

The amazing adventures of Kiwi striker Kris Bright

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This is a story of perseverance against the odds, of one man's desire to succeed and the lengths that a burning ambition will carry an individual.

In an era when many footballers are regarded as pampered and luxuriated individuals, nobody could accuse New Zealand striker Kris Bright of an easy ride.

He has played in Holland, Norway and Greece, had trials at Kilmarnock and Norwich and spent several months as a 16-year-old at Gillingham.

Still only 22, the Kiwi international finally fulfilled his long-held ambition to play in England after signing a two-year deal with League Two Shrewsbury in the summer.



Bright (black and grey shirt) in action for the New Zealand Knights

As Bright told me: "If there was a Champions League team on the moon that wanted to sign me, I would go there."

Bright's father Dave was born in England but moved to New Zealand and represented his adopted country in the 1982 World Cup

Son Kris played the game from an early age but in rugby-obsessed NZ the standard back home was poor and the young striker played a few years above his own age group.

"It is difficult coming out of New Zealand because we are so far away from everything but it was my aim from a young age to come to England," said Bright.

"To do this I had to look at any opportunities that came my way."

Bright's first attempt came when he was barely out of school and took him 12,000 miles to Gillingham. Darren Hare, a friend of a friend of the youngster's father, was head of youth development at the Priestfield Stadium.

Several DVDs of the striker in action persuaded the Gills to take a closer look and Bright spent a few months playing for the youth team. Financial problems ended his first foray into European football - and it proved a foretaste of what lay ahead.

Bright joined the [New Zealand Knights](#) as an apprentice but an injury to a player in the senior squad presented him with an opportunity. The Knights were the Kiwi representative in the [Australian A-League](#) and the young forward was soon spotted by Scottish side Kilmarnock.

He flew to Scotland twice but eventually lost out on a pro contract to Queen of the South's [Willie Gibson](#), who had also been on trial.

No matter, his performances for the now defunct Knights had been noticed elsewhere, with Belgium side Racing Genk and Dutch outfit [Fortuna Sittard](#) expressing an interest. Bright opted to move to the Netherlands, signing for the 2006-07 season.

"It was the first time I had played abroad - I was well excited," said Bright, who describes himself as a target man who likes to bring others into play as well as scoring goals himself.

The striker signed a one-year deal and speaks with genuine enthusiasm about how professionally the club looked after him. They provided an apartment, a car and all the basic necessities that allowed him to concentrate on football. He took lessons in the language and now rates his Dutch as pretty good.

The training was very technical and he participated in regular extra sessions to try to accelerate his development. Bright played quite a few games but unfortunately a relatively minor knee injury was misdiagnosed. When he eventually returned the season was almost over and Bright was effectively offered a trial over the summer if he wanted to earn a new contract.

While Bright was trying to earn a new deal [Norwegian side Kristiansund BK](#) approached him.

"While Fortuna were weighing up their decision I got on the next flight to Norway," he told me.

After signing an initial short-term contract, Bright scored at more than a goal a game and quickly earned himself a longer deal. You can see compilations of his goals on YouTube. The Norwegian second division is clearly of a modest standard; the crowds are small and most games are played on Astroturf.

Yet the fishing village of Kristiansund is the birthplace of Manchester United legend [Ole Gunnar Solskjaer](#), who played for Clausenengen in the same town. Bright's impressive goals-to-games ratio invited comparisons that the modest young Kiwi was keen to avoid.

"People were saying stupid things, comparing us," said a clearly embarrassed Bright. "The boys at the club gave me a bit of stick about it so I wanted it toned down a little bit."

In Norway as in Sittard, Bright did not know any other Kiwis but he made friends with a Canadian who lived close by. On the pitch the football was going well, with the striker an increasingly essential part of the team. The style of football was more robust than in Holland and the training more physical but it was good for his development.

A lengthy contract with top-flight side Stabaek seemed on the cards and the young striker thought a major breakthrough was imminent. The only break that followed was to his leg, ironically in a friendly against the team that planned to sign him.

The striker lost a year of his career but soon after returning came to the attention of a Greek scout. Bright had also attracted the interest of other Norwegian clubs but the recession had started to have an impact on the Scandinavian country. Combine that with the high tax rate in Norway and the Kiwi received what he felt were derisory offers.

Instead he signed an 18-month deal in January with Greek Super League club [Panserraikos](#). He was marked by former Newcastle defender [Nikos Dabizas](#) in his first game. Next up was AEK Athens defender Sotirios Kyrgiakos, who was [signed by Liverpool during the summer](#). One week he was charged with marking Brazil World Cup winner Gilberto Silva at corners. It should have been amazing - but it wasn't.

"It was a nightmare," said Bright. "Nobody could speak English and there were several players there that I had no communication with at all."

"Everything was difficult, lots of things that should have been done weren't, they didn't always pay on time and the communication from the club was awful."

The team were relegated at the end of the season and Bright, deeply disillusioned, had had enough.

"The learning curve in Greece was more of a mental thing - it made me a lot stronger," he said. "There were things I had to sort out for myself."

Bright returned for pre-season training but his agent had heard Norwich were looking for a striker. Bright paid what he described to me as a sizeable amount to buy himself out of his contract and [head over to Carrow Road](#) - this despite the fact there were no guarantees of a contract.

"That is how desperate I was to get to England," said the striker.

Bright played in a couple of reserve games, one of them against a Manchester United team managed by Solskjaer. They chatted afterwards about life in Kristiansund and the Norwegian wished the Kiwi all the best for the future.



Bright tangles with Spain defender Carles Puyol at the Confederations Cup

Norwich stalled over a deal and word reached Shrews boss Paul Simpson. Bright impressed in a couple of training games for the League Two club and was selected for a friendly at Tranmere.

After 70 minutes he was substituted and told to wait in the changing room. Afterwards Simpson told him that he was going to drive him to Shrewsbury's ground and would not allow him to leave until he had signed a deal.

And so the story of how Bright finally made it to England is almost at an end. However, nothing in this tale is straightforward.

Bright thought he was set to start the opening game of the season at home to Burton on 8 August. Except that it transpired on the morning of the game that the Greek football authorities had faxed the details confirming Bright's international clearance to the incorrect number.

Shrews striker Dave Hibbert played instead and went on to score in the opening three games. Bright has been waiting for his chance ever since - and it means his last competitive appearance in football came as a substitute for New Zealand against Spain in this summer's Confederations Cup.

If nothing else, however, Bright's career has taught him the value of resilience.

"In some ways I have had already had what seems like a full career," he said. "There have been some great times and some terrible times.

"I definitely miss home but my family understand this is what I want to do. I feel guilty at times being away but once I have finished I plan to spend as much time with them as I can and hopefully I can make a better life for all of us.

"My aim is to play in the Premier League and it is all about stepping stones. I am feeling good and waiting for my chance."

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