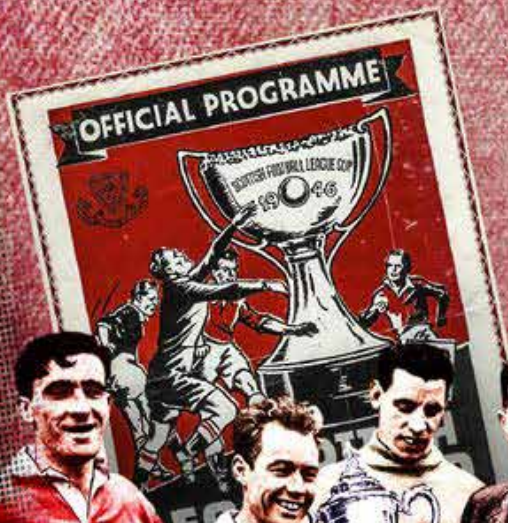




**GREATEST GAMES**

# ABERDEEN

**THE DONS FIFTY  
FINEST MATCHES**



**KEVIN STIRLING**

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**ABERDEEN**

**THE DONS' FIFTY  
FINEST MATCHES**

**KEVIN STIRLING**



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## Aberdeen 0 Celtic 1

21 March 1908  
Scottish Cup semi-final  
Pittodrie Park, Aberdeen  
Attendance: 20,000

### **Aberdeen**

Rab Macfarlane  
Donald Colman  
Jock Hume  
Alex Halkett  
Jim McIntosh  
William Low  
John McDonald  
Jim Muir  
Tom Murray  
Charlie O'Hagan  
Willie Lennie  
*Manager: Jimmy Philip*

### **Celtic**

Davie Adams  
Alex McNair  
Jim Weir  
Jim Young  
Willie Loney  
Jimmy Hay  
Alec Bennett  
Jimmy McMenemy  
Jimmy Quinn  
Peter Somers  
Davie Hamilton  
*Manager: Willie Maley*

'WE KNEW the significance of the game. It was the biggest occasion the club had been involved in since it came into being just five years ago.' The words of Aberdeen legend Donald Colman, the former player, trainer and Scotland international who invented the first dugout in British football.

Colman was looking back on his career in the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* before his benefit game in 1912 as he recalled the Dons' first Scottish Cup semi-final, 'Looking back it was a great occasion and although it ended in disappointment we gave it everything and were unlucky not to take it to a replay. Manager Jimmy Philip was keen to see the club develop and progress and reaching the last four of the Scottish Cup was a landmark for Aberdeen FC. From a personal point of view, I was proud to have played my part in that side. It was a great pity we didn't reach the final as we deserved to.'

After being formed in 1903 following the amalgamation of the three major clubs in the city, Aberdeen, Orion and Victoria United, the current Aberdeen Football Club entered the top division in Scottish football in 1905, a position they have never relinquished. The progression was as much expected as it was surprising. The authorities insisted that any application to join the Scottish leagues

would only be looked upon favourably if the three major clubs in the city joined forces. Following a difficult and prolonged period of negotiating, the new club eventually came into being on 14 April 1903. Those efforts were rewarded with progression in the Scottish Cup in 1908. Gone were the days of heavy defeats in the qualifying rounds when several smaller Aberdeen-based sides were outclassed against more experienced and streetwise opponents. The progress in 1908 perhaps vindicated that the combined strength of the established clubs meant that Aberdeen and the north-east was well represented on the national stage.

Aberdeen progressed to the last four after wins over Albion Rovers, Dundee and Queen's Park. The quarter-final victory over Tayside rivals Dundee was significant. It took three games for the 'stripes' (early reference to the black and gold strip) to prevail in a second replay that was played at Hampden Park. The venue of course was the national stadium in Glasgow and attracted interest in the west with two east-coast teams playing. Willie Lennie had been a doubt and the train journey south, as the Dons' party were housed within their own carriage, would not be beneficial for the Aberdeen winger. Lennie played and scored a sensational goal in 75 minutes as Aberdeen went on to win 3-1. Looking back this result proved significant in terms of Aberdeen showing up well on a national stage. There was also the fact that one of the most vociferous backers of Aberdeen's bid to gain admission to the Scottish leagues was the Dens Park club. Dundee had sent letters to the authorities claiming that professional football should be taken to the Aberdeen area and that the resources and supporter base would make Aberdeen a great asset to the mainstream of Scottish football.

Semi-finals were not played at a neutral venue until 1912. Celtic arrived at Pittodrie as cup holders and had gained a reputation for being a tough, uncompromising side that had an impressive record in the Scottish Cup, against opponents who were in uncharted territory.

On the eve of the game both sets of players and officials were treated to a performance at the Palace Theatre in Aberdeen. Celtic were staying at the old Murtle Hydro.



The club directors anticipated a record crowd, such was the interest in the tie. In advance of the game parts of the ground were built up to accommodate the large crowd that was expected. Pittodrie regulars were confident their side could overcome the Glasgow outfit and reach their first Scottish Cup Final. Football was the game of the working man, but it was reported in the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* that the Celtic tie attracted 'hundreds of occasional patrons, most who had never seen a first-class game. Elderly gentlemen, clergy, lawyers, doctors, merchants and so on; ladies old and young, many of them fashionably attired and wafting choice perfumes around.'

It was reported that special trains from all over Scotland brought spectators to the Granite City. Two from Glasgow conveyed a large travelling support for Celtic while others also arrived from Montrose, Dundee and Edinburgh, such was the interest in the game. The gates of Pittodrie were opened at 2pm, almost two hours before kick-off. The Pittodrie enclosure and stand was full of around 12,000 within that area and by 3.30pm the rest of the ground was packed as more than 20,000 filled every vantage point.

The First Aberdeenshire Royal Engineers pipe band entertained the huge crowd ahead of referee Ferguson from Falkirk coming on to the field to inspect the playing surface. Shortly after it was the black and gold of Aberdeen that took to the field as they left the Pittodrie pavilion to rousing cheers from the home support. Several minutes later Celtic, in their green and white strips, entered the fray to more muted calls from their own support.

Aberdeen won the toss and played towards the sea in the first half. Conditions were near perfect, and it was noted that several of the Celtic players were of a 'burly' nature. Celtic were first to attack in the opening minutes, but Jimmy Quinn's effort was blocked by Colman. Aberdeen responded when Jock Hume set up winger Willie Lennie, but he could not get the better of Young. There was little to choose between the teams in what were tense opening exchanges although Lennie looked the more likely for Aberdeen as did Quinn for the visitors. Indeed, it soon became clear that Quinn, the Celtic centre-forward, was their most dangerous threat and after the Aberdeen keeper saved from a 20-yard effort the defenders looked to close

the dangerman down at every opportunity. On one occasion Wilf Low went in hard on Quinn, who jumped clear of the challenge. Before half-time Quinn was again in the wars as he was challenged heavily by Aberdeen keeper Macfarlane, the Celtic player falling to the ground clutching his head. Donald Colman was showing all his experience as he rallied the home defence, bringing an assured calm to proceedings. Aberdeen were attacking on occasion with their threat coming down the left where the Charlie O'Hagan and Lennie combination almost brought the opening goal. O'Hagan and Lennie were the first capped players for Aberdeen. O'Hagan was a regular in the Ireland side while Lennie became the first Aberdeen player to play for Scotland in 1908.

The home side were lucky not to concede when a rare slip by Macfarlane saw the ball fall to Somers, whose effort went over the bar. It was a reprieve for Aberdeen at that point as on reflection it was the visitors who were creating the better opportunities. Alex Halkett then set up Murray but his effort from 15 yards was saved by Adams. Some of the Celtic tactics were not to the supporters' liking, such was their robust approach to the game. The referee was hardly doing the Dons any favours: on one occasion when O'Hagan remonstrated after being fouled no fewer than six times in five minutes the official threatened to send the Irish international off!

The first half was a nervous affair as both sides looked to gain what would almost certainly be a crucial advantage. Aberdeen gave little away at home and Celtic proved to be an excellent side on the road. The stage was set for an intriguing second half. Aberdeen centre-half Wilf Low had been the outstanding player in that first period. Latterly known as the 'Laughing Cavalier', Low was Aberdeen-born and as hard as the city's granite. He would later join Newcastle and played for Scotland on five occasions. Low remained on the payroll at Newcastle as he took over the position of head groundsman after retiring from playing.

Aberdeen opened the second half on the offensive when O'Hagan took advantage of a mistake by McNair, but his effort went wide. Halkett then tried his luck from long range when he should have set up Lennie, who was clear in on the Celtic goal. The game was

turning more physical with hard 'charges' from both sides resulting in some heavy challenges. Celtic gradually fell back and became more defensive as Aberdeen kept up the pressure. For a 15-minute period in the second half Aberdeen dominated the tie and passed up several chances that would have surely taken the Black and Golds through to their first cup final. Lennie, Murray and McDonald all came close to scoring as Celtic defended in depth. Then Low went upfield and came close with a fierce drive from outside the penalty area. At this point reference was made to the crowd producing 'an almost continuous roar of encouragement' as Aberdeen threw everything at Celtic.

Seven minutes from time a rare Celtic attack resulted in a corner. It was McMenemy who went upfield and his header from that cross deceived Aberdeen keeper Macfarlane to give Celtic an undeserved lead. Aberdeen responded with a late rally and continued pressing up until the final minute but they just came up short. The last chance came from a McDonald corner that caused mayhem in the Celtic defence but as the ball ended up on top of the net the final whistle sounded moments later.

The consensus afterwards was that Aberdeen were desperately unlucky not to at least take the tie to a replay and that referee Ferguson found few friends in the city after some poor decisions.

The total gate money amounted to £586 (19,294 paying at the turnstiles). The total receipts from the grandstand was £129. That included season ticket holders and ladies, who were admitted free and estimated to amount to about 1,500 in number. Such was the interest in attending matches at Pittodrie that the club decided that ladies would no longer be admitted free of charge as of the following season.

The Celtic party departed Aberdeen station at 7pm from the East Dock platform. However, their exit from Pittodrie was anything but cordial. It was reported that the Celtic players, officials and referee were pelted with stones as they left the field. As local officials took steps to prevent this, it proved futile. The local press was sympathetic to the club, but Aberdeen were braced for further action from the authorities.

Manager Jimmy Philip was never slow in confronting the authorities. On one occasion Philip proposed the very first foreign

tour by a Scottish international team, informing the authorities that he would foot the bill if there was a loss. Philip did, however, take Aberdeen to Bohemia, Moravia and Poland in the summer of 1911, the club's first overseas tour. He had been a driving force behind the club's efforts to gain admission to the Scottish leagues and was often lobbying other member clubs to get their support. This was essential as the fate of any club hoping to gain admission to league football was down to members. Philip was Aberdeen-born and appointed in a part-time role in 1903. A wood turner by trade, he was also a first-class referee and was invited to officiate at the Olympic Games of 1912 in Stockholm.

The defeat to Celtic was the start of a difficult period for Aberdeen against the Glasgow club in the Scottish Cup. A further defeat, this time at Celtic Park in 1911 at the same semi-final stage, was only avenged by a first Scottish Cup success over Celtic in 1935.

In the meantime Aberdeen's progress to the latter stages was an indication they were progressing in the right way. A sustained challenge for the league championship followed three years later and with three of their players now established internationals, the foundations were set for establishing the club as a major force in Scottish football.

However, events on 28 June 1914 in Sarajevo would bring conflict in Europe that was to bring an end to football for several years.