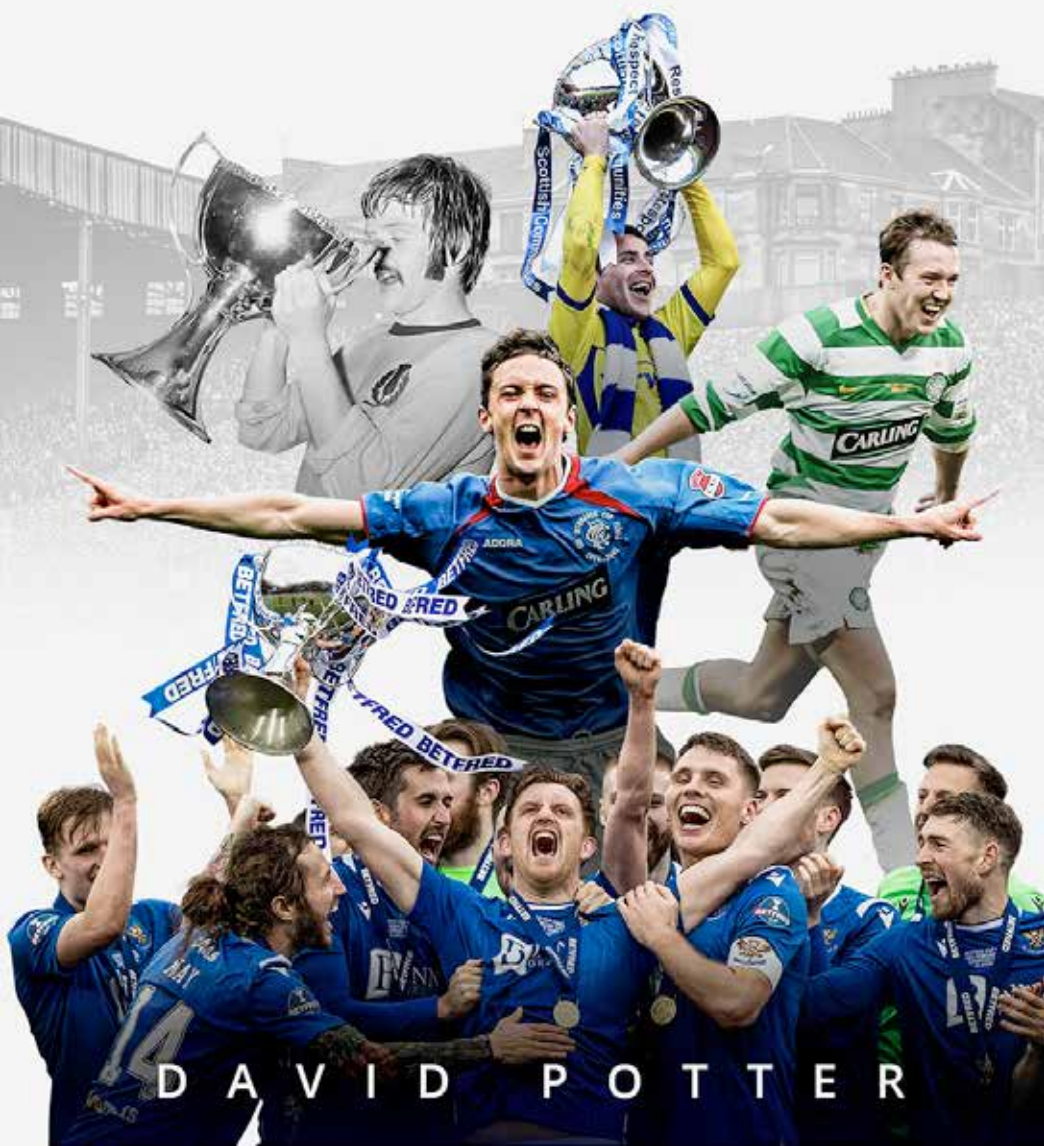


THE SCOTTISH LEAGUE CUP

75 YEARS
1946 - 2021



DAVID POTTER

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D A V I D P O T T E R



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CHAPTER ONE

THE NEWCOMER
ON THE BLOCK

1946–1949

SEASON 1946/47 was a remarkable one, as was always likely to be the case after the end of the major global conflict. The map of Europe had been redrawn and there was no permanent guarantee of peace. Our erstwhile Allies in the Soviet Union were proving no easier to deal with in certain matters than the late regime in Germany. But at least there was some temporary peace, although various parts of the world like Germany itself, the Middle East and India (funnily enough, not Ireland this time) were threatening trouble.

Worse still, according to some newspapers, was the fact that there was now a Labour Government with a huge majority, and a vigorous, determined one at that. The middle classes, we were led to believe, were throwing their arms up in despair and wondering whether the war had been worth it since the working classes voted for a Labour Government, and the middle classes were paying the price. Newspapers

and Churchill himself predicted, even suggested, wholesale emigration! It was laughable.

What was really happening was that, for the first time ever, the Government cared about its people. Improvements, revolutionary ones, in health, housing, education and all the important things in life would soon be on their way. It would be true to say that there was by 1946 no immediate sign of any such changes, but a revolution was indeed happening, a revolution all the more powerful and potent because it happened without any violence or bloodshed, and a revolution that was tacitly accepted by its opponents. When Winston Churchill returned to power in 1951, he emphatically did not dismantle the National Health Service. Indeed, the old warlord showed his kinder, more pragmatic side (he had, of course, at one time been a Liberal) by saying things like ‘I can think of no better investment for the future than putting milk into babies.’ However, conditions were still hard for most people in 1946, not least those whose principal breadwinner had failed to return from the war. Failure to return from the war was not always due to being a military casualty. That, at least, was easier dealt with than the many cases of those who had found themselves a new lady in Italy, Austria or even England. But everyone had a job now, and such was the need for industrial recovery that overtime was frequently offered and everyone’s standard of living began to rise slowly but steadily. Dole queues were a thing of the past. Rationing remained for a few years, but gradually reduced in its intensity as more and more commodities became available.

There was also, as had happened in the early 1920s, a certain feeling that it was great to be alive and that life was for the living. Theatre and cinema, both of which flourished

during the war, now began to enjoy even more of a boost and so did football to a very large extent, particularly now that unofficial football was over and 1946/47 was to be a real season with the return of full international games, the Scottish League, the Scottish Cup and the newcomer on the block, the Scottish League Cup.

In 1946, there were only 30 teams in the top two divisions of the Scottish League: 16 in Division A and only 14 in Division B. Why they did not make it 16 in both is one of those mysterious decisions that the historian cannot understand. The newspapers at the time cannot understand it either, wondering why respectable teams like Forfar Athletic and East Stirlingshire, for example, were denied admission to Division B when there seemed to be places available and had to play against reserve teams in Division C.

‘There are things that a feller just can’t understand,’ says a well-known character in *The Pickwick Papers*, but it meant that for the new Scottish League Cup, there were to be eight sections. Now 32 would have neatly divided everyone into eight sections of four, but as it was, there were two sections of three each. Sensibly, the Division A teams had their sections and Division B had theirs. The winners would then join the quarter-finals and from then on it would be a straight knockout.

The first-ever games in the Scottish League Cup were played on Saturday, 21 September 1946, and then sectional games were played on the next five Saturdays. No one had floodlights in those days and midweek football would only really have been possible in the month of August, but even then there was a certain discouragement from the Government who feared that a midweek fixture might encourage absenteeism

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from the factories and the mines where production was so necessary for the country's recovery. Changed days indeed from when there were large groups of men hanging around street corners with nothing to do!

The new tournament proved an instant success with large crowds at all games, over 40,000, for example, at Easter Road to see Hibs beat Celtic 4-2. The Scottish League Cup could be a psychological good; perhaps a team who had started the League programme badly might have a chance in a whole new tournament, but the *Glasgow Herald* is distressed to have to report that all the Glasgow teams other than Rangers (who beat St Mirren 4-0) were off to a bad start in the new competition.

The sectional format proved to be a great success with most of the groups going to the last day. Rangers were an exception, winning all their games against St Mirren, Morton and Queen's Park, as indeed were Dundee who comfortably beat Raith Rovers and Stenhousemuir in their three-team section. They were joined in the quarter-finals by Hibs, Hearts, Aberdeen, Dundee United, East Fife and Airdrie. Interestingly, patterns were set very early in this competition. East Fife, who were to make their name in this competition in future years, duly qualified whereas Celtic, who would not win the tournament in its first decade, lost out to Hibs and failed to qualify.

The tournament now went into hibernation as it were until early March. No games could have been played in February in any case; February 1947 sent a shiver down the spine of all those who lived through it for many years afterwards, as it probably was the worst winter of them all. Interestingly, only a few crackpots wrote letters to newspapers blaming it all on

the bombs dropped on Japan; nowadays it would have been the fault of man and his cynical indifference to the welfare of the planet. Carbon footprints and fossil fuels would have been execrated. In 1947, more thought it was because God was unhappy about a Labour Government!

By 1 March, when the first legs of the quarter-finals were scheduled, the ferocity of the weather had abated slightly – or, more accurately, Scotland learned how to cope with it – but even so, Herculean efforts were needed to prepare pitches at Broomfield, Ibrox, Tynecastle and Dens Park with German prisoners of war on occasion drafted in to clear the snow. This strikes the modern eye as not being a million miles away from slave labour, but the end result was successful and the four games went ahead with the Germans allowed to watch the games for nothing! Most of them would, in any case, be repatriated by the summer, we are glad to report.

It had been decreed that a Division A team would play a Division B side. The second legs were played on Wednesday, 5 March with a 4pm kick-off in most cases. Although the Division B sides had all done well in the first legs, the Division A sides all won through in the end. Rangers did the business against a plucky Dundee United at Dens Park (Tannadice being deemed unsuitable for a large crowd); Hearts, who had lost to East Fife on Saturday, came good at Methil to win 5-3 on aggregate; Aberdeen got the better of Dundee at Pittodrie, and the game at Easter Road eventually saw a goal scored by Hibs against Airdrie.

This last game is a veritable collector's item in Scottish football history. These two teams had drawn 4-4 at Broomfield on Saturday, but this game had to invoke the rule which stated that if the teams finished level on aggregate,

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another 20 minutes extra time had to be played. If still no decision was reached, they played on, ten minutes each way, until someone could score what would now be called a golden goal. It must have been dark before Willie Finnigan scored the decisive goal for Hibs on a heavily sanded pitch after a total of 35 minutes of extra time! It was Scottish football's longest-ever match, before 22,000 spectators who had a clear view of the moon as a frost began to come down. No one had, as yet, thought up the idea of a penalty shoot-out!

Those who might have wished to see an Edinburgh derby in the first-ever Scottish League Cup Final were to be bitterly disappointed on 22 March when the semi-finals were played. Jack Harkness in the *Sunday Post* makes an odd reference to Rangers enjoying 'real grass under their feet' (the snow and ice having departed) as they beat Hibs 3-1 in front of an astonishing crowd of 125,154 at Hampden. The *Glasgow Herald*, never a Rangers supporting newspaper, is less than totally impressed with a bad foul committed by Torry Gillick on Sammy Kean which led to loads of retaliatory fouls by Hibs and spoiled the game. Hibs had already put Rangers out of the Scottish Cup and there was not a little 'previous' here.

A 125,154 crowd was probably the largest that either side had played before in their history and showed what an instant success the Scottish League Cup had become. It also showed the sheer appetite for football that consumed Scotland in those days. A considerably smaller but still substantial crowd (36,210) was at Easter Road to see Aberdeen beat Hearts by the remarkable score of 6-2. It was 2-2 at half-time, but then George Hamilton inspired Aberdeen to a further four goals.

The first-ever Scottish League Cup Final was thus between Rangers and Aberdeen, the two teams who had contested the

previous year's unofficial Southern League Cup trophy. A huge crowd was expected for the final on 5 April. Aberdeen had more or less emptied itself for the Scottish Cup Final of 1937, their first-ever cup final, and a similar phenomenon was expected here. Aberdeen would actually make it to the Scottish Cup Final in 1947 too, meaning that the traditionally parsimonious Aberdonians would have to make two trips to Glasgow to see their favourites in cup finals!

Aberdeen travelled down on the Friday and stayed at Largs. In an interesting comment on social habits of the late 1940s, they spent the night in the premises of a local junior football team at a whist drive! This was after they had had a light training session in the afternoon on a public park. Life was a great deal more couthy and simple in those days, was it not?

Easter weekend was 5 April 1947 and although Easter was not a holiday in Scotland, people thought that this game might see Hampden's record attendance given the crowd that turned up for the semi-final between Rangers and Hibs and the ability of Aberdeen (sadly maintained in future years) to persuade more supporters to attend a cup final at Hampden in Glasgow than they could entice to Pittodrie for a league game. That a world record was not established that day was due to nothing other than the weather, for the rain was torrential and there was a cruel wind blowing from the Mount Florida end to the King's Park end of the ground. Many supporters, even those who had bought tickets and even some of those who had travelled from Aberdeen, opted to spend the afternoon in one of Glasgow's department stores or even a café. Others stayed at home and listened to the game on the radio but, even given the foul conditions, a

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remarkable 83,684 turned up to watch the game on the uncovered terraces.

The pitch might not have survived an inspection today, with puddles clearly seen in several areas of the playing field. Referee Bobby Calder of Rutherglen (in later years, ironically, to become a scout for Aberdeen) may have been under pressure from above to get the game played, but whether he was or not, the game went ahead and no one criticised him for his decision. Aberdeen fans, however, had cause to blame captain Frank Dunlop.

Dunlop won the toss and opted to play against the wind and the rain in the first half. The thinking was that if Aberdeen could hold them until half-time, they would then have the advantage of the conditions in the second half when Rangers were tiring. All this depended on Aberdeen having a good first half which, frankly, they didn't. Aberdeen's nervous left-winger Willie McCall fluffed a couple of early chances, but Rangers were far more clinical and scored through Torry Gillick and Billy Williamson. Even then, at 0-2 down, the Dons did not feel entirely out of it until just before half-time Jimmy Duncanson scored what proved to be the killer. The same player then scored early in the second half against the wind and rain, and Rangers' defence (not yet called the 'Iron Curtain', for Churchill had yet to make his famous speech about the Soviet Union's occupation of half of Europe) was unyielding, and the game finished Rangers 4 Aberdeen 0.

The teams were:

Rangers: Brown, Young and Shaw, McColl, Woodburn and Rae, Rutherford, Gillick, Williamson, Thornton and Duncanson

Aberdeen: Johnstone, Cooper and McKenna, McLaughlin, Dunlop and Taylor, Harris, Hamilton, Williams, Baird and McCall

It was a good win for Willie Struth's Rangers who also won the Scottish League that year, but Aberdeen would have more than ample compensation a fortnight later when they returned to Hampden to beat Hibs in the Scottish Cup Final. But the big winner was the Scottish League Cup itself. Looked upon with a little suspicion by the conservative elements of Scottish football at the start of the season, it had now clearly established itself on the Scottish scene and would be, from now, an integral part of the Scottish season.

If one had had to choose a winner of the second Scottish League Cup, one would have taken a long time before coming up with East Fife. East Fife were in Division B, but then again their greatest successes had been when they were in the lower tier. In 1927, in the aftermath of the General Strike which devastated the community of Methil and Buckhaven, East Fife reached the final of the Scottish Cup; then in 1938 when the war clouds were gathering ominously, they went one better and won the trophy. Now in the best era of their existence, they would win the Scottish League Cup three times in seven years, winning the trophy long before Celtic, Hibs, Hearts or Aberdeen did. The old Bayview stadium is now built over and the club plays closer to the Firth of Forth, where the waves seem to threaten on a wild day. The area, one would have to say, is run-down with more than its fair share of social problems. But that is now. In the late 1940s and 1950s the area was vibrant, active and bustling, with the area living up to its motto of Carbone Carbasoque (by coal and canvas), the twin sources of local wealth, namely coal and shipping.

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The country needed coal and was now prepared to pay miners a decent wage to get it. The mines had been nationalised so the Fife miners were now working for the National Coal Board rather than the Wemyss family, whom they heartily and with cause detested. Accidents were still distressingly frequent, as were the lung and other diseases associated with coal mining, but there was now the feeling that things were getting better and that miners were now valued as much-needed workers rather than in their pre-war condition, something that was little better than wage slavery.

And their team had appointed a good manager in James Scotland Symon, commonly known as Scot. He had already made his mark on Scottish society by having played for Scotland at both football and cricket, and his football career had included spells with Dundee, Portsmouth and Rangers. Intelligent, thoughtful and articulate, occasionally considered aloof and snobby, Symon would produce a good collection of players for the Fifers and develop a winning mentality.

For season 1947/48, the Scottish League Cup showed at least two improvements from the previous year. One was that, as there were now 32 teams in the Scottish League Divisions A and B, there were now eight groups of four teams; the other was that it was decided that the tournament would be over and done with by the end of October when the weather was still reasonably good.

Midweek football was still not really encouraged all that much and the six matches in each section were played on the first six Saturdays of the season beginning on 9 August. The draw put Rangers and Celtic in the same section, Hearts and Hibs in another. Celtic beat Rangers once, but Rangers won through, whereas in Edinburgh, Hearts beat Hibs twice,

something that was surprising in the context of the season in which Hibs would win the League. Aberdeen also qualified by the expedient beating of Queen of the South 9-0 on the final Saturday whereas their rivals Motherwell could only put three past St Mirren. They were joined in the quarter-finals by Falkirk, Hamilton Academical, East Fife, Stenhousemuir and Leith Athletic, the last named two earning some welcome cash by doing so.

Unlike 1946/47, the quarter-finals were not two-legged affairs and thus 27 September saw the four ties being played. Aberdeen duly beat Leith Athletic and Rangers won through 2-0 against Stenhousemuir, although the newspapers are united in giving praise to the Warriors for their brave performance. The other two games went to extra time with Falkirk eventually getting the better of Hamilton Accies, but the performance of the round was East Fife's 4-3 win over Hearts after extra time. Jack Harkness of the *Sunday Post*, himself an ex-goalkeeper of Hearts, was full of praise for East Fife, particularly the half-back line of Philp, Finlay and Aitken (Aitken had been a doubtful starter) which controlled the game throughout.

A crowd of 27,000 saw this thrilling game in which Hearts went ahead, but then East Fife scored twice and looked to be on the edge of glory until Hearts equalised at the death to take the game to extra time. Hearts then went ahead and that looked as if it were the end of the matter, but Tommy Adams scored direct from a corner kick and then rounded a couple of defenders to prod home the winner. Jack Harkness was very impressed by Scot Symon who, while everyone else was standing on their feet cheering at the end, simply slipped away as if to say, 'Well, that's that!'

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The *Aberdeen Press and Journal* was happy with their team's draw in the semi-final when they came out of the bag against East Fife. The writer pointed to the fact that the final could be the third consecutive year (counting the unofficial Southern League Cup Final of May 1946) that Aberdeen played Rangers in the final, assuming that Aberdeen would beat East Fife at Dens Park and Rangers would do likewise over Falkirk at Hampden. But 11 October 1947 was to confound them all.

The bookmakers offered odds of 29/1 against an East Fife v Falkirk final, but that is precisely what happened. Rangers were probably guilty of complacency against Falkirk and their fans were similarly over-confident, for only 44,000 turned up at Hampden to see Archie Aikman score the only goal of the game for Falkirk, while the 33,000 at Dens Park looked on in amazement as Aberdeen spurned chance after chance to score and Henry Morris, himself a Dundonian, scored the only goal of the game for East Fife. The writer of the *Dundee Courier* was very impressed when the whole East Fife party (wives and even mothers as well) went out for tea afterwards to the Val d'Or restaurant: 'It was a real family party and there was great rejoicing.'

The *Falkirk Herald* was similarly upbeat about the performance of their team. Both teams in the final had won the Scottish Cup once each, although Falkirk's triumph was as far back as 1913, and for the next two weeks the conversation in both Methil and Falkirk centred on little other than the prospects of their respective teams. Although the second half was to be on the radio with Peter Thomson doing the commentating, the national newspapers encouraged as many people as possible to go along to Hampden to see the game, 'even, if necessary, forsaking your own team for one Saturday, at least.'

Special trains brought spectators from both towns to Hampden. In the event, a creditable 53,000 turned up, but they were very disappointed to see a goalless draw in which both goalkeepers, John Niven and Jerry Dawson, excelled. The other players were all 'too nervy' according to the *Dundee Courier* and play only reached a high standard in the latter stages. East Fife, who would have won on corners if they had been counted, made an effort to have the replayed final played at Tynecastle. It was a sensible suggestion and would have been equidistant for both teams, but it would have meant an all-ticket final and, as the game was scheduled for next Saturday, 1 November, there would have been little time to print and distribute the briefs. So Hampden Park it was once again.

This time the attendance had fallen to 31,000 (still not bad for two provincial teams) but the East Fife fans saw a great performance by their team who won the second Scottish League Cup with a marvellous 4-1 victory.

The teams were:

East Fife: Niven, Laird and Stewart, Philip, Finlay and Aitken, Adams, D Davidson, Morris, J Davidson and Duncan

Falkirk: J Dawson, Whyte and McPhie, Bolt, Henderson and Gallacher, Fiddes, Alison, Aikman, Henderson and K Dawson

Referee: Mr P Craigmyle, Aberdeen

Falkirk lost an early goal thanks to a bad goalkeeping error by Jerry Dawson, a man who had excelled for Rangers in the past but whose best days were clearly behind him. He was also partly to blame for at least one of the others, as Tommy Adams scored one and Davie Duncan three with only one

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goal in reply from Archie Aikman. It was a well-taken goal by the Falkirk centre-forward but there was little else for the Bairns to cheer about.

The *Dundee Courier* singles out four Fifers for fine performances and being responsible for bringing the League Cup back to Methil. In the first place there was Davie Duncan for his three well-taken goals and his throw-ins (!) which usually split the defence, Sammy Stewart at left-back was good enough to be chosen for Scotland, *The Courier* thought, and even more worthy of a cap was left-half George 'Dod' Aitken, while the best man on the park was the wing wizard Tommy Adams, whose wife was even quoted as saying how delighted she was that he now had a medal to show for his efforts.

Another story carried in *The Courier* says a great deal about the professionalism of Scot Symon, even at the greatest moment of his career so far. The players had been presented with the now-famous three-handled trophy on the field of play. They then disappeared into the dressing-room along with manager Scot Symon. Symon then locked the door, even excluding a couple of East Fife directors who had a bottle of champagne to celebrate! It was his own way of stating that the dressing room, even in this most euphoric of moments, belonged to the manager and players. Once they had been showered and dressed, Symon would then allow them to meet their adoring public.

The adoring public was also well out in strength at Bayview that evening even in spite of the heavy rain as the League Cup was shown to all who assembled, some of whom were unashamedly in tears at what had come to pass. It was a fine day for the brave little team from one of the most heavily

industrial parts of the Kingdom of Fife. It meant also that part of the world could enjoy its Christmas and New Year, safe in the knowledge they had, once again, lifted a Scottish trophy from the second tier of the Scottish League. Not that they were going to be in the second tier for long, because they used this triumph as a springboard for winning Division B at the end of the 1947/48 season.

It was an important stage in the career of Scot Symon. He was far from the conventional idea of a football manager – the foul-mouthed, aggressive, prickly stereotype that was common even in the 1940s. No, he was always well dressed, sophisticated, dignified, suave almost and a man who was polite but never ever too friendly to anyone. His career had a long way to run yet, but for the moment, he was the man who was building East Fife to be a major force in Scottish football.

The other honours would be won by Hibs and Rangers that year, Hibs winning the Scottish League for the first time since 1903 and Rangers beating Morton in the final of the Scottish Cup, but the Scottish League Cup had clearly established itself as a credible trophy. The one downside of the tournament (and this became more pronounced as the league expanded to include more teams) was the effect that it had on regional tournaments like the Glasgow Cup, the Stirlingshire Cup and the Forfarshire Cup, for example. Such tournaments now began slowly to decline in importance as the Scottish League Cup continued its inexorable rise.

As is often the case, success is infectious, and 1948/49 was a great year for East Fife's local rivals Raith Rovers. Raith had been a great side in the early 1920s but had disappeared from prominence almost as quickly as they had risen and the 1930s had been a poor decade. But now under a crusty character

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called Bert Herdman (who had never played the game at a professional level but had arisen from the Supporters' Association of Raith Rovers), a man with a dreadful stammer but a grim determination, a foul tongue and a fine sense of humour, they had picked up a few good players like Andy Young, Willie McNaught and Willie Penman. Inspired by the success of their neighbours along the coast, Raith Rovers made an impact on the Scottish scene in 1949.

They would win Division B at the end of the season and they would also have a very good run in the Scottish League Cup, but without the triumph at the end that East Fife had enjoyed the previous season. The League Cup started in September this year, which meant that the final could not really be played until the spring. (Unlike 1972, 1973, 1982, 2018 and 2019 for example, they did not make the questionable decision to play the final in December!) Once again, the tournament proved a winner in terms of exciting games and good attendances.

The group which caused the greatest interest was the one in which Rangers, Celtic and Hibs were all involved. For a while Celtic had the upper hand but, once again in this competition, the Parkhead side pressed the self-destruct button to lose to Rangers on the last Saturday at Ibrox in a game watched by, of all people, Eamon de Valera, the Irish patriot and politician. He had been (incredibly) invited by Rangers! Rangers were joined by Dundee, East Fife, Hamilton, Airdrie, Alloa, St Mirren and Raith Rovers. The section involving St Mirren, Hearts, Third Lanark and Morton was a fascinating one, for each of the four teams won two, drew two and lost two! They all had six points, and goal average had to be deployed to settle the winner with St Mirren just edging it over Aberdeen by :33 of a goal.

All exciting stuff, and the tournament organisers did everyone a favour by deciding against a two-legged format for the quarter-finals. The ties were set for 30 October and included a mouth-watering Fife derby at Stark's Park between Raith Rovers and East Fife. An all-ticket crowd of 24,000 crammed into Stark's Park to see a thrilling, high-scoring derby in which Raith led 3-0 at half-time, Henry Morris then scored a hat-trick for East Fife, but in the middle of it Willie Penman had scored for Raith – 4-3 – and then in a lung-bursting climax which brought the whole stand on its feet, Francis Joyner scored a spectacular goal to make it 5-3 for the home side.

It was by some distance the best tie of the round, and *The Courier* does not go too far overboard when it says that it was 'the best game in Raith Rovers history'. Elsewhere, only Rangers qualified for the semi-finals with a lacklustre 1-0 win over St Mirren, while Dundee needed a replay to beat Alloa after a shocking first game at Dens Park. Hamilton Accies needed three bites of the cherry to get the better of their Lanarkshire rivals Airdrie, the three games not doing any harm at all to the coffers of both clubs, as the cynics were not slow to point out.

The Scottish League was rightly castigated for playing the semi-finals of a major tournament on the date of 20 November, a day of ferocious wind and rain. Attendances were poor: 50,996 at Hampden to see Rangers v Dundee and a mere 16,751 at Celtic Park to see Raith Rovers take on Hamilton. By the standards of the time these were poor and, on a better day a month or so earlier perhaps, one might have expected to have seen both these attendances doubled.

The day was not without its comic touches, nevertheless. A bus load of Dundee fans who had never been to Hampden

before arrived uncomfortably close to kick-off time, parked on some waste ground and dashed to the ground. They had paid their money and were in the ground before they realised that they had gone to nearby Cathkin and were watching Third Lanark v Celtic! Even more bizarre was what happened at the kick-off at Hampden. Rangers won the toss, sensibly chose to play with the wind, and then took the kick-off. Neither Jock Shaw, the Rangers captain, nor Bobby Ancell, the Dundee captain, nor the referee, Mr Livingstone, noticed the error until some journalist at half-time asked the question why Dundee, who had apparently won the toss, chose to play against the wind. By then, it was too late to do anything about it, and it was certainly too late for Dundee to rescue the game.

Eddie Rutherford, Ian McColl and Jimmy Duncanson had all scored within the first ten minutes and Willie Thornton scored before the half-hour mark. 'Job done' seemed to be the feeling of the Rangers team and for the rest of the first half, and all the second half, the Iron Curtain descended with a vengeance. Dundee, always a good ball-playing team, managed to string together a few passes and even earned a penalty late in the game to make the score 4-1, but by that time the crowd, even the Rangers crowd, had decided that enough was enough and that it was time to go home and get out of the incessant rain which drenched the open terraces of Hampden.

Over at Parkhead, the rain was just as bad and most of the 16,000 crowd sheltered under the somewhat porous roof of what a Celtic supporter who had served in the Far East in the war had now christened 'the Jungle'. The fare on offer there was generally admitted, even in Raith Rovers sources, to have been poor but goals from Jimmy Ellis before half-

time and Willie Penman soon after were enough to see the Kirkcaldy side through to the second national cup final in their history.

It's a long time from 20 November until 12 March, and it may be that a great deal of interest in the tournament had gone over the winter. Or it may be that Rangers and their supporters, going strongly in the other tournaments as well, thought that there would be no contest against the Division B side, but for whatever reason, the authorities were disappointed to see a crowd of only 57,450 there on a fine, sunny spring day.

Certainly, there does not seem to have been any lack of interest from Kirkcaldy with four special trains laid on and some enthusiasts even planning to cycle to Glasgow. The town was agog with excitement for days before, with one local businessman offering to commission a replica of the Scottish League Cup for each player if they won. Not only that, but the supporters' club had presented the Rovers with a special set of red jerseys for the game so as not to clash with Rangers. This was more of a gift than it sounds, for clothes were still rationed in 1949.

The reason for the disappointing crowd may have, one suspects, more to do with some kind of protest from the Rangers supporters themselves at the Iron Curtain defensive tactics. It was certainly efficient and won games for the Ibrox side, but those who had seen Alan Morton and Tommy Cairns in years gone by expected more entertainment. Almost two years previously, Winston Churchill had said, 'From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an Iron Curtain has descended across the continent.' He was of course referring to the Soviet Union, but the phrase was now freely used to describe prickly dance-hall attendants, less than totally

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co-operative ladies on a night out, and now the niggardly Rangers defence of Young, Shaw, Woodburn and Cox.

The teams were:

Rangers: Brown, Young and Shaw, McColl, Woodburn and Cox, Gillick, Paton, Thornton, Duncanson and Rutherford

Raith Rovers: Westland, McLure and McNaught, Young, Colville and Leigh, Maule, Collins, Penman, Brady and Joyner

Referee: Mr WG Livingstone, Glasgow

Both teams were without key men. Rangers lacked Willie Waddell (the Deedle, as he was called) and Torry Gillick was brought back, whereas for Raith Rovers, young Andy Leigh, who had only played a few games for Raith Rovers, discovered only on the morning of the game at the Kenilworth Hotel that Ernie Till had called off injured and that he was playing. To calm his nerves, he and his father went for a walk round Glasgow and got back to the hotel to discover that the bus had gone. He and his father then had to commission a taxi (an astonishingly extravagant and expensive experience in 1949) to get him to Hampden in time for kick-off.

Rangers won 2-0, but that was not anything like the full story. The first half was all Raith Rovers with only Bobby Brown in the Rangers goal keeping them out. Near the end of the first half, with the scores still level, came the moment which some veteran Raith Rovers supporters recall to this very day and which Willie Penman himself would regale admirers with for years. He seemed to take about three steps forward to pick up a Collins cross-field pass and to hammer home a brilliant goal, only to find that a linesman's flag was up and that Mr Livingstone was disallowing the goal. The press, with

surprising unanimity and belying the common perception that they always support Rangers, declared the goal was legitimate and it remains a pity that this was 1949, not the 21st century, where we could have seen for certain with the benefit of TV. Storms of boos rang round the ground, but that made no difference.

The League Cup was won and lost in the early part of the second half when Willie Thornton made two goals, one for the indolent and moody Torry Gillick to score and the other for Willie Paton. And yet, as Rangers retreated into their shell yet again, the gallant Division B Raith Rovers kept at them with Penman and Collins both coming close on several occasions. *The Courier* felt that Raith Rovers should have had at least two penalties; one when the ubiquitous and hard-working Andy Young was held when about to shoot, the other was when Penman was pushed off the ball. Later on he was downed by goalkeeper Brown (normally a very gentlemanly and sporting character) as well in a tackle which might nowadays have earned the goalkeeper a red card. The game finished with Raith Rovers still on top but Rangers 2-0 winners!

It was difficult for many years afterwards to persuade Kirkcaldy people that the ‘All referees favour Rangers’ mantra is not true and even some Rangers supporters were embarrassed enough to stay silent during the presentation of the trophy. It was presented on the field by Mr Scott, the President of Queen’s Park. Some cries of ‘Shame!’ were heard coming from the Raith Rovers fans and the sizeable neutral support. The writer of *The Sunday Post* sympathises while the *Glasgow Herald* damns Rangers with faint praise and singles out Torry Gillick for a ‘disinclination to exert himself’.

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But ‘facts are chieles that winnae ding’ says Robert Burns. Rangers had won the League Cup for the second time in three years. They would win the first-ever treble that year, but they never came closer to losing it than they did that day against Raith Rovers. Raith Rovers would be compensated with the Division B championship, but it would be a long time before they ever saw another League Cup Final. Funnily enough, Rangers too would now go through a barren period in this competition for the next decade or so.

The 1949/50 Scottish League Cup was dominated by the Kingdom of Fife, and yet it was a strange one as well, for Raith Rovers, the heroes of last year’s competition, were the only Fife team who did not make it to the quarter-finals. They had had the misfortune to be drawn in the same section as East Fife and Hearts. This section certainly yielded much excitement and generated high income with the large crowds but it was East Fife who won through, dropping only one point, and that was to Hearts at Tynecastle.

As far as the administration of the League Cup was concerned, a large penny had dropped when they realised that if you began the season with the League Cup in August, there was still enough daylight to play Wednesday night games (possibly with an earlyish kick-off) and the group sections could be finished by the first Saturday in September. Wednesday nights could also be deployed for one of the legs of the quarter-finals and the whole competition could be comfortably completed by the end of October before the start of the winter. This sensible format made the competition a compact and self-contained one and would be a great success over the next 20 years until the authorities in the early 1970s, disobeying the truest of all aphorisms ‘If it ain’t broke, don’t

fix it!', began to plaster about with the competition – to its severe detriment.

Celtic and Rangers were drawn together for the third year in a row. Eyebrows were raised and knowing glances exchanged, but Aberdeen and St Mirren did not complain. There was a lot of money involved in that section! For the third year in a row, Rangers qualified at the expense of Celtic, but this was the year of the infamous occasion at Ibrox when Sammy Cox turned around and deliberately kicked Charlie Tully in the pit of the stomach in full view of the Celtic end of Ibrox. Bottles flew (throwing beer bottles was the preferred method of causing trouble for the football hooligans in those days) and Celtic generally took their eye off the ball and lost the game. Neutral observers like the respected Jack Harkness in the *Sunday Post* were appalled. That appropriate action was not taken against Cox by referee Gebbie was a major factor in the Celtic paranoia complex which continues in some areas of their support to this day.

Rangers and East Fife were joined in the quarter-finals by Hibs and Partick Thistle from the Division A sections and by Airdrie, Forfar, Dunfermline and Cowdenbeath from the Division B sections. The first legs were played on Saturday, 17 September, and the second legs in the following midweek. East Fife had little bother beating Forfar Athletic but the other ties were exciting ones. Rangers had a surprising amount of bother in beating Cowdenbeath, while Dunfermline beat Airdrie 4-3 in the first leg at Broomfield and had to struggle to hold them to a 0-0 draw at East End Park, but the most impressive performance of them all was Hibs. They were 2-4 down to Partick Thistle from the first leg at Firhill but rallied to defeat Thistle 4-0 at Easter Road in a performance

which had *The Scotsman* (not the most football-orientated of newspapers and, in so far as it did take an interest in the game, widely believed to be pro-Hearts) purring with pleasure at 'their [Hibs] individual and collective skill' and singling out Lawrie Reilly as a match winner.

The semi-final draw paired the two former winners together, Rangers and East Fife at Hampden, while Hibs and Dunfermline met each other at Tynecastle. The games were to be played on Saturday, 8 October and hardly anyone expected anything other than a final between the two best teams in the country: Rangers and Hibs. How wrong they were! In what was arguably Fife's best footballing day, the establishment was confounded, as in 1947, and an all-Fife League Cup Final emerged.

The game at Hampden attracted a crowd of 74,000 and boiled down, according to the *Glasgow Herald*, to a duel between Rangers right-winger Willie Waddell and East Fife left-back Sammy Stewart. This duel was won marginally by Stewart and it was so important because, according to the writer, Waddell was the only forward worthy of being associated with Rangers. Little wonder that the Rangers fans sang, 'The right foot, the left foot, the noddle. When you can buy all these wonderful things, then you can buy Willie Waddell!' But it was East Fife, 'the best team I have seen this season' (the *Glasgow Herald* reporter states), that won through in extra time after Rangers, down after 45 minutes, had rallied in the second half. Still singing the praises of East Fife, the writer singles out the winning goal by Charlie Fleming (sometimes called 'Cannonball', other times 'Legs') as one of the best that Hampden has ever seen. One gets the impression that 'our football correspondent' was delighted at

this turn of events for the game turned nasty for a spell and Willie Woodburn was singled out more than once for being the culprit. There was a tragic end to the game, however, when John McArthur, the chairman of East Fife, collapsed and died on the final whistle. He had had a heart condition and was attending the game against medical advice.

Across the country at Tynecastle, Hibs, the odds-on favourites, were turned over by Dunfermline Athletic, who were strangers to this level of football. It was one of these games which the League Cup would throw up many times in the future where, for no apparent or rational reason, the favourites lost to a vastly inferior team who simply all seemed capable of raising their game on that day. Managed by Webber Lees, Dunfermline refused to accept defeat even when Lawrie Reilly put Hibs ahead. Gerry Mays (sometimes written 'Mayes') equalised with a header, then scored with a hook shot with quarter of an hour to go. Then Dunfermline, their defence well marshalled by a giant of a man called Jimmy Clarkson, held out against a Hibs forward line which contained three of their Famous Five, namely Lawrie Reilly, Eddie Turnbull and Willie Ormond. It was an unlikely but nevertheless thoroughly deserved victory for Dunfermline Athletic, whose first big occasion this was.

It is often assumed that Dunfermline Athletic have always been a strong team in Scottish football. Not so. Until the arrival of Jock Stein in 1960, their history had been one of woeful underachievement at a run-down little ground with an old, creaky wooden stand (affectionately called the Hen House) from which one could easily get splinters in one's rear quarters. They had had the occasional good player – a man called Bobby Skinner, for example, in the 1920s – but never

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a good team, and their nickname the Pars (for paralytics, perhaps, but there are at least six other theories!) goes back to the 1920s and possibly earlier. They were poorly supported and generally regarded as the weakest team in Fife. Their achievement on 8 October 1949 was the best result of their history, and everyone from the Provost, the Burgh Council and Ministers of the Kirk downwards were impressed by this mighty feat.

An interesting note on the status of the competition was struck when a move was made by some folk in the press to take the game away from Hampden. The argument was that there was going to be a poor crowd at Hampden and some place closer might have sufficed. Stark's Park, Kirkcaldy, ideal for the travelling support of both clubs, was not nearly big enough. Either of the Edinburgh grounds was mooted as a possibility, or even Dens Park, Dundee, but the Scottish League refused on the grounds that as the Scottish League Cup was now a recognised national trophy the recognised national ground of the country should be deployed. Hampden on 29 October it was.

In the event, 39,744 turned up, a good attendance for two out-of-town teams, although considerably fewer than the 45,000 about a mile away at Celtic Park, for example, to see Celtic play Hibs (two well-supported teams) in a league match. A great deal of support was expressed for Division B Dunfermline by the neutrals, but there were still quite a few empty spaces around the vast bowl of Hampden as the following teams ran out:

East Fife: McGarrity, Laird and Stewart, Philp, Finlay and Aitken, Black, Fleming, Morris, Brown and Duncan

Dunfermline Athletic: Johnstone, Kirk and McLean, McCall, Clarkson and Whyte, Mays, Cannon, Henderson, McGairy and Smith

Referee: W Webb, Glasgow

East Fife were wearing a new strip of old gold and black collars and cuffs, Dunfermline wore black and white hoops. Both teams looked nice but the game was a massive disappointment in that East Fife scored three goals in the first 20 minutes and then settled down to play some good football and await the final whistle. Long before the end, the Pars were a beaten team. The goals were scored by Charlie Fleming pushing home a Davie Duncan cross, Davie Duncan himself hammering home another cross from right-winger Bobby Black, then with the game less than a quarter over, Henry Morris scoring a third after a good through ball from the same Bobby Black. The Pars tried hard but getting back into this game was simply beyond them, although at one point Clarkson hit the post. In modern terminology, they simply had not turned up. So it was another triumph from the men from Methil. *The Courier* reports rather improbably that ‘hosts’ of representatives from English clubs like Manchester City, Newcastle United and Burnley were there, chequebook in hand, to persuade Scot Symon to part with his men. It was unlikely to be quite so dramatic, but it was certainly true that East Fife contained quite a few players who would fit in rather well at a richer team than East Fife. In time, some of them would succumb to the temptation of going down south.

So, after four years, the League Cup had only two winners and, of the eight finalists, three had been Division B teams. Larger teams like Celtic, Hearts and Hibs had yet to show

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face in a final as the decade of the 1940s came to an end. There was something rather symbolic about all this, as if the 1940s with all the horrors and triumphs that it had brought to the world were now heroically moving aside as it were to allow the entry of the 1950s, that peace-loving, prosperous new decade. The 20th century was now, as it were, at half-time. The second half would indeed prove to be different.