THE GALLANT FEW

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COLUMNS BY
DAVE MACKINNON
DAVID MASON

INTERVIEWS WITH
KEVIN THOMSON
MARK WARBURTON

ANALYSIS
ABDALLAH SIMA

FEATURES
BEALE DOWNFALL
OLD FIRM TICKET ALLOCATION
ZAK LOVELACE
& MORE

MY 5-A-SIDE
MADJID BOUGHERRA



PHILIPPE CLEMENT


Photo: Rangers FC

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EDITOR
Adam Robertson

COLUMISTS
Dave Mackinnon
David Mason

CONTRIBUTORS
Andy McKellar
James Black
Jamie Currie
Madjid Bougherra
RWSC
Steven Harrigan
Willy Irwin

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CONTACT DETAILS

For further information please contact us on the following:
www.patreon.com/gallantfewmag
Socials: @gallantfewmag
Email: gallantfewmag@gmail.com

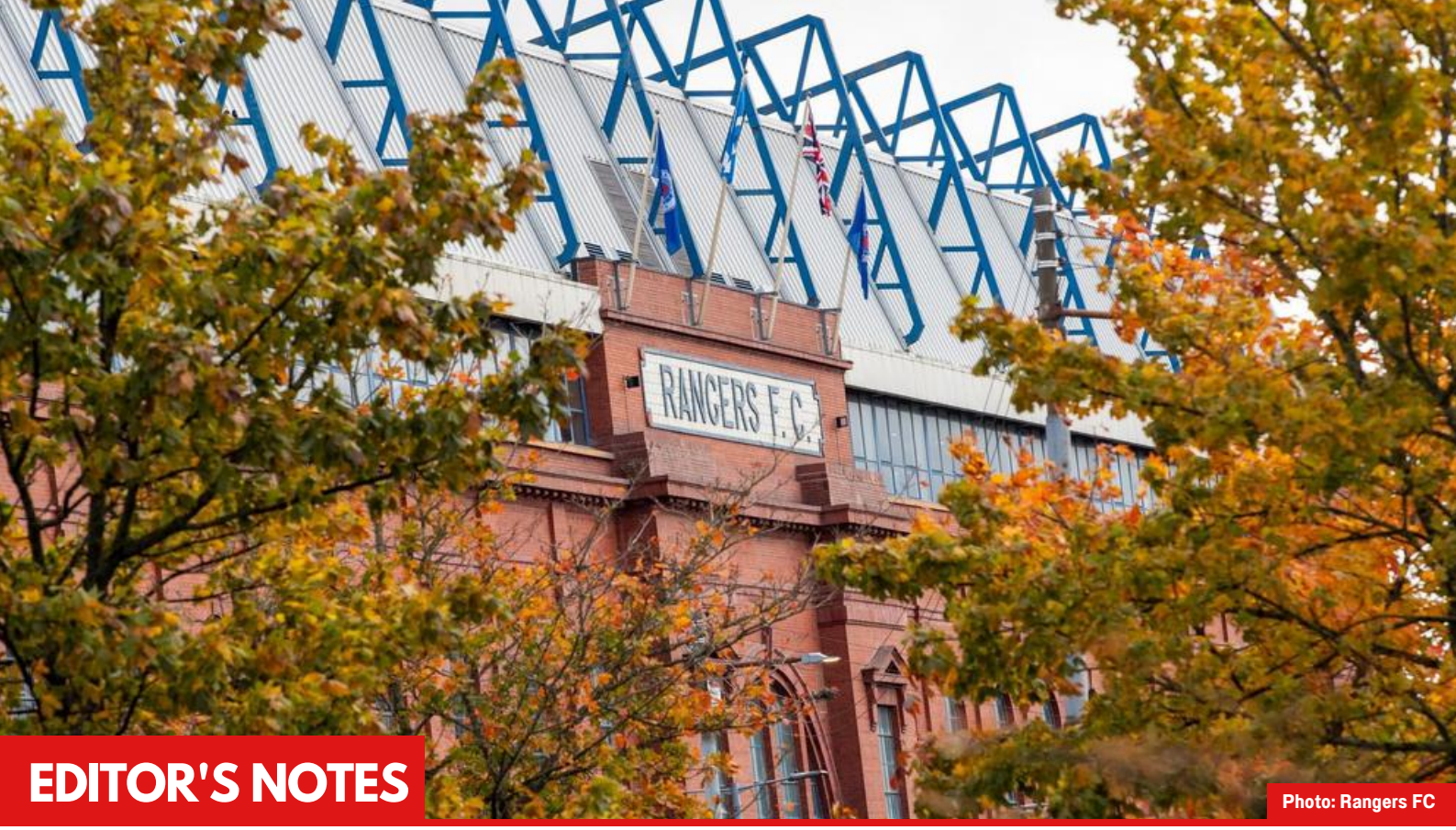


Photo: Rangers FC

EDITOR'S NOTES

THE NEW MANAGER BOUNCE?

Dear Readers,

It is with immense gratitude and a sense of accomplishment that I extend my heartfelt thanks to each one of you for your unwavering support.

The journey to this third issue has been a challenging one, marked by a brief hiatus due to personal issues. Your patience and encouragement have been instrumental in bringing The Gallant Few Magazine back to life, and for that, I am truly thankful.

This issue, as a testament to your support, is packed with some fantastic features that I believe you'll thoroughly enjoy. We are thrilled to present exclusive interviews with footballing legend, Kevin Thomson and former Rangers manager, Mark Warburton. Their insights and experiences promise to be a captivating read for football enthusiasts. Additionally, you'll find in-depth articles on Philippe Clement, the 19th permanent manager of Rangers Football Club, as well as an exploration of the Old Firm ticket allocation debacle, a topic of significant interest and debate among Rangers fans.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to invite you to further support our magazine's growth by becoming a part of our Patreon community. For just £3, you can gain early access to our magazine, ensuring that you're among the first to dive into the latest issue. Additionally, your membership on Patreon enables you to actively participate in shaping the future of The Gallant Few Magazine by having your say on the content and direction of our upcoming issues. Your contribution, no matter how small, makes a significant difference.

To join our Patreon community and enjoy these exclusive benefits, please visit www.patreon.com/gallantfewmag. Your support, whether through reading, sharing, or joining our Patreon community, is truly invaluable, and it fuels our commitment to delivering high-quality content to football fans worldwide.

Thank you once again for your unwavering support. Together, we'll continue to celebrate the beautiful game and explore its stories in the pages of The Gallant Few Magazine.

Sincerely,

Adam Robertson
Editor
The Gallant Few Magazine

WHAT MAKES THE PERFECT CLUB?

DAVE MACKINNON

It's most young kid's dream to become a profession footballer. As a youngster growing up in Renfrew, I had that dream from an early age. I was never without a ball tied to my toe and my father made that dream more visual when he regularly took me along to Ibrox to see the likes of John Greig, Dave Smith, Colin Stein and my favourite player Andy Penman. Seeing these players grace the Ibrox turf added the topping to a visualisation I had of me wearing the Rangers shirt.

I was fortunate to have a great grounding at Arsenal as a young professional, before being transferred to Dundee then Partick Thistle, and then the dream move to Glasgow Rangers, where I managed to pull on the jersey in 177 first team games.

Each game running out in front of the magnificent Rangers support was special and took me back to my days on the old terracing, now the Govan stand, opposite the tunnel. Having realised that dream as a kid, I knew what it was like to cheer on your team, and how much you relate as a fan to the team and their performance. Like many, if Rangers were beaten, it ruined my week until the next victory.

Passion is something which goes hand in hand with not just being a supporter of Rangers, but to anyone who is a fan of their own team. At each of the seven teams I played for I witnessed that passion and shared in it with the fans. I was truly passionate about 'my team' and what it meant to the fans. That bond makes teams and too often, I've seen the people running clubs forget that without that passion and connection, their club will be nothing.

When I retired as a player 20 years after it first started, I came back into football as an Executive/CEO at several clubs following many 'grounding' years in business. Having been a player and experienced that passionate relationship between players and fans, I set out a strategy for each of the clubs I worked with. That strategy embraced the business side required to run a club, but also included the true input on the emotional requirement of being a fan. Fans need to feel part of a club, spiritually, emotionally, and corporately.

I have often been asked what is the perfect way to run a club?

For me the answer is simple:



Photo: Dave MacKinnon

1) Set out a strategic plan that includes input from everyone. The board, football management, players, staff, and fans. A similar objective running from top to bottom and bottom to top.

2) Set and agree targets and timescales, both individually and collectively, and what everyone one involved must achieve to make the plan a success. A mantra of 'what does my club require from me'?

3) Gain buy-in and commitment from all.

4) Regularly update each stakeholder on the progress of the strategic plan and how they are performing.

5) Create a communications strategy ensuring all involved get the information they need. My experience tells me there are several languages within a football club:

The Board has a language which is strategic and long term, the football side has a language which is based on weekly performance with quick decisions having to be made. The staff have a language set out by the Board but must have football success at its core. The fans are multilingual and happy to dip in and out if they have each areas messages translated.

If clubs can do that collectively across all stakeholders, then success and the associated passion will prevail.

AYE READY

Dave Mackinnon

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JIM FORREST - THE IRRATIONAL AFTERMATH OF BERWICK

DAVID MASON

The curtains were closed on Jim Forrest at Hurlet Crematorium on 16 October and I was one of a small private group of family and friends in attendance. The cortege had swung past the great red façade of Ibrox on route, where many fans paid their own tributes to this once great centre-forward. It was fitting that there should be this last farewell at the stadium, because Rangers figured enormously in Jim's life. A boyhood fan, the club gave him both his greatest moments in football, but also his saddest.

It was there that he joined up at Rangers as a schoolboy, signed from Drumchapel Amateurs and it was there that he would go on to set the post-war scoring record of 57 competitive goals in a season, from just 50 games. Indeed, by the time he left Rangers at just 22, he had scored 145 goals in 173 appearances, excluding friendlies. If these were added, it took him to around 150. It was a remarkable scoring record by any standard, but especially for a player of such tender years. Honours followed, of course, in a league championship medal, two league cup wins. Each were won with the benefit of Jim's goals – four of them in the 5-0 win over Morton in 1963 and both goals in the 2-1 win over Celtic a year later.

Had Forrest's career ended then through injury in 1966, he would have been celebrated as one of a kind, an all-time great, and a remarkable goalscoring machine whose record ended before he had even reached his peak. However, his time at Ibrox ended in the most irrational of circumstances. An eight-game run that brought just one goal followed by one of the worst results in Rangers' history – a 1-0 first round Scottish Cup defeat to Berwick Rangers on 28 January 1967.



Photo: Scottish FA



Photo: David Mason

Forrest and his strike partner were held out as scapegoats on a day when none of the players rose above mediocrity. Even the Berwick goalscorer that day, Sammy Reid, told me that they were battered by Rangers, but the Ibrox side could not find a way past big Jock Wallace in the opposition goal.

The team was pilloried as was the manager Scot Symon and his board. There were no broad shoulders in elevated places in these days as Chairman John Lawrence and Symon came out to proclaim 'It wisnae our fault, it was them', pointing the finger directly at the team, but principally the strike pair. To be fair, the fans who are never slow to offer a knee-jerk reaction in the midst of trauma were similarly minded.

Forrest was naturally anxious but also annoyed that he should have the weight of the defeat piled on his shoulders. He was after all just a youngster and there were other more experienced players who could have shared the burden. But, constant high balls were punted into the box that were easy for Wallace to mop up. Jim put in a transfer request after twice failing to get Symon to even meet him, before walking into his office in disgust to tell him of his decision. There was no conciliatory chat or arm around the shoulder. Just a 'put it in writing' comment that really closed the door on Forrest's time at Ibrox.

He played one friendly match against Leicester that put him in the shop window and by March he was on his way to Preston North End for £30,000. After a season at Deepdale he was on his way to Aberdeen where he spent five happy years, adding to his Scotland caps and also featuring in a

glorious Scottish Cup win over Celtic. From there, he had spells in Hong Kong and Texas, before hanging up his boots at 32.

Forrest, a season ticket holder, never gave up on Rangers and came along to matches for many years. He had triggered his move away from Ibrox by his own transfer request, but it should never have gotten to that stage. The club showed no interest in retaining him – although just 22 and with a record of 145 goals in 173 games. He never spoke out about his time at Ibrox, maintaining the counsel and dignity that seem to evaporate amongst others following Berwick.

Funerals are always sombre occasions and times of reflection. As the curtain closed on Forrest I had this gnawing sense that he had passed without a wrong being righted. Our club let him down badly and suffered as a consequence. A European Cup Winners Cup final which we played and lost without a recognised striker was the consequence of irrationality four months earlier. Ironically nine of those who played at Berwick also played in Nuremburg that night. What would they have done for a tenth in Jim Forrest?

Who knows what Rangers and Forrest would have achieved if he had remained? We can only speculate. The curtains closed, we made our way quietly back to Ibrox to meet the family and friends. There was no mention of Berwick, just a thoroughly nice man who was loved by those close to him – and the wider Rangers family. One that he should never have been allowed to leave in the first place.

David Mason
Rangers Football Club Hstorian



Photo: Rangers FC

Christmas READY



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Photo: Rangers FC

ALL ABOARD

Words: Steven Harrigan

Board at any one of the Glasgow Subways fifteen stations that make up the 'clockwork orange' and no matter how short, long, fun, or uncomfortable the journey is, one that is always accompanied by the famous Glasga shoogle if you're not careful you can just as easily end up back exactly in the same spot where you began.

As Phillippe Clement was announced on a Sunday 15th October as Rangers 19th permanent manger bringing to an end another exhausting search process the process of examining and dissecting what the former Monaco and Brugge manager might bring has now started.

First off, its clear Rangers have appointed the most experienced candidate for the role. Unlike the 18th manager (although it is worth pointing out Stuart McCall once told me during an interview for The Heart and Hand Podcast network that he has the contractual proof his stay however short, was far from temporary) Clement isn't a novice, Clement without any quiestion has a track record and has accumulated 304 matches leading four teams, across two countries, most notably winning three titles in succession between 2018-2021 with Genk and Brugge.

The impressive and imposing figure of the Belgium coach saw him chosen over Kevin Muscat, a man who I could never get behind as a potential Rangers manager material due in part to his cowardly nature as a player and his own tarnished reptation with his one stint coaching in Europe. My fear was always Muscat's was a style that only works with sizeable funds, time, and a group of players that like those prevalent in Australian and Japanese cultures are receptive to embracing new ideas. The almost military like respect those cultures offer up to those in senior positions would not have been so forthcoming in Scotland, and while in Japan and his native Australia Muscat will be seen a figure who rose to the top of the game to represent his country on 46 occasions, in the Britain he was a far greater divisive figure. His successes in management have also taken place in two countries where football does not take top billing in sporting prowess. Far from it. In Australia cricket, Ozzy rules football and rugby carry far more day-to-day scrutiny and exposure, while in Japan, Baseball and Sumo wrestling take centre stage. While in Scotland, especially in Glasgow there is no room for anything much else and finishing second best will see you handed your P45.

As for Clement, while French football certainly can boast of having some fiercely passionate sets of fans and hostile atmospheres, the principality of Monaco is not amongst them. In a place where F1 and shots of aristocracy in the always sparce crowd carry far more importance and intensity than even the biggest games at the Stade Lous II Stadium. Glasgow is different, his personality appears on the face of it to be one who embraces the type of red-hot spotlight that comes with the job here, and a playing spell at Coventry will have prepared him for the culture, but nothing is quite like the goldfish bowl of Scottish football.

Clubs	Games	Wins	Draws	Losses
Monaco	73	37	15	21
Club Brugge	127	73	30	24
Genk	82	47	20	15
Waasland-Beveren	22	9	4	9

As Clement takes centre stage and gets to work meeting his squad and watching hours upon hours of previous matches back what can't be lost is the urgency for the need in the appointment of a new and much needed Director of Football / Sporting Director. A role that arguably carries more importance if not more headlines as the incoming manager. It's been a role vacated since Ross Wilson left the post in April of this year. The decision by the hierarchy of the club to neglect this area and position for such a prolonged period of time and instead intrust Beale to scout, recruit and develop players is one that without any question was a contributing factor to the quick demise of the Londoner, had the foundations, building blocks and infrastructure of a well-run and well organised football club been fully in place and operational perhaps some of the issues surrounding the summer recruitment in particular might not quite be where they now are at. Instead, vast sums of money in fees and contracts were squandered on nothing more than bang average players.

The club has also muted via various media outlets of the move to a more data led scouting department over simply one man's shopping list, another positive step, but questions must be asked as to why now? what took so long? and why does our scouting system continually like its playing catchup to the rest of football?

Cherry-picking a Director of Football or Sporting director from any successful organisation and expecting similar results based on previous outcomes alone won't do. Any person given the role must be given the tools and backing to start from the bottom up and put in place the kind of structure that seems to be badly lacking at Ibrox. Brighton's Sam Jewell is one name muted at the point of writing, but no matter who takes on the role, working with Clement will be vital in ensuring on and off pitch success.

An accomplished player Clement was notably successful at Brugge where he had enjoyed a spell as a tough tackling, no nonsense defender in his playing days, collecting two league titles and four domestic cup triumphs at Brugge. As a defender himself one can only wonder what he will make of some of our more recent defensive displays, his eyeballs may need to be forced open like that famous scene in Stanley Kubrick's 'A Clockwork Orange'.

His own career saw him be part of Belgium sides at The World Cup in France 1998, where three draws seen Belgium exit at the group stage (Clement played and started twice, vs The Netherlands and South Korea) and Clement was also included at Euro 2000 but did not feature as co-hosts Belgium once again failed to navigate beyond the group phase.

His step into the coaching side of the game upon



Photo: Club Brugge

his retirement in 2011 saw him work initially for Brugge in their scouting department, then as the assistant manager, even taking on the caretaker role twice when called upon, gaining a vital grounding that helped project his transition into full time management first off in 2017 with Waasland-Beveren. In his six-month stint there saw them win 9 from a possible 22 games. That upsurge in form was enough for Genk to be persuaded to offer Clement the managers job in December 2017 while the team sat in 9th place in the Pro League. The upturn would be immediate, Genk would finish in 5th place before the following season would end with their first title being secured in eight seasons in 2018-19.

That success made Brugge sit up and take notice of their former player and coach. Clement was approached to return to the club he held so dear and the natural return of such a popular and well-respected figure was a marriage that was always destined to transpire.

Season 2019-20 was one that was impacted worldwide by the COVID virus outbreak, Brugge was awarded the title while sitting in the strong position of being 15 points clear of second place *(Genk had won the previous seasons title with a margin of 7 points)* as The Belgium topflight became the first major European competition to declare. The following season saw Brugge retain their title in a season played behind closed doors as the virus continued to have an impact on all walks of life. Clement's stock was one very much on the rise and with Brugge leading the league in January 2022, Ligue 1 side Monaco who had fallen down to 6th place in France, looked to him as the man to turn their fortunes around in similar fashion as he had done in his native country.

Between January and May 2022 improvement was witnessed, Monaco would finish in 3rd gaining preliminary entry into the Champions League Qualifiers, but his only full season in charge there would end with his dismissal after a 6th place finish and failing to qualify for any European competition.
An undoubted factor in his hiring must be Clement's ability to nurture and develop talent. There are multiple examples of players previously under his tutorage having big impacts in leagues and top competitions across Europe. In the Premier League with Leandro Trossard first at Brighton, now at Arsenal, at Chelsea with Alex Disasi, Noa Lang the winger so impressive and dangerous in our recent matches against PSV and in La Liga with French midfielder Real Madrid's Aurelien Tchouaménie serving as just some of the names and careers Clement has played his part in coaching up.

At Ibrox In the immediate short-term things should look immeasurably better almost instantaneous, the return of several key players to the group will improve the product on the park and a man who holds his level of experience should be able to achieve with even a few coaching sessions.

Clement has spoken about his desire to bring an attacking and exciting brand of football, one that is centred around goals. Looking at his full season in charge at Monaco scoring goals for weren't the issue, keeping them out was!

Only PSG scored more goals in 2022-23 (89) than Clement's Monaco (70) it was his sides defensive frailties that causes concern and



Photo: AS Monaco

unease. Losing 58 goals is a stark contrast to League winners PSG's 40, or second placed Lens 29. Even if it is worthwhile pointing out they did have to cope with the loss of key defensive minded players such as Tchouameni in the summer of 2022 and Badiashile the following January.



Photo: AS Monaco

The alarming rate several of his sides have fallen away is a potential red flag, in the 2020-21 season with Brugge his team only won one from the final six Championship playoff games, relying on their regular season form to secure their place at the summit (Belgium football has an ever weirder split than Scottish football) and the title. That concerning pattern was again repeated in his time at Monaco winning just 2 of the final 6 games that concluded season 21/22 and only 1 of the last 6 matches that ended the 2022/23 campaign, that saw a hugely talented Monaco side finish, 6th, and lead to his dismissal. 20 times Monaco lost the first goal in his full season in France, just 9 times they mustered an equaliser. Only 24% total league games ended with clean sheets. In a season in Scotland that could yet go down to the final games in the split or even goal difference Clement must have provided assurances to his new bosses that he has learned the lessons of his past.

Looking ahead, Clements first silverware at Rangers should be the League Cup, with Rangers already at the semi-final stage upon his arrival and the final scheduled for late November it presents an early opportunity to do something Beale could never do, win a trophy. The issue is his domestic Cup record in both Belgium and France makes for less than stellar reading.

Clement has never won a domestic cup competition as a manger, losing two Belgium Cup Finals in a row, and twice getting put out while in



Photo: Club Brugge

France on penalties (once to lower league side Rodez at the last 64 stage!), this type of record feeds the narrative that like the man who went before him, this is a manager who fails to win the big games. This despite strong showings against a Zidane led Real Madrid side in the Bernabeu in the Champions League where Monaco took the lead and an impressive 3-1 Ligue 1 win over PSG back in February 2023. On paper, that margin of victory is a show of strength, but it must be pointed out that this was a PSG side that was without the likes of Mbappe, Messi and Verratti and a team where key players in the starting XI were aged between 16 and 17 years old, but still as Micheal Beale found out, not being able to reap the rewards of your rivals at their weakest points, is what gets you the sack. The competition will quickly provide both the manager and players with the potential of writing some new narratives early into this tenure.

In European competition is where Clement's reputation has failed to scale any great heights. An early 1st place finish in the Europa League group with Genk in2018-19 was followed up with a loss to Slavia Prague in the last 32 stage, what followed was a trio of tough Champions' League Group stages with a young Brugge side clearly trying to find their feet at the top table. His sides never achieved higher than a 3rd place finish with losses to the likes of Manchester Utd and City, Real Madrid, Dortmund, PSG, and Leipzig. While with Monaco fate seemed to put Clement on collision course with Rangers, only for his sides to somewhat surprisingly make exits in the Europa League to Braga at the last 16 stage in 2022 and to PSV in the Champions League Qualifying Round 3 at the start of season 2022-23, then be followed up by an exit to Bayer Leverkusen side on penalties in the first KO stage, after a 2nd place finish at the Group Stage.

Typically, the follicly challenged Belgium has looked for his sides to play out from the back and draw out the opposition in a term boxing observers or anyone present the last time Ibrox hosted a bout back in 1980 between Jim Watt and Howard Davis JR would class as rope a dope. The concern will be how that type of style will translate to a league such as ours, when many opponents are happy to sit back, and look to win encounters on points.

In the Belgium Pro League space in behind high defensive lines and defenders who are in teams for their on the ball ability on the ball over more traditional defensive actions is aplenty, in Scotland that is certainly not the case.

His familiarity with many of the current squad including the out on loan Ianis Hagi, will provide him and his staff with a head start at assessing what they have at their disposal, with no transfer window until the clock strikes midnight at the end of the year, making the most of what's available



Photo: AS Monaco

will be paramount to any early impressions and success. Who knows perhaps his previous relationship will with Cyrill Dessers will see him even extract more than we have witnessed to date.

In France its clear Clements sides played some exciting football but at various stages team selection was at best questionable at points, he notably failed to rally his side after key losses, which became decisively poor spells. He can't afford the same at Rangers. That type of form will not be tolerated in Glasgow.

In the end too many of the important matches were disappointments, with matches won against the so-called lesser clubs done so lacking in style and a heavily reliance on individual brilliance over team cohesion, his initial impressive 6 months in the French Rivera some critics say was solely due to the talents of players such as Tchouaménie and the maverick Ben Yedder progressing the team. Many Monaco fans feel unconvinced by Clement, who it is said lost the dressing room towards the end of his time there and under performed with the players at his disposal.

At Monaco what can't be disputed is that he inherited a very impressive group of players who had stuttered under Niko Kovac, elimination from the final round of the Champions Legue Qualifying stage along with a patchy league form had led to the ex-Bayern Munich's man's dismissal, despite Monaco sitting top of their Europa League group but it was certainly not a group that lacked talent, His Monaco side was unquestionably a very talented group, as a squad largely unchanged from the time of his departure now sits at top of the table (only 8 matches played it must be stressed). The Data graphic below demonstrates the changes in Monaco's playing style from Clement's full season in charge in comparison to this one.

Quite how he views the current crop is a question only he can honestly answer. His ability to turn situations around in a speedy manner will be tested to its fullness in Govan as Rangers are yet to face many of the league's toughest away fixtures in the darkness of a Scottish winter.

The greatest fear is that Rangers have simply become a Leicester city type club, opening the doors to managers/ coaches/ players who feel no deep connection or internal desire for the club, perhaps long gone are the days of players feeling a sense of 'belonging' to any one club, the globalisation of the game has facilitated and watered-down the need or demand for local hero types, but so has our actions as a club, choosing to openly ignore or simply draw our eyes and shrug our shoulders at any potential targets playing on our doorstep in the thirst to search anywhere but Scotland for talent, with the results being many of the incoming players being overhyped and overpriced with no or little sign of progress on the pitch.

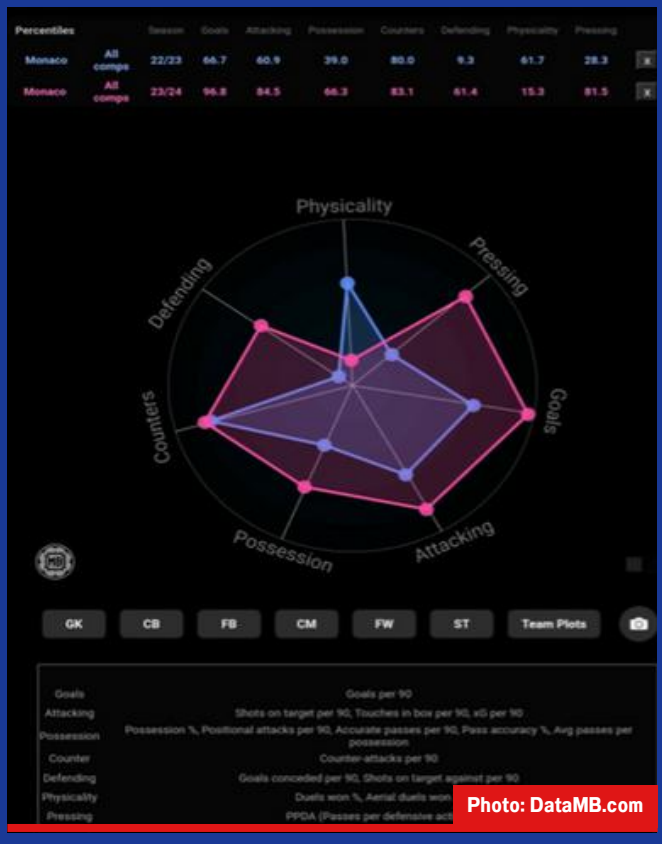


Photo: DataMB.com

An alarming pattern has been all too prominent with many of this squad Clement will inherit and be tasked with working with initially at the very least, games and goals lost down to nothing more than a clear lack of aggression, desire, and laziness. Like the lights of the subway train emerging from the tunnel or the bright orange paintwork its clear as day this demonstrates many of our current players have no deep connection with the club, no passion, and zero inner drive or determination to be successful here.

Listen to the players who played under Souness, Walter, Eck, Advocaat, even Gerrard, they still talk about us (the supporters) passionately as if it's something that "belongs" to them as much to us the fans, even though many of them have since long been retired. Now, you sit back and watch many of this squad and all you see staring back is mercenaries who don't seem to care at all. Rangers is merely a stop on the Outer circle line of club football.

The decision to bring onboard a familiar, as of yet unnamed face onto his staff, perhaps that of a Kevin Thomson, a coach who knows the club and has himself has tasted success while cutting his teeth as a manger in his own right, or even a Steven Davis, the very man the club turned to steady the ship in the aftermath of Beales dismissal. Davis, a club legend, and the most capped British player ever is a man who would instantly command the respect of every player in the dressing room, either appointment would prove both popular with the fans and seen as a shrewd and clever move by the club, if at a bare minimum to offer a future stability and continuity factor that has been missing from previous staffs.

That link, that bond between staff and the supporters is perhaps connection that can only be formed with consistent winning and progress, two things that sadly have been found in short supply



Photo: Rangers FC

of late, that will be the biggest challenge awaiting the new man in charge.

In the end, only the fullness of time will tell if the board are pushing ahead with a 'European' feel squad and staff and if a manager with no previous ties or experience in our game is a gamble worth taking.
There has been little if any proof this season that the current squad are indeed capable of turning the club's domestic fortunes and the seven-point deficit on its head. A league win, and automatic entry into next seasons Champions League with all the benefits it provides has to be the priority, no matter how unlikely that might seem at this



Photo: Rangers FC



Photo: Rangers FC

junction. Should that transpire, it might even represent and rank as Clements finest achievement in management to date should he be the orchestrator of such a feat come May 2024.

Rangers must get back to winning titles on a regular basis, not just one every 5-6 seasons, and as of now we are yet witness any evidence that that will or can indeed transpire. Continually finishing in 2nd place in a two-horse race isn't sustainable on any level. Currently the annual selling of blind faith and hope in the push of sales on things such as season tickets, MyGers packages and merchandise to continue at the rates witnessed in the past, isn't a solid business plan.

The supporter's reactions to Clement's predecessor should serve not just as a warning but as stark proof that the anger from the majority of fans at the club lacking competitiveness in multiple title races will no longer be met with little questions and the continued handing over hard to come by cash.

The challenge both short and long term for Monsieur Clement is to make sure that once again we as a club don't find ourselves going around in circles and face back where we started.

Steven Harrigan
@steven_harrigan



Photo: Rangers FC

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WITH KEVIN THOMSON

Words: Steven Harrigan

Kevin Thomson was a tough tackling no-nonsense midfield player who while at the club won two League titles, two League Cups and one Scottish Cup, together with starting the 2008 UEFA Cup Final in Manchester.

Kevin also had spells at Hibs, Dundee, and Middlesbrough as a player before retiring from playing in 2016. Where he took on the Rangers youth teams, before managing Kelty Hearts to a League two Championship.

Back to the start, grass roots football is so vital to providing any player with a firm grounding, how did you go from Hutchison Vale to Coventry City as a youth, what skills did you pick up then that you would carry with you throughout your career?

I had probably outgrown my local club before I got the move to Hutchison Vale, and then it was into the Big bad world as opposed to being well, at a level of football where they tried to recruit the best players, so you were a bit under. Pressure to I hate the words, but that fight for that game time and that, you know, getting in the team and then just be part of the squad and try and find the way of standing out. Hutchison Vale had a bit of a reputation, all the scouts would attend and probably anyone that would watch in youth development, they've always been viewed as an attractive club. So, then that led the opportunities to play in select games that's more in keeping with what the current industry or set up looks like it's now.

I then I've got an opportunity to go to Coventry and I managed to actually earn myself a good contract, but everybody knows it didn't quite work out down there and I ended up back u the road with my local team and without sounding disrespectful I was probably just a wee bit too good for that level and then I got an opportunity going to Hibernian and I suppose that was when I first become a proper full time player and the rest was history.



Photo: Hibernian FC

How bad was your homesickness while in the Midlands and what did you learn about yourself in that period, how did that experience shape you?

I had it tough at Coventry, missed my friends; I missed my family (my dad) and then I suppose football was not the main objective down there because mine was probably thinking about home. When you play football, the first and foremost thing in your mind should be about playing football. I was quite a silent boy back then. Richard Mooney was the Academy manager down there at time, he was great, and they treated me great down there. I just think I was. I was too far down the line when it came to wanting to be home, to be with my friends but i do think it shaped me and hate to say you need setbacks or difficult times to make you robust and mentally tough, but I think back then. The way life was we it, it certainly helped me to be the type of person I know now. I think back to me leaving home as a 15-year-old and moving away from your friends and your family. That's a big step. I've got one son who is 13 and to think that like in two years' time he would be packing a bag to leave it's a scary thought when I still have to remind him to brush his teeth at times. Certainly, probably being a little bit immature at that stage I think it opened my eyes. To what was going on around me, I think ultimately it stood me in good stead forward.



Photo: Hibernian FC


Photo: Hibernian FC

A move to Hibernian then transpired, that Hibs you broke through in was one that had a host of young talent, what was it that made you all so formidable and early in your career at Hibs would endure a cruciate injury at such a young and vital age for development, then several other key injuries throughout your career, how did they affect you mentally at the various stages and did they get any easier to deal with?

I think when you look back, you look back at proud moments. As a youth team and look, I'm not saying we're anywhere near it, because obviously we're not, but when you look at say the Manchester United class of 99, but you think of that bond and that togetherness that you see, it's quite hard to break.

It's always great to see young players breaking through, I'm a massive advocate for it, but it's normally just one or two at the one time at best. Fans love home grown players; they get excited about them and they're desperate for that next coming. I think having so many of us at that one time Probably helped every individual as you had a mate beside you as you entered the first team changing room. When there's five or six you that can break in at one time. I think you have a strong influence on the changing room straight away. That helped us settle and allowed us concentrate on football, by feeling really comfortable, which might be a wee bit different if it was just one younger player getting in, where you can be cast aside and earn your stripes. I think I look back now through experiences, and I do think it was certainly there was lots of luck involved. Obviously, there was lots of talent. I think within that group. Everybody kind of went on and done

really well, but I certainly think there was there was an element of luck as well, which I think everybody knew. And then you mentioned obviously the setback, the disappointment in. The knee injury was probably another one that goes into the same bracket as Coventry really. At that stage I felt I was. I was arriving, having played 25-26 games in the bounce. So, you're building your reputation and boom, it was all taken away from you. So, where I could you gone or what could have been, there's always the bit that you sit and think about when you retire, the what ifs. The hardest part was the support was definitely around you, but then see your teammates and your club flourishing and building big reputations when you're sitting in the treatment room, so it was mentally it was tough, but I think that same again it shapes you too through it.

Was perhaps the biggest lesson you learned that football has a way of humbling you and humbling you very quickly that you spoke about, you know, being a young way of being the top of the world, everything projected as an upwards linear progression. Then that set back occurs.

I think so. I had the blonde spikey hair back then, I was starting to get the recognition out on the town and enjoying the nightlife, enjoying myself. The hardship that I had to get through, that battling instinct, to keep on getting back and keep on. Recovering from these setbacks, keep moving forward in my career, but if only I had a magic recipe can you erase the injuries in my career, I feel as if I could have achieved so much more.

When you spend what, 10-11 months in the in the



Photo: Hibernian FC

treatment room trying to recover for quite a rare injury (an ACL), especially back then, I mean, it's obviously become quite a popular injury, but back then it was still so substantial I can still recall around the same time it happened to Alan Shearer and it was like World breaking news.



Photo: Hibernian FC



Photo: Rangers FC

You almost feel as though everybody was against you and when I went onto suffer it again at Rugby Park while at Rangers, in a great side, we just beat Celtic 4-2 at Parkhead. Barry was injured at the time, he just coming back that and what I think of that the midfield four and the potential of a Davis Thomson, Mendes, and Ferguson quartet, I think anyone that knows anything about football will get quite excited about that. Then my mentality and my drive from me as an individual to go on and win more trophies to fight myself back in the team and be such an important member of the side, for me? Personally, it was just such a critical time in my career, everybody knows I'm not big headed, but I'd like to think I could achieve a bit more if. I just have a bit more luck with injuries.

At Hibs in your first spell, you experienced something that we still see prevalent to this day, where clubs ask for sizeable fees for an individual without adjusting their wage accordingly, how does that impact a player, because no matter your respect, gratitude,, and affection for the club in question, there comes I point I imagine where you wish to test yourself at a higher level on a more regular basis?

You start to get recognition. It's and realise its a short career, so financially its important, then if you get an opportunity of playing on a bigger stage the kind of opportunity for you to play in front of that level of fanbase, play in The Champions League, compete for trophies, its special, despite being the club captain of Hibs at the time. I went on win five major trophies, to play in front of 50,000 every second week, play in the Champions League, featured in the run and (UEFA Cup) final in Manchester. I managed to become a national player. All these things that come with playing at a bigger club. I think everybody would tell you it was the right decision, for me, I think you make decision when they come along. You won't always please everybody, but the harsh reality is it's the people that you look to please Is irrelevant when you become 31 and you have to retire, and their money won't help pay your wages or look after you when you when you can't play. I've never really been selfish but when opportunities come, you have to grab it with both hands.

Walter then came in for you as he looked to shape a Scottish core back into Rangers. Describe that moment, the dash along the M8 to make the deadline and if Rangers interest surprised you are all, because Walter had asked you to show more responsibility just a few months earlier. Looking back do you think he was simply testing your character?

How did you know for certain that Rangers and Walter was the right club because you had other offers?

I know he had a go at me with regards to my commitment to the national teams and I used to. Regularly pull out to be fair. I think the lessons that I learned from Walter is I look to live my life trying to be the best I can possibly be. With Walter, being alright wasn't good enough and being OK and being A (7 rating) in games wasn't enough and I always strived to be more than that, and that's difficult for the type of player that I was. But I wasn't a goal scorer, I wasn't a match changer., Hopefully I was a big game player, one that would


Photo: Rangers FC

have major role in the team, but I wasn't one that could go 80-90 minutes without touching the ball and then pop up with the winner, you get those players with those accolades which are special talents, but I was one that was involved in the and bustle, at the forefront of the game, I suppose, and it was probably harder to catch people's eyes and stand out. So, when Walter told me that just playing alright and getting bye wasn't enough it taught me valuable lessons that there is always more in the tank.

I eventually started to play and make sure I lived my life properly. Maintain that hard work hard every summer to kick on. You just won the treble, go again, a double, it's the treble the next season, that winning mentality. That endless goal of never being happy.

Salt and vinegar as opposed to Salt and sauce, football over footy even moving from the East to the West has its differences but how did Walter, the senior players, and people like Sandy Jardine at the club aid that transition for you?

I count my lucky stars when I think about my time at the club, I had the greatest manager. Coisty, Kenny McDowell, Ian Durrant, Sandy Jardine, and John Greig were always around place, then you look at that playing group, you had Barry Ferguson who's the best of the best, someone that took every part responsibility for the team and every other. When things went right, it was it the group when it didn't, he took the blame. His was a



Photo: Rangers FC

leadership quality he had in abundance to carry the club and the can, because you know when things went wrong fans will have an opinion on Thomson or McGregor or Charlie Adam, or whatever it may be. But Barry was always at the forefront of taking that stick. So, I think that was a good thing. For me looking back when I probably didn't see that then, and I continually say, the Sandy Jardines and John Greggs were always on hand to give you that kick up the backside when needed, sometimes off a high just to knock you down a peg or two and I just felt that for me as an individual when I joined the. Club I was given no rules. I was given no expectations. Really, I was. Just I was signed as a player and it was our responsibility to represent the club in the right manner, when I looked around and wanted to learn, wanted to be part of it, I seen the standards, emulate them, so i knew if I could get to that, that it would help me be successful. I'm not sure if you didn't have that in the building that I might not have been able to learn that so quickly and learn what it was and what it takes to be a Rangers player. I had that opportunity to pick Coistys brain, pick Duranty's brain I think I was really lucky.

On they players on the coaches never been around the club, they've been enforcing the standards consistently. So even just in in things to tell you bits of advice, be it a 2- or 20-minute chat you know what's expected of you.

They just live and breathe the club. That probably was one of my frustrations with me when I was there with the academy there was a lot of fines and a lot of discipline for the young players and I know obviously they need people who show them more what they need, they need different development opportunities to see what it looks like around the corner you, but I got frustrated. Because I was young too, when I joined, and we never had many rules that at Easter Rd it and it was the same when I joined Rangers I never. Got fined once. When I was there as a player, there might be the odd player that maybe stepped out of line. I can think you, Barry, and obviously Gregsy when there was there the booze gate thing when it obviously. Goes up and beyond the actual day-to-day stuff, and I'm pretty sure they got disciplined hard by Walter. But when it came to like having mobile phones in the gym or mobile phones in the physio room or like these types of things it just wasn't the thing to do.

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I watched those people, how they lived, how they spoke, how they greeted people as they entered the building and I wanted to be that person. The same as what they were, and I was hopefully intelligent enough and wise enough to look around and see what the standard was required.

Walter and Ally set about bringing a Scottish core back to the club at that time, how big a part was that in the success that followed do you believe?

I became Walters first buy for money back at the club and he inherited Paul Le Guens side that I had played against, even with the likes of Barry, there was a softness to that Paul Le Guen side, you always felt they were vulnerable. So much so Barry got sent off for kicking me out of frustration at Easter Rd, and I think Walter being the best of the best realised that and knew he had to change it.

If you bring up to present, day you can tell when there's a fragility around the Rangers team. People in the stands feel it, but the opposition team certainly feel it. Would your advice be to Philippe Clement to do something similar?

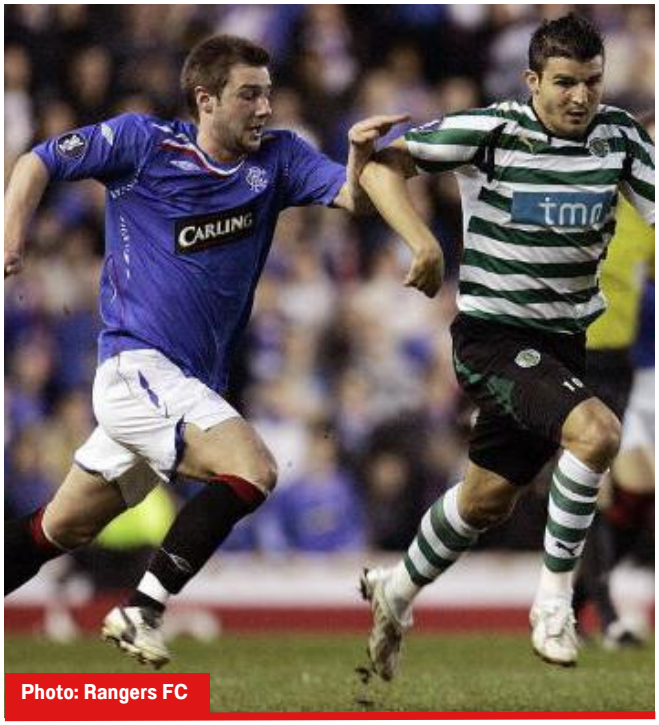


Photo: Rangers FC



Photo: Rangers FC

I would hate to call any team or player soft, but there is an animosity, there's a vulnerability that exists. You need to find your own confidence as a Rangers player. I've been there and I've. Been booed off after a loss, or for giving the ball away. It goes back to that weight off the jersey, the, lots of good players fail at Rangers because they can't manage that expectation it's a special attribute to have, you have to make sure that you've got that personality and that that mentality to want to take the ball under pressure again and go and play that hard pass or hit that shot or, go make that tackle, take it off the goalie or go make sure that you're the first person to get the ball in the box. It's a special attribute the fans see it and love it and think you really need that attribute to succeed at Ibrox. I remember Hibs beating us at Ibrox to go top of the league, but Walter taught us to win and lose with class, people just see the good times, but there are hard times also.

That response to adversity. That shapes a team, how you handle them shapes you as a player and a team.

Absolutely. Celtic had won the league 3 weeks ago, now look at things change.

One team you did play in that received criticism from the outside was the one that reached the 2008 UEFA Cup Final in Manchester, does that bother you at all, that people talk down that side, outside our fanbase?

We started the Champions League in the group of death, played well in places like Lyon (French champions) away, scored two vs Stuttgart, who were German champions, for example, then the

next part of that we got two goals away at Sporting Lisbon in the quarter finals, went to Florence and played with 10 men for a long period and that's just me off the tip of my tongue, you know. So, I think that team because of Walter's steadiness and hardiness and their games, like the Barcelona one where you were playing against the world's best at that time and we had to be robust in order to compete, play that extra man in midfield and play on the counterattack. Defending for your life. I thought that Barcelona team gave up because they couldn't break us down. Like, you know, that's like, I don't know why anyone wouldn't think that was brilliant football, but I understand when it comes to Rangers, sometimes the. The outside world. Want to be negative towards us, i think that group deserves some credibility, we gained 7 points in that Champions' League group, even before the UEFA Cup run.

Do you think part of the reason is it because of the final was against a Russian team and they're. Maybe not the big name or the glamorous club some immediately attach towards, I think people forget that they were exceptional at a lot of things, had beat Bayern in the final.

I do think that I think that if it had been Bayern in the final, I think people would maybe have looked at it differently. I got Tymoshchuk strip at the end, and I think a lot of people forget that he went on and won the Champions League after that. You know what I mean? I think people have the perception just because they may not be one of the big sexy, glamorous names. Look at, Arshavin, going into the Premier League at one stage he was like the hottest prospect in the Premier League before going here, then he goes to Anfield and scores four, I don't even know if I had never been done before, and even the Russian internationals were handy, all good players. I think the biggest. Frustration for me. Is that I walked off that pitch at half time after a free kick, just before and me and Steve (Davis) were arguing Davis, who was going to take it about just kind of favoured a left footer, rather than the right, it was on the penny right side, so looked for whip, it was just before half time and I remember walking off and thinking you're going to win this.

Daniel Cousin was suspended for the final. How big an impact do you think that had and you also played with Mido at Middlesbrough, two players with great ability but perhaps other aspects lacking, how did you view them as teammates and how do would you handle them as a manager today?

Dan getting sent off in Florence was another huge factor for that team that needed teams to perform like that Barcelona team and find it really difficult to play against a stuffy Rangers side and then for us to have the quality when we did get our opportunity at the big moments in the games. I think of Darcheville over in Lisbon when Steve



Photo: Rangers FC

(Davis) breaks down the side and the quality of ball for Darcheville to scores and then them (Sporting) huffing and puffing, that wee bit of luck or a late winner, we needed to defend well to, to make it hard for the opposition and I always think, like Daniel getting sent. Off in Florence, If Daniel would have played in that final, I always think what could have been. The best way to describe him was an enigma. I think back to that Celtic game at Parkhead when he was unplayable. How powerful how strong he was Mark Wilson, Gary Galdwell and Stephen McManus must have nightmares about him and I think a lot of people forget that he got sent off in that game, and we played, I think the last 15-20 minutes at Parkhead with 10 men, and we did let them off the hook that day to make it six or seven, it could have been a DVD day. Mendes was sensational and that was minus Barry Ferguson. When you think how good Barry was and how important to that team he was. Daniel could have been a serious player for Rangers, but Walter could manage him.

Florence to Kaunas, football as in life has a way of humbling you very quickly, is it at times like that when the real character and characters in any side shows through, Season 2008-09, was the motivation always to win the league due to the circumstances that had transpired the season before with regards to the fixture pile up? How did Walter and his man management style deal with you in the aftermath of red cards at both Tynecastle and in a League Cup Final at Hampden that Rangers ended up winning with 9 men, do you think his response would have differed had the outcomes and Boydy and Kenny not bailed you out?

(Walters) was the best. That's the one thing like, I think I came back from 8-9 months on the on the sidelines, obviously with my knee injury and I made my first start at Tynecastle, and I was sent it off after 13 minutes for tackling Ian Black and I was fearful for my life, really, because he never looked at me at half time and never spoke to me. Kaunas is another one when you think of the highs of Manchester six weeks after being the cream of the crop, I mentioned earlier, having disappointments, and reacting to them, one of Walters key attributes was he never allowed the squad to get too high or too low, he ingrained in the group. that goes back to and I'm not throwing him under the bus the Conner Goldson interview after the semi loss vs Hibs a few years back about getting bored of winning, that was the opposite of us. We wanted the next one. No matter how big the high or low, you were back in the gym Monday morning and doing the hard yards to get better, that came from Walter. Trying to get better and look to try and win that next title, get off to a good start the next season to try. it' been a two race for however long and without being disrespectful to the rest you knew exactly what was happening across the city, who they were signing. You knew if they were losing a manager. Who the new manager was going to be what type of tactics would they use, and you had to make sure that you were working harder than what was happening across there. That was driven by Walter, we only got to sample or enjoy any success for a short period, then it was back to work.


Photo: Rangers FC

Why Middlesbrough, was it the connection with Gordon Strachan from your time at Coventry in your youth, Was England always the next, natural move to make?

No, not really and I. Suppose it goes back to that that no one thought what was a was going to happen in the next 12 months. I don't think anyone could envision it. You grow up as a football fan in Scotland and just expect Rangers and Celtic Hibs, Hearts and the Aberdeen's to be at the forefront of. Scottish football. I suppose from my perspective because I had originally signed in the January, I had the four-and-a-half-year contract, and I was now down to my final year. So, for the club I was probably more vulnerable as an asset looking at like the assets within the squad, I was probably one that left them more open than others when it comes to potentially being a free (Bosman) wand being able to speak to clubs in January. You're sitting in pre-season at the middle of June. I think that goes back to being a bit unlucky because I had everything I wished for, maybe playing every week important part of the squad a brilliant manager, well respected within the fanbase, I felt I was next in line to be the captain and I think Walter would have made me the captain in time. Had already told me that I was the next to kind of take over Barry's mantle Just have to wait for. I'm not so sure I would have ever left the club. Middlesbrough was a tough one because they offered my contract that set me up for life and contract that probably Rangers couldn't at that time. I'm pretty sure a few people behind the scenes knew that there was trouble ahead without us knowing it, I'm not so sure the club could offer me the contract as well. Why would you let Kevin Thomson win a double and be a main part of your team and run down his contract? They just didn't make sense. To have injuries that I had and to knock back that contract at Middlesbrough was a risk and probably one the club weren't willing to take. Thing best thing was to do was to move and set me up for life. Go to England, but I have to say Middlesbrough was a brilliant club. Brilliant facilities, brilliant stadium it just never worked. Today, I've got major excuses why that happens and I never live my life giving excuses but to break my leg in my second game and never really recover, never really get going it was a shame. I felt I could do really well down there and I felt as though could have had a totally different relationship with the fans. When. I look back, I feel as though there's a lot of things been stacked against me, really, and I feel that was another vital time in my career that it just never quite worked out for me for other reasons.

Was there a chance and opportunity for you go back to Rangers think that would transpire at any point, and eventually become Rangers captain?

Yes, that's a bit disappointing to go to this day I wanted the opportunity to come back and play for

Rangers, but it never materialised. It was under Coisty and you think back to some of the players he did bring back, the Kennys (Miller), Boydy and Stevie Smiths. Whether he thought I could bring something to the party, I know I didn't know. Rangers were in the Second division, the First Division I felt I probably could help, and I probably would have played for him for free I. I thought I would have the opportunity to. Go back and. It never materialised, which is a disappointment.

You did go back to the club as a coach. How did you get the opportunity to do that role and Steven Gerrard was the gaffer at Ibrox during that time, what was he like as a man, because you spoke about the ability to pick up the phone for advice, is that so important and those small things the kind of human factors that go unnoticed on the outside?

That was brilliant for me. I actually met Craig. Mulholland through in Edinburgh, he presented what the Academy curriculum was, how it looked, and there might be an opportunity for what I was looking for that opportunity and I was so grateful to get the opportunity to go back it was only part time at the time and travelling all the way through Glasgow you could argue for nothing really, especially financially, but. It was a massive, I would have paid to go for just the opportunity to learn to, to work with the resources that the club have, the platform it gives you. Then to work my way up to the 15s and 18s, to get an opportunity to work under Steven, to see what It looked like at the first team level. I also one got the B team during COVID. I did get good exposure when it came to having a couple with the Bubble games when coming playing Dundee. United and went against the Dundee United's first team and effectively my team was a first team. Your Jordan Jones or Greg Stewarts so you get to experience having a team top my pitch for a small period of time. Getting the sessions that look similar to the 1st team, I felt became natural for me and opened the door for me When I first spoke to Steven (Gerrard) he said listen I know you want to sit here so for me to sleep at night I'll have to make sure that my door is always open for you and give you as much insight and opportunity as you want , I was so grateful to him and all the staff. I had Gary Macalister when he was part of Gordons staff at Middlesbrough, so I always had they figures to bounce things off. I suppose that brought me a wee bit of prestige with the reserve players and under 18 players that the manager would maybe divert his path to walk over in the hall and shake your hand or give you a minute of his time. I'd like to think there was hopefully some sort of true respect there knowing that I wanted to go on my own journey.

Its perhaps challenging to understand from the outside looking in why has someone who has the playing career you have had, the background in coaching and a Scottish League two championship medal as a manger in your own right, not to mention the experience you gained working at Rangers, been unable to get a managerial job since?



Photo: Rangers FC

I've done the academies when we get to middle of November, we'll be going seven years, I've done 18 months part time in the Academy and Rangers, two years full time. I've done the full season with Kelly obviously holding their own and having to deal with COVID. Deal with testing the players coming in and having to deal with COVID, travelling in the same cars as other players. Hoping to have enough first team players available for Saturday and you know, hiding behind your sofa, really. Panicking like every time your phone went, it was another person that had tested positive. When you see people go for jobs, and I think that in the Academy we do 8/10/12 sessions a week, while at a club you might only do three, four or five.

It's an awful lot of pitch time.

Yeah, its a lot of challenging pitch time because we didn't work with the cream of the crop or a grassroots Academy, we help the local schools with a lot of the community, I'm really passionate about that and I love the kids, the bits, but it's a challenge it's a tough hour, you need to push them but the enthusiasm and the passion of to give these kids opportunities to help them get better is right.

Sell yourself, you clinched the league with Kelty in some style, a 16-game unbeaten run, you had the highest scoring game, a 6-1 win. Only 3 league defeats, finished at the top a staggering 19 points ahead of 2nd place and the highest attendance record for the season, knocked out the Scottish Cup holders (St Johnstone). That's quite a feat.

I felt things were going really well at Kelly, if I had the crystal ball, I probably should have taken a job when I was in that job, when one of the two teams approached Kelty, one was the Raith job. I just never felt it was the right time for me and then all it's been a bit dry since and giving up the opportunity at Kelty just felt it was the right thing to do at the right time, again, in hindsight it might been the wrong thing to do, but I've always tried to trust my gut and trust my instinct to go what as an individual I've represented, be really respectful and understand that there's another forty coaches and ex-Rangers players that want opportunities that are no different from myself. I just need to keep my head down, keep working hard and keep trying to do the right things and hopefully I would like another opportunity, but if it doesn't come, I cannot sit here and say that I'm one who one gets too frustrated with the industry or to upset when you don't get an opportunity. My young boys are obviously passionate footballers in an Academy, so that keeps me busy, I'm a not bad chauffeur driven taxi service for them. I just have to remain positive that the right opportunity will come, and I will be able to hopefully showcase what I can do as an individual.



Photo: Kelty Hearts

I think we did a really good job at Kelty, I do think Kelty carry a an unfair any stigma that they had all this money, yes, we had a good budget, but we were also along with the things you mentioned there, unbeaten at home, we. We lost only three games all season. Ok, we lost to Dundee United in the cup, but we also knocked at the double Cup holders, which will probably never be done again in St Johnstone in the 5th round the Scottish Cup was the furthest the club had ever been and that was knocking out a full-time tam that were a Premier League team and Kelty were part time League Two team. I know that people will say, he comes out with the violin, we've never really talked up what we did there You just hope that people that enjoy the game, the fans see you done a good job. I think if you ask all the committee at Kelly and all the fans like how we represented the club, how we trained the sacrifices we made, we never missed one night's training. I got offered to Europa League semi-final for BT and never done it knock back the line and agreed to give the boys the night off, but I've thought that doing the right thing would help me in the long run as an. Individual and it. Would then showcase to the players that I was all in, I was committed. It wasn't a case of the gaffers not here on a Tuesday. I get that family comes first, so something could pop up, but if I was available, I was there. You just hope people see that. You can't just prise a job off somebody, you just have to be patient, I've probably gone by patient now for how long it's been. But at the same time, every minute, every day I've been coaching with my own Academy, I've been doing media, I've been here, I've been there, I've been to Ibrox. I've been doing RTV. I've been doing the major TV. And BT or the TNT and ViaPlay, BBC and BBC Alba only couple of go I travelled all the way to Peterhead. So, I certainly put myself out there, but I wouldn't say I'm the best network when it when it comes to going and watching games, sitting in boardrooms, and picking up the phone to people I've never been one. Of the people they ask for anything and might be naive from me for me as an individual, but I'm not one of the people if my phone goes li try to accommodate.

You spoke previously about not being heavily reliant on data while at Kelty, has that changed or is that information in your view primarily for the staff and in your opinion do players still seek to have the game simplified as much as possible. Can some managers/ coaches etc cause a paralysis by analysis at times, do you think anything we've said previously, has been taken out of context and held against you how would you address these concerns?

No, I certainly don't think so the Rangers connection is one that I feel highly thought on within the fans which is humbling its huge. I wouldn't put that all on the line to try and be the best to get an opportunity within the first team, or go back to the club, I would be willing to risk that

for that opportunity. I feel I could do a good job and what I believe in. I think the game has changed and opportunities are hard, it's just the way it is. I don't think there one thing you can put your finger on why a chairman don't like you, or you don't get an interview, or something they've been exposed to something on social media, or somebody just not speaking that highly of you. I met Jim Goodwin while covering a game at Peterhead recently and he said to me 'everybody buzzes off you', but i said back to him that doesn't give you a job. I met Alex Lowry on Sunday, when I was doing the lounges at Ibrox and he is the first to come and give you a cuddle, plus the kind of the messages that I received, the day that I left Rangers to get the job at Kelly, if there was 50 players I worked with full time within that Academy, 48 of them sent me a message and I'm not talking, just short ones like, 'good luck ' I'm talking, big long some articulate than others m big double grab messages. It's ridiculous and I cannot tell you how many times I read them for a period of time after leaving it Kelly, how hard it was to leave. And I think back to myself, like, if they players never thought anything they wouldn't have sent them. It would have been things like 'all the best', but some of them were, 'thanks for all the help that you've given me. Honestly, it was so, so humbling they messages tells me that I was doing the right things. The Kelty boys, sill message me, still call me gaffer, and I still called Walter gaffer. I think that is done as a mark of respect, but it wont get me another job.

Do you think that's because some people that are appointed? The chairman too often, don't ask the football people. Or the people, the staff, to help them make the decision.



Photo: Kelty Hearts



Photo: Rangers FC

Possibly. I think it's hard to think It's hard to sell yourself to people that probably don't know you and it I'm not saying these people are uneducated because they're not. Sometimes it's their money. It's their decision, is their neck that's on the line when it. So, they have to they take a lot of responsibility and a lot of pressure as well, but. Just thinking there is only 42 jobs in the country, I've been a League two manager. I've won League two. I've been a part time manager. I would like the next opportunity to be full time, then you've got the Premier League, and the half is like the way the game is. You're not old enough to get the Rangers job. You can't get the Celtic job. You can't get Aberdeen job; you can't get the Hearts job and then you then you look at like how many jobs are actually are available that an opportunity that. Might arise, as you say for a board to be like, Kevin Thomson's done a really good job and he's our man, he's the one that would like to speak to, and sometimes you don't even get an interview or like, you didn't even make the shortlist and it makes it tough, so there is there is only about a dozen jobs available and by the way, none of the dozen jobs might become available the managers that are there might be doing a great job that, so it's such a difficult thing to get involved in. That's why I'm telling you that I'm delighted I've got the Academy, I'm going to change, I won't lose any sleep. I'd like an opportunity, but you can't feel sorry for yourself.



Photo: Scotland FA

A proud Scot, you gained 3 caps (a win, draw and loss) and now find yourself commentating on the National sides' games on TV, first off do you have your bag packed for Germany and surly ITV/STV will just hire the Viaplay/ TNT crew for the Scotland games, shouldn't they. How do you enjoy being involved in the broadcasting side, it's something that comes across very naturally and your assessments and diagnoses of games (The France vs Scotland match as the most recent example) is very detailed and informal to those of us watching on at home?

I'd love to. Probably in the last maybe a couple of. months I've said to a few that obviously people who book you for things like that that I'm interested. Listen, if there's more opportunities, I'm all for it, I've really enjoyed commentating on them and the calibre of player also, I felt the France game was probably the best I've spoke I do really enjoy the media; probably the punditry a wee bit more than the commentary because the commentary is a tough gig, you have all the pronunciations. When work for the big broadcasters, so you have to do your due diligence but at the same time be natural and respectful, to defend the superstars that sometimes the boys are playing against. Sometimes people have a preconceived perception of you, and you won't change their opinions.

I really enjoyed your analysis of France and their press. You have admitted you recommended Ryan Porteous to former manager Micheal Beale. Why has there in your view been an almost snobbery at the prospect of signing players from within our league at the club?

It's probably the right word. I don't know why. I spoke to Coisty and Derek McInnes while we're we were down in London doing the Sparta game and someone like Lewis Ferguson has gone and kicked on. He's obviously got a connection with obviously his name and his family, and listen, he's flourished, and I thought he was one of Scotland's best players vs France on the night the more he went on he the better he's become. I think he's grown and grown and grown and this is the key I suppose for recruitment, Ryan is a bit of the same.

It's simply succession planning, isn't it?

It is and that's. The that's the bit to see where they could go and what they could be and. I think that makes any recruitment a gamble, but when you then go and tick the boxes which I'm sure these people will do, as you mentioned earlier, like the data that kind of the stuff how things are done nowadays, Ryan. Being at the age that he was and taking money that Watford paid for Ryan (Porteous), and whatever money Bolonga paid for Lewis Ferguson and what they would now both cost now, both Scotland internationals and both will do really well. Maybe at Watford are probably not doing well in. Championship as they would. Like, but I've got every optimism that Ryan might bounce again and or somewhere else, or worst-case scenario he is going to have an English career for the next maybe 5 to 10 years cause he's at a good age. It should only. The players he's playing with, should only help him develop. I suppose the Hibs frustration is that they didn't want him to go to Rangers. I understand that right, but, if he goes to Rangers and he gets a bigger platform, a bigger selling fee. Rangers get a good player, a good fee possibly, so do Hibs with a sell on fee.

When you look at your football perspective for ours, our homegrown talent should be making the Scottish game the biggest premium they can be. Rangers and Celtic signing the best talent. I do think we've missed a tick with a few over the last few years that would bring a lot to the party and be successful for Rangers, and then potentially go on further, with how much the resources are down the road by the way, 10/12/15/20 million is still a drop in the ocean to them, but which is huge money here.

For me we have missed out on a number of ones that could be played could be that succession plan. They don't have to come in and start, but it's about finding who can handle playing for the club and then seeing if they've got the ability. To match. Worst case scenario, they go down South after us.

100% look at Nathan Patterson, the captain Is in your position and probably one of the hardest players to push out the team but to play whatever it was 12-15 games for Rangers, then a few appearances off the bench, he went to a Euros, and deserved to do so a top talent, because of that exposure in Europe and the league can happen with others. It would be more beneficial to these clubs, those players and the money getting spread around Scottish football rather than disappear elsewhere, it stays in our game.

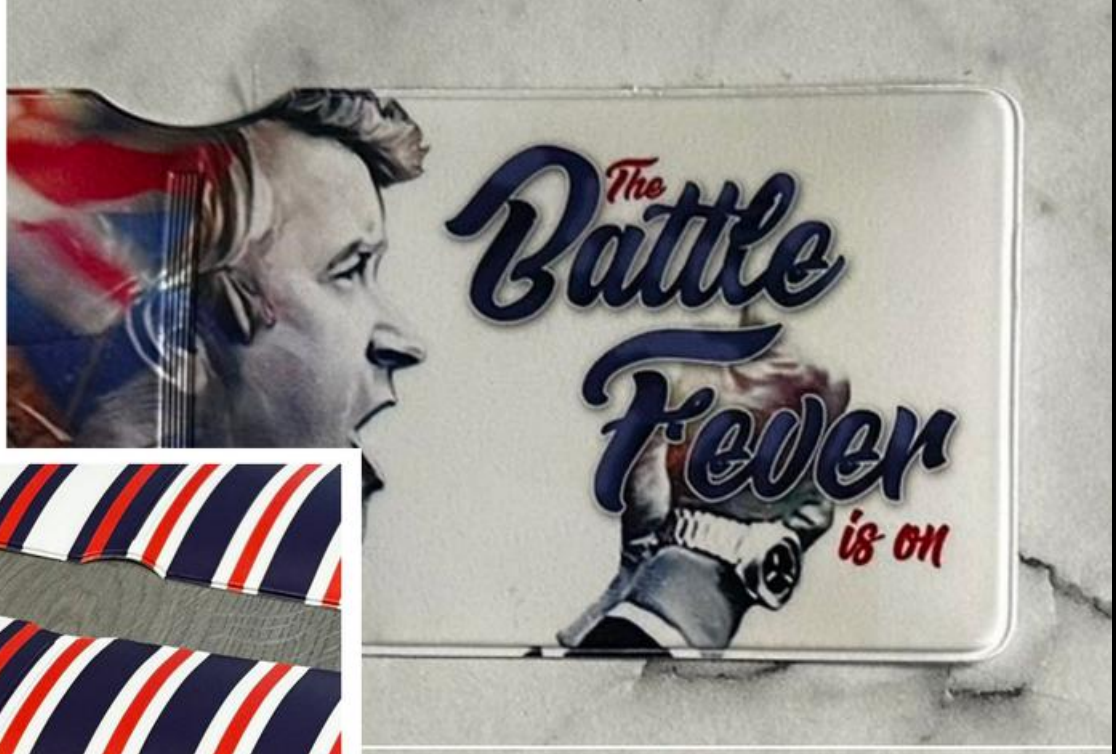
Kevin, thank you very much for your time and for any Chairman, or any potential clubs that want to get a top manager/ coach in, they would be silly not to approach you, or at the very least get in touch, hear what you have to say. It's been a pleasure, Thank you.

Editor's note: Rangers would be crazy not to have Kevin Thomson back involved on the coaching side.

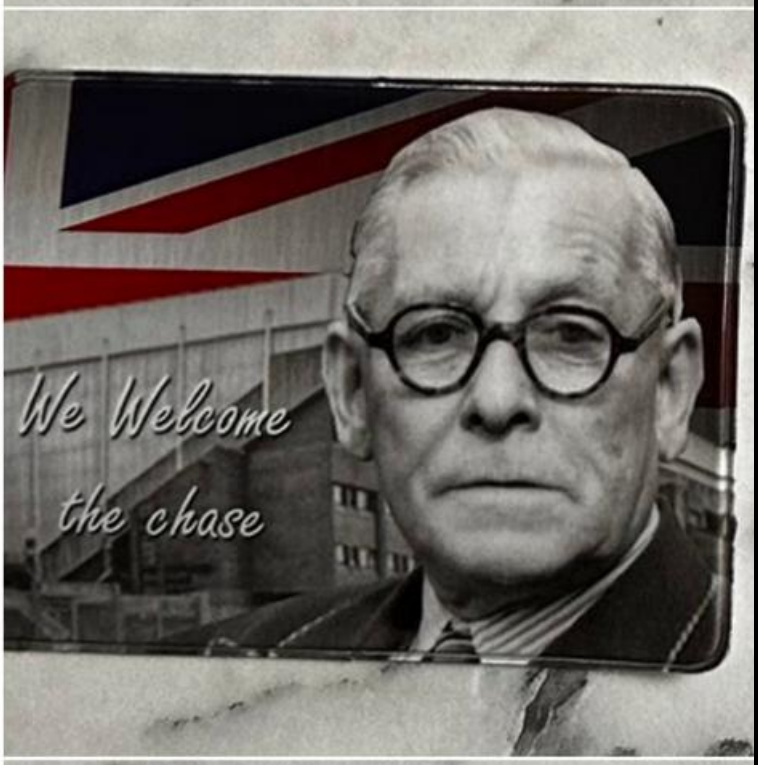
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MICHAEL BEALE - THE DOWNFALL

Words: Andy McKellar

Michael Beale was appointed as the 18th permanent manager of Rangers Football Club on 28th November 2022 following a disappointing start to season 2022/23 under Giovanni Van Bronkhorst. He arrived bringing an air of optimism and positivity as someone who earned the reputation as the brains behind the Gerrard era and his clear affection for our club helped bolster his popularity amongst the support.

The Englishman cut his teeth in the youth academies of England - Chelsea followed by Liverpool - before broadening his horizons when he accepted a coaching role at Brazilian club Sao Paulo. He enjoyed a growing reputation among those within the game and so much so that Steven Gerrard brought him to Ibrox. And we know what happened form thereon in.

Progress followed at Rangers - even if it was more gradual than we would have liked - and that brought success in the shape of a long overdue league title and the reestablishment of our reputation in European competition. But nothing lasts for ever with Beale following Gerrard to Aston Villa before stepping out on his own as manager of QPR, a move that in itself confirmed his reputation within the game.

And then came the call. Rangers were looking for a new manager and Michael Beale answered. He was appointed on a three-and-a-half-year contract and we will look in this article at what went wrong in the period that followed, a short period that eventually resulted in his premature departure from which we are now seeking to rebuild.

Consistent Start

Things had become turgid at Ibrox under Giovanni Van Bronkhorst despite the immense high of reaching a European cup final. A questionable pre-season bled into a slow start to the campaign with the football on show being held up as a cure for insomnia. We were functional but little more and the lack of entertainment or excitement was soon evident in the stands as the atmosphere became flatter with each passing week. It simply didn't feel sustainable despite only being a few points behind Celtic in the league but inevitably the wheels came crashing off in a few short weeks and the league challenge was all but over. Enter Michael Beale.

Results quickly followed with wins flowing consistently including at difficult venues like Tynecastle and Easter Road. Rangers won 13 of Michael Beale's first 14 league games, drawing only with Celtic in that time, and a better start realistically couldn't be expected. On paper, it was an absolutely terrific beginning to his Rangers career.



Photo: Rangers FC

Two factors though were weighed against this. Firstly Celtic matched our record in that time meaning despite immense consistency, we gained no ground at all in terms of the league table. Secondly, the football still wasn't all that good if we're being honest.

To his credit there were glimpses of progress, particularly with Todd Cantwell finding form and adding some much needed spark to the side. But we still felt stodgy and slow in terms of our style of play. Just like under Gio there was a lot of possession but much of it safe and sideways. But the benefit of the doubt was largely afforded at this point as this wasn't yet his own team and it wouldn't be until the summer. But then things took a turn.

Big Game Failure

With our league run not putting a dent in Celtic's title aspirations the focus of the season quickly turned to domestic trophies with both the League Cup and Scottish Cup still up for grabs. Standing in our way both times - our city rivals. A bigger test we could not have asked for but it's these tests we simply must pass if we want to get back to the levels we aspire to.



Photo: Rangers FC

First up was the League Cup final. It's a trophy I've always considered to be ours such was our historic ownership of it over the years. And it is one that hasn't been in our cabinet for far too long following some dreadful results and disappointing dropouts in recent seasons. Michael Beale now had a chance to deliver it.

Immediately he made an error. While admittedly they were still building up their fitness Todd Cantwell and Nico Raskin were left on the bench. Both had been rare rays of light in an otherwise dull season and you could feel the deflation amongst the support when they saw the team-sheet. We had seen this movie before with the same old faces falling short of what was required, and so it would prove again as we meekly surrendered, going 2-0 down just after half-time with the manager refusing to make subs until it was too late.

There was the familiar inquest and post-mortem afterwards. Fans were angry and let down by the manager and the team as we allowed Celtic a run at yet another treble. I actually sat in on the press conference after the match at Auchenhowie and you could feel the atmosphere had shifted following the defeat. They'd become too common and we weren't about to let another manager, another regime continue with failure.

And so we moved onto the next one - the Scottish Cup. Having allowed Celtic to secure a league and cup double with the greatest of ease this was our final chance to put down a marker and let them know we were on our way back. With the other half of the semi-finals being atrociously weak, this was a de facto final for the Cup.

We started poorly and allowed Celtic much of the early attacking play but they lacked quality for a change. In truth there wasn't much between the teams with neither really taking control or playing to their potential. But then came the inevitable - the defensive calamity.

Rangers ball-watched instead of playing to the whistle. Among four statuesque defenders sprung a Celtic attacker who crossed the ball to the back-post for Jota to head home. It was an error that even by our standards that season was horrendous and a cup tie is no place for handing over gifts.

We huffed and puffed and had some chances but it wasn't enough. We lost the semi-final, handed Celtic a treble and finished the season trophyless. The optimism and credit that Beale had brough and carried for many weeks was now being eroded by our big game failures. These were viewed as a test of this team and him as a manager and they were failed at every turn.

These results cast a long and dark shadow over our season and over the new manager. He had two



Photo: Rangers FC

chances to win a trophy and fell short on both counts. Fans had seen more than enough of that over the years and even Gio managed a Scottish Cup success while beating Celtic along the way. Questions were asked of the mentality and whether now was the time to rip up the playing squad and start again. And so we did.

Summer Recruitment

At long last the Rangers revamp was underway. Fans had been crying out for a refresh, for a failing squad to be ripped apart and for fresh energy to be introduced. Funds, we were told, would be made available and the contract situation for many players provided an organic end to a cycle that in truth hadn't delivered as much success as we craved.

In the absence of a director of football Michael Beale was entrusted with much responsibility and almost complete oversight over the incoming transfers. He was allowed to build his own team, his way and it was clear from comments made by our CEO that they backed the manager to succeed.

Most of our funds went on the attack with replacements for Kent, Morelos and Sakala required. In came Danilo, Cyriel Dessers and Sam Lammers to that end for a combined £13m. Eyebrows were raised with the scoring records of the latter two with neither having ever been prolific across their careers. Danilo brought a bit more excitement and we paid a pretty price to get him in the door. Also joining them as a new face in the attack was Abdallah Simo on loan from Brighton, someone fans my recall from his performances against us for Slavia Prague.

At the other end of the pitch Beale was tasked with replacing a genuine club legend in the shape of Allan McGregor. While his powers were on the decline in latter years these were still big gloves to fill and in came former England goalkeeper Jack Butland on a free transfer, a piece of business we would soon appreciate as an absolute bargain.

Ahead of him we added Dujon Sterling from Chelsea and Leon Balogun on a free after leaving QPR. Sterling, as a right-back, was always likely to be a squad player and Balogun at his age looked to be in a similar boat. With an evident need to prioritise funds it soon became obvious that the defence would have to make do for another season with some familiar faces being relied upon yet again.

In the middle of the park money was spent to get Jose Cifuentes in from LAFC before the expiration of his contract and he was joined by Kieran Dowell on a free transfer from Norwich. The groundwork in this area of the park had been completed in January with Cantwell and Raskin coming in the door for modest fees with both being free agents in the summer. And so the manager's work was complete.



Photo: Rangers FC



Photo: Rangers FC

What became immediately obvious was that we signed attackers with no width. There was no natural replacement for Ryan Kent and on the right-hand side we simply neglected to bring anyone in. This can only have been part of Beale's plan switch to a new, narrower attack which varied from two strikers with a No10 behind them and one striker with two x No10s behind him. What also became clear in pre-season was that it wasn't really working.

Sure you can never read too much into friendly games but we struggled to build play from middle to front and the new-look attack was taking time to gel and find its feet. Neither full-back excelled in the absence of any width ahead of them and I think we scored more penalties than open-play goals before the real stuff started when the season kicked-off.

As I write this I think Jack Butland can be safely deemed as a success with his performances and leadership being abundantly clear even in a struggling side. The defence was never improved and so we can pretty much gloss over that area and in central midfield Kieran Dowell has been injured, unsurprisingly, and Jose Cifuentes has struggled to adapt and settle despite some early flashes of ability.

I said before the summer that what we do in terms of attack would dictate our success or failure this season. We had previously big players leaving and we had to upgrade on them if we wanted to seriously challenge for the league. The bottom line? We failed miserably.

Sure there was an element of bad fortune for Danilo with his recent injury but even before then Beale had signed him for £5-6m and then left him on the bench for big games. Playing ahead of him were Lammers and Dessers and both have probably been the face of our failed summer recruitment, having struggled enormously at Ibrox.

Dessers didn't arrived with any great pedigree or scoring record and his early performances perhaps displayed why that was the case. He is functional and perhaps an average SPFL-level striker but during his time until Beale's departure showed very little to suggest he should be a starting No9 for Rangers Football Club. The same, sadly, can be said for Sam Lammers who twists and turns but ultimately goes nowhere. He has skill and ability but seems unable to harness that into something with an end product on the pitch.

Abdallah Sima has however emerged as a surprise revelation with a keen eye for goal and some much needed pace added to our attack. At times he looks like he's never seen a football and then a few minutes later he's rifling home an instinctive strike into the back of the net. In that sense he's not too dissimilar to Fashion Sakala and at present we're looking to Sima for goals and contributions in attack more than any of the other new faces.

Overall then the summer was a disaster. Two players - Butland and Sima - can be viewed as getting pass marks with the rest either not contributing or falling below the standards expected. The issue isn't just the lack of quality, it's the money we spent for that lack of quality. Around £15m was spent on incoming players and while the net spend is much lower, we simply haven't received any value whatsoever for that outlay.

If we couple the individual lack of quality with a confused and muddled tactical approach then we were only ever arriving at one outcome. The ship was sinking from day 1 of the new season and in this case it took its captain with it in the shape of Michael Beale.

As someone who wanted Beale to get the job and desperately wanted him to succeed it is tempting to make excuses or throw circumstances in as some justification for his failure. But I can't. He was in the door last season to assess the team, was allowed reinforcements in January and then was given control in the summer to over see a revamp. This was his team, molded in his style. And it just didn't work.

If it was only the summer recruitment that went wrong we could have perhaps scraped by had we had a solid tactical foundation on which to build. We could have been organized and disciplined and had a style of play that may have just masked some of the weaknesses individually. But as we know that wasn't the case.

I am tempted to go as far as to say Beale was trying to be too clever. He moved away from the system that he coached and drilled for years under Gerrard, one which eventually underpinned our success in 2020/21. But it's not clear why. Whatever he was trying to do with his narrow attackers is anyone's guess because the evidence wasn't on the pitch.

It's one thing being flexible and able to change and adapt but it's quite another to be chopping and changing formations and selections because nothing seems to be working. Overseeing such a change in personnel was always going to be challenging but I'm afraid it wasn't helped by a lack of a clear vision for how this team was supposed to play together.

Given his obvious affection for the club and for living in Scotland this was arguably a dream job but it is one that soon became a nightmare. Sure he was up against a very strong opponent but in truth the failings were internal. He signed the wrong players and failed to put them into anything resembling a cohesive structure or style of play.

Michael Beale may well be a very good coach but he has some way to go if he wants to prove he can be a very good manager. There are lessons to be learned from his turbulent time at Rangers and if he wants to succeed he is going to have to reflect on them.

As for Rangers - the Clement era has begun. I just hope he has more good fortune and success than his predecessor.

Andy McKellar
@AMcKellar89



Photo: Rangers FC

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INTERVIEW WITH MARK WARBURTON

Words: James Black

Mark Warburton holds a unique place in Rangers' history as the only Ibrox boss to win the Scottish Championship title and Challenge Cup before an ill-fated maiden campaign in the Premiership was brought to a premature halt in controversial circumstances.

Warburton, like the rest of us, was an interested spectator as Belgian Phillippe Clement was named the 19th permanent manager of Rangers earlier this month, replacing Michael Beale in the hot seat. While Warburton confessed that his knowledge of Clement is limited, he is confident that he will very quickly get to grips with the demands and expectations that come with being tasked with leading the charge to 56, saying: "My knowledge of Philippe is limited; I've read up on what he's done and what he's achieved so I hope very much that he can transfer that success to Rangers Football Club.

"He's an experienced guy and I think it's important that he finds his own way around the club and he'll quickly see what it means to so many people - the demands and expectations, the history and all that stuff - he doesn't need advice from me or any other manager. I'm sure he'll embrace what it means to be Rangers manager and, fingers crossed he'll bring success to the club.

"You've only got to walk through the front door at Ibrox to know about expectation. Some people say that you don't get it as an outsider but of course, we get it, we're not stupid. It always irks me that people think I - or other managers - would be naive enough or ignorant enough not to appreciate the responsibility that comes with managing a club of Rangers' stature."

Warburton took the Rangers job having left Brentford following a successful spell at Griffin Park and the Englishman was delighted to be handed the chance to try and restore the Light Blues to our rightful place atop Scottish football.

"I enjoyed the meetings. They were discussions that flowed, and there was a good feeling to it that was evident from the outset, of course, David knew the people involved and it was a pleasure to meet them. But there was also a case of you having to look at it and say you need to have the chance of success. And the obvious thing that came up was finance. Rangers had been through what they've been through, they were on the way back up but hadn't quite achieved it the year before. You look at the finance and people were talking even in interviews about... it's very clear that the only club that matters to Rangers is Celtic in terms of the fans and what we have to do and close the gap, and then level up with Celtic and then go beyond them and win 55 and everything, everything that comes with it. So to do that it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that you need to have the financial backing to do that and that was the only concern.

"To go into a club, the privilege of managing such a club, global reach of a football club, in an institution that so many, all of that, as a young kid growing up all of that I there was never ever an issue. The only issue, as I say was making sure that you had the financial ability to close the gap; not immediately, not in one year, not even two years, but to make sure that you could make evident progress to close the gap and get closer to and then beat the obvious rival."

Having cantered to the Championship title - and beating Celtic in a Scottish Cup semi-final at Hampden that season - expectations were massive going into Warburton's second season in charge. Experienced signings like Joey Barton, Niko Kranjcar, and Clint Hill were brought in to complement younger arrivals including Josh

Windass as Jordan Rossiter however, Warburton feels the financial gulf between the Old Firm was still so great that it would be incredibly difficult to meet the expectations - both inside and outside the club: "There's no lack of desire. There's no lack of hunger to get Rangers back to the top of Scottish football and back into Europe and doing what they need to be at the top table. That was evident. There's never any lack of passion to do that. But when we beat Celtic in that semi final said before, fantastic for the fans for the day for the players for the staff, what it meant to so many people that again, goes without saying, but straightaway I've got I'm old enough, shall I say enough experience from a different industry as well as football, to know that expectation suddenly goes through the roof. But the budgets hadn't.

"When you look at people like Dom Ball, Andy Halliday, and Jason Holt if I added all their wages up together on that day, it'd be less than half of one of the Celtic midfielders. That's the reality of it. If I look at my centre-backs combined, they didn't come to one of the Celtic defenders. I look at Lee Wallace who was outstanding. Lee and Kenny were two senior guys on a day. But in terms of wages and budget, we were, I think probably 20% of Celtic if that. So we beat them on the day and deserved to, I think, and had a fantastic day. But you and I both know if we're honest with each other nine times out of 10 that team that rival packed with international players is going to win that game of football. So we got it right on the day. And we had a fantastic achievement by the players and everything that comes with it. So I'm not diluting that at all, but I knew then our budget was still going to be a fraction of our rivals.

"They responded by bringing in the Brendan Rodgers and the Dembeles and all these players came in on wages, that absolutely dwarfed ours. And then you get the media working against Rangers, you've got certain people saying Niko Kranjcar on 25 grand a week, it was almost beyond farcical. Niko and I were looking at each other and just burst out laughing. He'd love to be on a fraction of that. And it was literally, I felt all this going on. And then when I walked out for that Hamilton game, clear blue sky, I remember the day well and the banner and everything else. But when I saw it in the morning, I get I always got to the ground early. around nine o'clock for a couple of hours on your own, a bit of peace and quiet, and people like Davie, Jim Stewart, and Frank McParland would come in. I walked out of the tunnel just to look at the pitch and great to look around Ibrox when there was no one there. It's magnificent. And I saw 'Going For 55' on the far side. And that was when my heart sank, and not through lack of passion, not through lack of desire or lack of hunger to go and win. But just a realisation that now the Rangers we've lit the blue touchpaper, literally with the Rangers fan base, and had we come out and gone you know what we come back here we're going to deliver the best performance we can, every single week, we go into every game to win it. But we're also pleased with the fact that we've got to keep closing the gap on Celtic and we can talk about the money.

"Let us talk about the budget and you know, we've been where we've been the Rangers are on the way back and we're gonna we're gonna keep on making progress every single day. If that sort of dialogue. I was then told by the media that



Photo: Rangers FC



Photo: Rangers FC

Rangers fans wouldn't tolerate that. The Rangers fans want to hear we're gonna go and beat them straight away. And I'm thinking now you're saying the Rangers fan base doesn't get it. That's what you're saying. I disagree with them but you never saw mentioned the fact that Dembele is on multiples of Kenny Miller for example, you never saw that their midfield's wages dwarfed ours, I told you earlier and that was the frustration for me that the expectation suddenly became too much. And that 2-2 draw with Hamilton if you remember the Sunday morning we got caned by the media the following day. 'Shocking start for Rangers', 'appalling opening day performance' all that went with returning to the Premiership, all that went with the build-up to that day, all those young players, and the media immediately turned and that for me said a great deal and as I say the expectation was the one that gave me the greatest concern James because I knew we were still so far behind financially."

One of Warburton's earliest Rangers signings has gone on to carve his name into Ibrox folklore, captaining the side to 55 under Steven Gerrard, a European final under Gio van Bronckhorst, and earning a place in the club's Hall of Fame, but even the man who brought James Tavernier to Glasgow admits he couldn't have foreseen his career going the way it has since he arrived in a double deal with Martyn Waghorn.

"I knew we had an athlete. One of the things on recruitment you look at their playing record minutes played. So you might have an outstanding talented player but if he's always injured there's no point, but Tavernier was never like that. In truth neither was Waghorn, but again, good athleticism, good pedigree, young, hungry, really good young players. No one could have envisaged that Tav would be captain now Hall of Famer etc. But I always knew that there was a very passionate footballer, there was a really good character and an infectious love of the game.

"He very quickly courtesy of the quality and the addition of people like Lee Wallace and Kenny Miller. They made him very aware James of what it meant and he learned you could see how he benefited from talking to Kenny and talking to John Greg and John would come in after games at home and you could see people like Tav, Waggy, Andy Halliday and Dom Ball taking it in. Look how young Dom came on as a young player what a job he did for us, he's playing now and top of the championship and Wes Foderingham is playing in the Premier League and these guys are all done great. But again, having that influence of those older players really helped it but Tav was a nice bit of business. It was good business for us again, going back to finance I think it was £260,000 for the pair of them - I think Waggy scored something like 38 goals that first year - so you've got a minimal outlay low wages on two young talented boys who have proven themselves already in the championship down south. So again, that's the type of business which we were very proud of, but never really got mentioned that great at the time."

While Tavernier's attacking prowess has often seen calls from fans for him to be pushed into a midfield role rather than his usual right-back slot, Warburton opened up on why the Ibrox skipper has stayed exactly where he has always been in the Rangers side.

"Rangers and Celtic are the dominant teams in Scotland, no disrespect to hearts or to hips to Aberdeen or anyone else, but it's obvious that the two dominant teams are Rangers and Celtic. Most games that go into that to dominate possession. Therefore in terms of if he was going to go in the Premier League, for example, he'd have a lot more defending to do, Last year if he came up against West Ham you're gonna look and say right it could be up against Bowen could be up against Benrahma could be up against Paqueta, could be up again Kudus; all top class internationals. That's not the case in Scotland, because Rangers will dominate football nine times out of 10 - play Celtic or be evenly matched - but most times it's dominate the football. So as a manager and a coach, they haven't got to worry so much about him defensively because they have the ball nine more times than not. So what's his strength? His strength is with the ball going forward delivering quality crosses. Look at the goals that he's scored for Rangers over the years, you've got great delivery from set pieces, great delivery on the run, you've got a player who's willing to get forward and he's got the energy to then get back, it's outstanding. Now, Tav won't mind me saying this, if Tav was an outstanding one-on-one defender with everything else that he's got with the ball, then Man United or Liverpool or Spurs might come in, you know, two years, three years, four years ago.

"I've been with people from Spurs, who I took when I was up there to a home game, and both of them now are in incredibly senior positions with an association and once a major recognised technical sporting director at a major European club. I've gone there and I thought Tav on the night had an okay game but not one of his best and they went 'Bloody hell, look at that boy Tavernier. Wow.' So I've gone I didn't think at his best game. Well, they said 'Look how we get forward'. But all they saw because I've got like wood for the trees I'm seeing Tav everyday. But all they saw was this unbelievably attacking full-back who got forward and delivered crosses and they never mentioned defended because the best form of defence is attack. Everyone's got flaws and that's why the boys are on, you know someone like Declan Rice has just gone for a hundred-odd million to Arsenal. There's not many in Declan Rice's game and that's why he's 100 million. But when someone goes for less, there's a reason why, because there is a flaw. It's maybe an area of ability, or concentration, aerobic endurance, there'll be a flaw in their game, technical basis, slightly weak or weaker left foot, or whatever it may be. There's something that causes them to be worth slightly less money.



Photo: Rangers FC

"The boys at the top of the game, the boys who are going for 50, 60, 70, 80 million, West Ham signed Lucas Paqueta; what a technician! I thought I'd seen some really good players. And then you see, you see Lucas Paqueta. There's a reason he starts for Brazil every game, he is just an incredible, incredible talent. But that's why they're going for 50, 60, 70 or Man City might pay 80 million that type of thing for him. There is a reason so going back to your question we have you know, outstanding player outstanding character enormous respect for Tav, like him incredibly, you know what a fantastic guy is. But in Rangers team is perfect because they have the ball more often than not."

Part Two of our Mark Warburton interview sees the ex-Rangers boss discuss his controversial exit from Ibrox, Niko Kranjcar and Joe Barton, trying to bring young players through from the Academy and what's next for him after leaving West Ham over the summer.

James Black
@jamesblack1986



Photo: Rangers FC

ABDALLAH SIMA ANALYSIS

Words: Jamie Currie

While Jack Butland, Danilo, and Sam Lammers stole the headlines and have been the major talking points of the summer arrivals, one other has come in on loan from Brighton & Hove Albion and has been quietly proving to be up there with Butland in the column of positive signings – that has been Abdallah Sima.

Prior to joining Rangers, Sima had been on loan at French Ligue 1 side Angers, who were struggling at the foot of the league. The Senegalese youngster scored six goals in 37 outings in all competitions.

However, if you take a more in-depth look at his stats from his time in Ligue 1 with the context of him playing for a relegation-battling side, they look decent, all things considered.

He made the appearances for Angers playing as a centre-forward, it was a different role than he had been asked to play as when he was at Slavia prior to the Brighton move he was very much used in the wide roles.

He worked well for Slavia in a well-oiled dominant team. So his signing is one that when you look back on it made perfect sense. Rangers needed something different from those wide areas and Abdallah Sima certainly has given them something that is different from Kent's trickery and Sakala's raw pace. He brings a physical presence and he brings numbers to those wide roles.

So let's analyse Sima's start to his Rangers career so far.

Playing style

I think it's fair to say Sima isn't the most aesthetically pleasing when it comes to assessing him style-wise. He's certainly not the most elegant of players. However, he has brought something to the Rangers side that they lack all over the park and that is size, pace and power.

We have seen he can be a little clumsy on the ball at times and his technique could be better but his pace and finishing ability is something that has helped him massively since moving to play in the SPFL Premiership. He's full of confidence at the moment, and that is helping him show the qualities that got him his move to Brighton.

He's been around for so long that many forget he is just 22 so there is definite room for growth and time for him to improve on his good attributes as well as fine-tuning some of the aspects of his game that he isn't as good at, especially the technical aspect of his game. Under the right coach, he will only get better and better. He's not the first Brighton player that's been sent out on a few loans and then eventually found their groove.



Photo: Rangers FC

He's a real team player

During the press conference prior to the Europa League match against Sparta Prague, Gers gaffer Philippe Clement referenced Sima and his contribution to the team.

He said: "Abdallah is doing very well this season; he's very motivated. He's a soldier for the team, he's not only thinking about scoring goals and making assists but also doing his defensive job. He's someone who is not thinking about himself, he's doing his job for the team."

That's a really good description of Sima's recent performances. So far he's played on both sides of the attack and in a two as a striker, but his recent work rate in games where the team have been struggling, especially in Cyprus against Aris and in games against St Mirren and others have made him stand out.

He seems to be really enjoying his time at Ibrox and it's reflecting within his displays on the pitch.



Photo: Rangers FC

Rangers fans love good footballers, however, they also do love a player who will give their all every time they pull on that blue shirt and Sima is quietly becoming a fan favourite due to his work rate and output up until this point.

The numbers

Prior to the Sparta match Sima had six goals in five matches. He's currently the top scorer for Rangers with nine goals. Before that burst of form he had three goals in 11, which is quite the turnaround.

Having a deeper look at his stats in the Scottish Premiership:

He has five goals; his xG is 3.2 so he's over performing. He's played 514 minutes and his minutes per goal ratio is 103. 50% of his total shots are on target. Furthermore, he's created five big chances and his xA comes in at 0.34.

Then having a look at the two Europa League matches. He's scored 2 in 2 and scored all of Rangers' goals in the group thus far. His xG is 1.4, he's averaging a goal every 90 minutes, and he's played 179 minutes across both games.

He's created three chances for his teammates and his xA is 0.3 as well as his five shots all being on target at a rate of 100%.

At this point, he's well on course to beat both Sakala and Kent's numbers from last season. That's what we were all screaming for, right? So far Sima is delivering just that.

Should Rangers attempt to keep Sima permanently?

It then begs the question should Rangers be trying to keep Sima beyond the summer?

If you take into account the player-trading model. It looks like a no-brainer. A young guy with potential and at the right club to find his feet and grow as a player, then you move him on when the time is right. However, we have seen this last season with Malik Tillman, Sima may fancy a shot at a better league at the end of the season. And with no option to buy, the ball will firmly be in Brighton's court.

Having said that, there is a long way to go in the season and form can flip so it's sensible for Rangers to take their time over Sima and make sure if they wish to keep him on a permanent deal that everything is right for the club and the player before jumping in two footed and doing a deal.

Jamie Currie
@jamiecurrie89



Photos: Glasgow Times

OPINION

OLD FIRM TICKET ALLOCATION

Words: James Black

The row over Old Firm ticket allocations is set to see Rangers fans locked out of Parkhead on December 30, with Celtic having previously rejected tickets for Ibrox earlier in the season - but the Rangers board can't simply roll over and accept the attempts by the Celtic hierarchy to stop the Gers support backing Philippe Clement's side in the East End.

While arguments over Rangers' motivation in the decision to originally remove Celtic fans from the 8000-ish capacity Broomloan Road end into the 800-ish capacity corner between the Broomloan and Sandy Jardine Stand - sell more season tickets or a fit of pique - giving Celtic the same allocation seems to have been the club's settled thinking on the matter.

When Celtic turned down that allocation for the first Old Firm game of this season, it meant Rangers could pack the place with Bluenoses and maximise gate receipts even more due not having to segregate fans.

However it, rightly, led some to expect they would then see Rangers fans locked out at Parkhead and both clubs need to come together to find some sort of resolution - or the SPFL are going to need to step in and actually make a decision on something for a change.

Personally, I have no interest in going to Celtic Park for an Old Firm game but I get why many do so locking Rangers fans out completely is unfair on those who do want to head across the city for the game.

Talk of giving Celtic the 'European allocation' doesn't work in the short-term and means the club would almost certainly have to reduce the number of season tickets on sale - or at least go back to the old way where some ST holders in certain areas (the Broomloan at the time) didn't have Old Firm games included as part of their ticket.

Doing that though would mean fans missing out on the biggest game of the season at home - and likely a big part of the reason why many have season tickets in the first place.

There have been recent suggestions of a mandatory percentage of tickets visiting clubs should be allocated - rumoured to be as much as 5% - but whether that happens remains to be



Photo: Rangers FC

seen; clubs like Rangers would stand to lose out with the likes of St Johnstone guaranteed a minimim of around 2500 when they never bring anything close to that number.

Celtic boss Brendan Rodgers even spoke recently about his preference for clubs to get a 'standardised' number of away tickets seems logical on the face of it, but quickly starts to fall apart when you look at the actual numbers it would guarantee clubs for trips to Ibrox and Celtic Park.

With that never likely to happen, it means that it's going to be left at club's discretion to decide how many away tickets to allocate to particular clubs.

Maybe the Powers-That-Be will see sense and decide to allow away fans into the upcoming Old Firm but that isn't going to happen any time soon.

While the tit-for-tat continues between the clubs, as usual, it is the fans who are the one who end up suffering as a result - although with a few hundred extra seats just becoming available at Celtic Park, maybe there will be Rangers fans there after all.

James Black
@jamesblack1989





Photo: Rangers FC

THE SEASON SO FAR...

Words: Rangers WSC

Four months into the season and having completed the first round of fixtures, Rangers WFC are sitting top of the league undefeated and are through to the quarter finals of the SWPL Cup.

The Jo Potter era began back in July with a comprehensive 11-0 win over Queens Park in the Glasgow Cup Semi Final before going on to win the competition with two injury time against Celtic in the Final at Broadwood.

Following this the girls travelled to Spain in early August for a pre-season camp rounding off their preparations with a 1-0 win over Liga F side Levante before returning home for the start of the league season.

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This fantastic start has been just the tonic that was needed after last season's emotionally draining and energy sapping campaign ended with the loss of the league and the Scottish Cup Final in the final two games. It certainly feels like we are at the dawn of something special with this Rangers side. From the outside looking in team spirit seems to be high and there's a great blend of youth, players in their prime, and experience. It's a start that would be impressive on its own, but it's come against the backdrop of a mini-injury crisis with several players picking up knocks and strains.

A lot of the credit for just how positive the start has been must go to the new manager. So far, it's looking like we have won a proverbial watch with the appointment of Jo. She certainly looks and talks like a Rangers manager. More importantly she backs that up by walking the walk. She has put out a side that plays a nice technical style but equally is determined, hard-working, physical, and purposeful. It's a cliché, but she seems to 'get' Rangers and what this club is about and has put out a team in an image that Rangers fans demand.



Photo: Rangers FC

Last season we didn't stray too much from a back four, two relatively deep midfielders and an 8-sometimes-10 supporting a striker flanked by two wingers. It was a system that certainly had its plus points. It was highly organised and structured leading to the girls having the best defensive record in the league. However, at times we were less than imaginative in attack with the side tending to overplay.

Jo has effectively ripped that up and introduced a high risk / high reward 3-4-1-2. And it's not quite a normal 3 at the back either. Nicola Docherty and Rachel McLauchlan at times play as auxiliary wing backs and seem to have license to drive up the park or overlap when it is on. We still favour playing out from the back (and sometimes gives us fans heart problems) but from there on our approach play is more penetrative and a lot quicker than last season.

This new sense of attacking verve has come with a sacrifice in defensive solidity (we have already conceded 7 goals in 11 league games compared to just the 9 in 32 last season) but at the other end we are just shy of averaging 5 goals a game in the SWPL. More importantly being more adventurous has continued into the big games and has meant that we have 4 points out of 6 against our main title rivals, whereas at this point last season we only had 2 out of 6 from the opening phase fixtures against Celtic and Glasgow City.



Photo: Rangers FC


Photo: Rangers FC

Another pleasing aspect is how well the players seem to be gelling as a group and how good individual performances have been. Rio Hardy has come in and paired extremely well with Kirsty Howat. Rio balances relentless hard work with an opportunistic knack of being in the right place at the right time to score. Howat herself has continued her great end of season form from last season and earned herself a Scotland call up.

In midfield, Mia McAulay has made the most of her opportunities on the right-hand side and looks like another promising academy prospect. On the other flank Jodi McLeary has enjoyed her most consistent run in the team. Chelsea Cornet is having her best season in a Rangers shirt. While Rachel Rowe has had a bit of a stop start season so far due to a couple of injuries, she has shown in her appearances her capability of bringing a physical and high energy intensity to the team. Kirsty Maclean continues to shine, showing why she is considered one of the most exciting young players in Britain, and loan signing Libby Bance has impressed with her neat and tidy passing game.

At the back, Kathryn Hill had a very strong October deservedly earning another call up to the Scotland squad. Rachel McLauchlan and Nic Docherty are as consistent as ever and have adapted to their new roles well.

Looking ahead, Rangers will be wanting to cement their lead at the top of the table and progress into the SWPL Cup Final. With the greatest respect to Boroughmuir Thistle, it's been a bit of luck that on paper we have drawn the weakest team on paper for the quarter finals, with Celtic and Glasgow City drawing each other.

The challenge for Jo will be to give further game time to Rachel Rowe, Sarah Ewens, Michelle Colson, Brogan Hay and Lizzie Arnot whilst continuing the form that has come from the smaller available squad at the beginning of the season.

However, the biggest concern for the fans will be that if she continues the way she has started, Jo won't be around at the club for too long. Widely respected in England for both her playing career and coaching abilities, she has career links with WSL sides Arsenal, Leicester City and Everton, as well as with Championship sides Reading and Birmingham City, both who should have ambitions to be back in the top league. It's not inconceivable that she would be on the shortlist for most of the clubs mentioned when the time comes to make their next appointment.

But for now we will enjoy the Potter revolution at Rangers and by the next time we check in with an update we will be well on the way to securing the league and have the SWPL Cup final to look forward to!

Rangers Women Supporters Club
@RangersWSC

Pos	Club	Pl	GD	Pts
1	Rangers	11	+47	31
2	Celtic	11	+45	30
3	Glasgow City	10	+25	25
4	Hearts	11	+14	19
5	Hibernian	11	+3	17
6	Partick Thistle	10	+2	15
7	Motherwell	11	-6	12
8	Aberdeen	10	-8	12
9	Spartans	10	-14	8
10	Dundee United	10	-34	7
11	Montrose	10	-33	5
12	Hamilton Academical	11	-41	2

Photo: SWPL

RANGERS WOMEN'S FIXTURES

Tickets and further information can be found on: https://www.rangers.co.uk/

SPARTANS
SUNDAY 5 NOVEMBER 2023
BROADWOOD STAIDUM (H)

BOROUGHMUIR
SUNDAY 12 NOVEMBER 2023
BROADWOOD STADIUM (H)

GLASGOW CITY
SUNDAY 19 NOVEMBER 2023
PETERSHILL PARK (A)

MONTROSE
SUNDAY 26 NOVEMBER 2023
BROADWOOD STADIUM (H)

MOTHERWELL
SUNDAY 10 NOVEMBER 2023
K PARK TRAINING ACADEMNY (A)



Photo: Rangers FC

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Photo: Rangers FC

ONE TO WATCH

ZAK LOVELACE

Words: Willy Irwin

In 2019, Lovelace joined Millwall from Glebe after scoring 43 goals in 15 appearances en route to Glebe's Kent Youth League victory. On 29 December 2021, after scoring 21 goals in 19 appearances throughout Millwall's youth teams

The sought-after 16-year-old broke into Millwall's first team becoming the second youngest player in their history to make a first team appearance.

Following his debut in December 2021, Lovelace went on to make a further four appearances for the English Championship side.

Zak Lovelace officially joined Rangers on the 4th July 2022 after deciding to leave Millwall. Zak instantly made an impact at Rangers academy looking like a player who could push for the first team due to his power, pace & goalscoring ability for the B team in the Lowland league & UEFA Youth League.



Photo: Rangers FC



Photo: Rangers FC

Zak made his first team debut for the club in the League Cup against Scottish League One side Queen of the South on 30 August 2022.

He made his first Scottish Premiership appearance for Rangers against Old Firm rivals Celtic which isn't a bad game to make his league debut.

By the time the next season rolled around he was attracting interest from clubs in Scotland & England who wanted to take him on loan but the club decided to keep him in house due to injuries & in the end it was a good decision as he went on to make his first start against St Mirren where he was the best player on the pitch until he had to come off injured which will likely rule him out for a few months.

I think the club will look to get Zak on a new long term deal as the potential is for all to see & I believe it's only a matter of time before Zak is a regular in the first team where his value will increase massively which can only be a good thing for Rangers with the trading model that's a big part of our plans moving forward.

Willy Irwin
@spatestonbear2



MY RANGERS 5-A-SIDE



MANAGER

Walter Smith was simply the best. A club legend who helped me win 6 trophies at Rangers.

GOALKEEPER



The unbelievable goalkeeper, Allan McGregor was a leader and great communicator at the back.



DEFENDER

Plenty of running in his legs, Steven Whittaker would get up and down the pitch in my team.

MIDFIELDER



The technical player in my team, Steven Davis was another leader who would ensure high standards.



STRIKER

His passion for football and eye for goal would benefit my team, give him a change and he will score.

STRIKER



Ally McCoist the greatest goalscorer in the clubs history. No brainer for him to lead my attack.

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GALLANTFEWMAG

PLAYER of the MONTH

5 Games

4 Goals



Abdallah Sima



NOVEMBER FIXTURES

HEARTS
SUNDAY 5TH NOVEMBER 2023, 3PM
SCOTTISH LEAGUE CUP - SEMI FINAL
HAMPDEN PARK

SPARTA PRAGUE
THURSDAY 9TH NOVEMBER 2023, 8PM
UEFA EUROPA LEAGUE - GROUP STAGE
IBROX STADIUM

LIVINGSTON
SUNDAY 12TH NOVEMBER 2023, 12PM
SCOTTISH PREMIERSHIP
ALMONDVALE STADIUM

ABERDEEN
SUNDAY 26TH NOVEMBER 2023, 12PM
SCOTTISH PREMIERSHIP
PITTODRIE

ARIS LIMASSOL
THURSDAY 30TH NOVEMBER 2023, 8PM
UEFA EUROPA LEAGUE - GROUP STAGE
IBROX STADIUM