cup finalist in 1943 and 1947.

He got his first cap against Germany at home 1941-10-05 when he came on as substitute for the injured leftback (Sweden winning 4-2). He was a versatile defender and the Swedish selectors used him in all 3 back positions. He got 8 caps as centre-half, 7 as leftback and 5 as rightback. In addition he came on as substitute for injured players twice as leftback and once as centrehalf. The last of his 23 caps, which would have been many more had it not been for World War 2, was against Switzerland away 1950-11-12 (Switzerland winning 4-2).

The highlight of his playing career was the 1948 Olympic Games in London. He and Bertil NORDAHL (one of the famous NORDAHL brothers) vied for the centrehalf position in the Olympic team. In the pre-Olympic year they both had 3 appearances as centrehalf for Sweden. But the selectors preferred the tougher, more robust and hard Bertil NORDAHL to the technical and elegant Börje LEANDER as central defender. However, his chance came when an other of the NORDAHL brothers, rightback Knut, got injured. He replaced Knut in the quarterfinal against South Korea, 12-0, and the semifinal against Denmark, 4-2. Knut NORDAHL was fit for fight again for the final against Yugoslavia, but Börje LEANDER got an Olympic Gold medal for playing in the quarterfinal and the semifinal.

He was selected for the Swedish 1950 World Cup squad to Brazil but declined for personal reasons.

He was a technical player and a superb header. He often tested the nerves of his supporters with his daring dribbling within his own penalty area and seemingly dangerous passes back to his own goalkeeper. He was AIK's regular penalty taker and his 25 1st division goals were all penalties. He was occasionally also the penalty taker for the national

team and converted all his 4 penalties for Sweden. In the winters he played what we in Sweden call "football of the winter", i.e. bandy, in the 1<sup>st</sup> division for AIK. About half the members of the AIK football team played bandy for the club in the winters. In bandy he was an ordinary 1st division player without any international honours (there were other players that were internationals in both football and bandy). But he made, as it turned out, a lasting contribution to the world of football when he recruited his brother-in-law, Lennart JOHANSSON, as manager of the AIK bandy team. Lennart Johansson went on to become manager of

The AIK football team, to President of the football division of AIK, to President of AIK, to president of the Swedish League, to President of the Swedish FA and to President of UEFA. However, he lost to Joseph BLATTER in his bid to become President of FIFA.

At the time of writing there are only 2 members of the Swedish 1948 Olympic Gold medal winning team still alive, goalkeeper Torsten LINDBERG and outsideleft Nils LIEDHOLM.

*Ture Widlund*