

WE'RE GOING TO WEMBLEY

SCOTLAND'S
EURO 96 JOURNEY



FOREWORD BY JOCK BROWN

JOHN BLEASDALE
NEIL DOHERTY

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Chapter 1

The Night a Team Died

By Neil Doherty

THE STORY of Scotland at the UEFA European Championship is fleeting when contrasted with the national team's FIFA World Cup story, which at time of writing spans eight tournaments between 1954 and 1998. When qualification began for Euro '96, Scotland had featured in the Euros only once before, in Sweden in 1992. Preceding Euro '92, they had qualified for five consecutive World Cups between 1974 and 1990, an era now considered a golden age of Scottish football. This relative success had raised public expectations during the 1990s, so Scotland's failure to qualify for the 1994 World Cup in the USA, which sets the context for their Euro '96 story, was perceived as a national calamity at the time.

When reflecting upon the unsuccessful USA '94 qualification campaign, one defining evening stands alone in the annals of Scottish football history – 28 April 1993. What had begun as a difficult but fairly standard World Cup qualification away fixture against Portugal ultimately descended into a night of unforeseen embarrassment. Andy

Roxburgh's Scotland, a team built on effort and defensive solidity, had folded like a deck of cards on a wet evening in the Portuguese capital, losing 5-0 in catastrophic fashion.

If we rewind the clock slightly, this dismal defeat had been Scotland's fifth USA '94 qualification fixture, in a difficult group also containing Italy, Switzerland, Malta and Estonia. Scotland's first group match had taken place seven months earlier on 9 September 1992 against a strong Switzerland side, who went in high on confidence, having already annihilated Estonia 6-0 in Tallinn. In the Wankdorf Stadium in Bern, blond-haired striker Adrian Knup, who had scored twice against Estonia, and went on to score twice at USA '94, also scored twice on the night, either side of an Ally McCoist goal. Georges Bregy added a third to consign Scotland to a 3-1 defeat at the hands of the Swiss, and captain Richard Gough was then sent off for deliberate handball six minutes before the final whistle after the ball hit a sprinkler and bounced awkwardly. This defeat set the tone for what became a miserable campaign for Gough, and the final chapter of his 61-cap international career. At the final whistle, the bitterly disappointed Tartan Army, who were accustomed to a better level of performance, refused to leave the Wankdorf. This unfortunate scenario led to Swiss stadium security staff approaching Roxburgh to request that he take his team back out on to the pitch to speak to the supporters. Many players were reportedly so disappointed with the result that they could not face the fans.

Despite this disappointing start to qualification, confidence remained high going into the first home match of the campaign against Portugal on 14 October 1992. For the first time, Scotland were scheduled to play their World

Cup qualifiers away from Hampden Park, with the home of Scottish football set to undergo a drastic redevelopment programme, beginning with the modernisation of the old north enclosure and east terracing areas. Scotland would therefore play their first three home qualifiers at Ibrox Stadium, Glasgow, and their final two at Pittodrie Stadium, Aberdeen.

Since 1972, Scotland had completed a long series of home qualifying matches at Hampden which had resulted in those five successful World Cup qualifications. Over the course of 16 home qualifiers, Scotland had won 12, drawn three, and lost just one, a lone defeat against Wales which did not prevent qualification for the Mexico '86 World Cup finals. Furthermore, no visiting nation had scored more than one goal over the course of those games.

Despite the enforced switch of venues, Roxburgh was in justifiably confident mood prior to the first home fixture, reflecting pre-match that he had felt overwhelmed and humbled by the emotionally charged atmosphere created by the Tartan Army in Gothenburg and Norrköping a few short months earlier at Euro '92. Roxburgh's team had emerged from the tournament with many plaudits, including UEFA's Fair Play award, of which the manager stated, 'Players, coaches, fans and journalists often regard Fair Play as weakness. If a team wins the Fair Play trophy, but fails to win the competition, it is often regarded as lacking the necessary commitment to win.' Roxburgh also acknowledged the disappointment of the opening away defeat in Switzerland, referring to the match as 'the trauma of Bern', while heaping further praise upon the loyal travelling supporters, who he felt had backed the team throughout a difficult night. Despite the pre-match

optimism, however, a half-full Ibrox witnessed a 0-0 draw with Portugal, with Scotland far from comfortable. This was the era before the introduction of three points for a win, so Scotland had gained only one point from a possible four.

Scotland's next match on 18 November 1992 was a tough home fixture against Italy, World Cup hosts just two years earlier. The early 1990s was an era of dominance for Italian football, with the nation's top league, Serie A, considered the number-one destination for the world's elite footballers. In this pre-internet era, before the availability of 24-hour football coverage, Channel 4's *Gazzetta Football Italia* hit TV screens in 1992, proving hugely popular and consolidating Italian football's popularity in the United Kingdom. *Gazzetta* also tracked the career of England's most talented player of the era, Paul Gascoigne, who had transferred from Tottenham Hotspur to Lazio for £5.5m in 1992 – an enormous fee at the time. More on Gazza later, a main protagonist of the Euro '96 story.

Prior to facing Italy, Roxburgh heaped praise upon his visiting counterpart, 46-year-old Italian head coach Arrigo Sacchi. Sacchi had departed AC Milan at the conclusion of season 1990/91 after five years of incredible success as manager of the *Rossoneri*. Roxburgh, a coaches' coach, and in many ways ahead of his time, described having known Sacchi since 1979, when they first met in Florence on a coaching course run by the Italian FA. Roxburgh gave Sacchi much of the credit for the rising popularity of Italian football at the time, stating he felt Sacchi had revolutionised the Italian league with his methods and his ability to develop star players such as Dutch trio Marco van Basten, Ruud Gullit and Frank Rijkaard.

Interestingly, with many now crediting the football methodology of pressing and counter-pressing to coaches of the current era, Roxburgh was a proponent of these tactics as early as 1992. Roxburgh told the Italy match programme, 'Press the opposition into a restricted space when they have possession of the ball, rather than retreat, and the first element in pressing football has been implemented. This approach has become the in-fashion in Italian league football with Milan, under Sacchi, and a few of the other top clubs leading the way. The underlying principle is to attack the opposition as quickly as possible in order to regain possession. Put another way, it means attacking with or without the ball. It is the opposite to retreat and counterattack. The Italians are so fascinated by this adventurous style of play that they now have a television show called *Pressing*. It is easy for us in Scotland to be in accord with this Milanese method as we have always had an impatient, aggressive attitude to defending and a route one mentality when going forward. Tonight's game should certainly be played in an energetic, positive spirit, with both teams committed to a pressing game.'

Pre-match, 24-times-capped Dave 'Slim' McPherson added, 'We know we didn't play too well against the Swiss in the Wankdorf Stadium or against Portugal so we want to make amends now. More importantly, though, we want more points on the board. There is not a crisis simply because we lost an away fixture and drew a home one but there is pressure on us to make this one really count.' McPherson also acknowledged the quality of the Italian head coach and players, stating, 'Italy have always had outstanding players and this current side of Arrigo Sacchi's is no different. Sacchi can still pick players like [Gianluigi]

Lentini, [Roberto] Donadoni, [Gianluca] Vialli and [Roberto] Baggio! And the return of [Franco] Baresi, after his brief retirement, adds to his clutch of stars.' McPherson also backed his manager: 'Andy Roxburgh always does his homework so thoroughly that he will know all about them.'

Despite the obvious pedigree of the Italians, who ultimately went all the way to the World Cup Final in 1994, Scotland were far from overawed on the night. On the balance of play, the final score of 0-0 was possibly a fair result, although both Gordon Durie and Gary McAllister had gilt-edged chances which almost provided Scotland with a famous Ibrox victory.

With just two points gained from a possible six, Malta were the next visitors to Ibrox on 17 February 1993. Pre-match, 55-cap veteran Maurice Malpas acknowledged that Scotland's World Cup qualification path was no longer straightforward. Nevertheless, Malpas told the match programme, 'I don't accept we are already out of the running for one of the two qualifying spots but equally there's no doubt that we are now facing a very difficult task. The situation we are in is a tester for us. Normally we get off to a flier in the qualifying competition – this time we haven't started well and have it all left to do. As I see it we must win all our remaining home games, pick up something either in Italy or Portugal and hope someone does us a turn. Many followers of Scottish football, myself included, can't remember a time when the national team wasn't involved in the tournament. No sooner have the qualifying ties started than the fans are booking their holidays to attend the finals and the players are aware of just how important it is to them that we do the qualifying business, starting with Malta.'

Jock Brown, former football commentator and the brother of ex-Scotland manager Craig Brown, remembers it being taken for granted that Scotland would qualify for major tournaments.

Jock told us, ‘That was the feeling, and it was a complete disaster if we didn’t qualify. The expectation was very high, and, of course, that was at a time when it was harder to qualify, because fewer teams qualified. Nowadays, we’re about to go to 48 teams at the World Cup for goodness sake. Andy Roxburgh was one of eight at Euro ’92, and in Euro ’96 it was one of 16. It was a totally different world, but we were still expected to get there. It was expected, and people did plan on the basis that we’d be there. I can’t understand why when I think back, because some of the groups were pretty tough. We had become so used to making it that people expected nothing else, and any manager who didn’t qualify at that time was considered a complete idiot and had to go, which wasn’t fair and wasn’t right. It was crazy. There were a lot of good players and a lot of good teams back then, and I think our team was very average. When you think back and look at the players we had, I would say we were short of superstars. We didn’t have one or two that were really special. It really was a workmanlike team that we had, and I think that would be the best you could say for us, but we were still expected to qualify.’

The home match against Malta nevertheless provided the Tartan Army with an isolated example of something to cheer during this ill-fated qualification campaign. A crowd of 35,490, albeit bolstered by 17,000 free tickets given away to local school children, witnessed a comfortable 3-0 victory, with McCoist netting twice and Pat Nevin adding

a third before the end, providing Roxburgh's Scotland with a much needed first win in the group.

Although confidence was fragile entering the away fixture against Portugal on 28 April 1993, nobody predicted Scotland's grim date with destiny in Lisbon. Just months earlier Roxburgh and his players had been heralded by the Scottish public following a tenacious display at Euro '92. Drawn in the tournament's 'Group of Death' with Germany, the Netherlands and the CIS (formerly the Soviet Union), Scotland had acquitted themselves superbly in Sweden, and were perhaps unlucky not to progress further in the tournament. So how did things go so wrong in Lisbon less than a year after Roxburgh's finest hour?

Craig Brown, who was Scotland's assistant manager in Lisbon, provided us with his recollections of the calamitous trip. Brown firstly sought to address the longstanding falsehood that Roxburgh used information received from a Portuguese taxi driver to prepare his team. Brown told us, 'Tommy [Craig] was my colleague with the under-21 team, and we had a hotel not too far from the [first team] hotel. I was doing the general national team thing, timetabling the training for the under-21s. We were trying to find out from our sources what the Portuguese team would be. We were getting various rumours, and we found there was a strong rumour that Rui Barros failed the urine test so wasn't going to play.

'So, I'm at the under-21 game the night before the game, and I'm looking for a taxi back to the hotel to meet with Andy and the team, and this car drew up. It was [former England manager] Bobby Robson, who I knew. He stopped, and he said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going to the team hotel." Bobby said, "C'mon, jump

in.” And while he was taking me I said, “I believe that Rui Barros has failed a urine test?” He said, “I heard that he can’t play.” I phoned Andy and told him that Barros wasn’t playing, so Andy scored his name out on the board. Andy told the team that the guy who gave me a lift from the under-21 game told him that Barros had failed the urine test. Now, he didn’t say it was a taxi driver, and he didn’t want to say it was Bobby Robson, because Bobby would have been seen as disloyal to Portugal, because he was the manager of Sporting Lisbon at the time. That became a story, that the taxi driver gave us information. It wasn’t a taxi driver that told me, it was probably the most prominent manager in Portugal! I think it’s worth mentioning that it was also Bobby Robson’s information that told us that Barros was back in the team, when we were thinking that he was out the team.

‘I remember the Portugal manager was Carlos Queiroz who I had played against with the under-16 team. We renewed the friendship with him and he was very affable when we arrived at the stadium. I said, “They tell me that Barros has passed the test.” He admitted, “Yes, he has.” That confirmed it, and Andy had to confirm the change to the players, but it was taken badly by the media, because somebody told the media that a taxi driver gave us our Portuguese tactics. I just would like to clarify, to clear that one up particularly, because it didn’t look good that a taxi driver would be telling you who is playing. The driver was Bobby Robson.’

Despite setting the record straight on ‘taxigate’, Brown told us that Portugal away was his worst night in a Scotland dugout: ‘We weren’t complacent. No way were we thinking it would be easy against Portugal. They were

a top team, so we knew it was a very difficult game. We didn't think it was possible for anybody to beat us by that margin. We were a good team. We had a very bad game that night. I remember one or two guys got injured, and there was a slackness about our defence. I have probably been at 130-odd internationals with Scotland. All Andy's matches, and I was with Alex Ferguson for half-a-dozen. Alex had ten games in charge of the team, and I started when Alex was in charge, and Andy had over 60, and I had 70. We are talking 130-odd matches, I don't know the exact number, and of all the games I was involved in with Scotland, that one in Portugal was the worst. We were well beaten in that game. That was one game that you couldn't see hope or that you could do something about it, because we were very well beaten. That was an indication that we were going to struggle to qualify from the group, which we failed to do.

'It was the most agonising evening I've had watching Scotland from the side of the pitch. We failed to get to the World Cup, but I think Andy's got to get a lot of credit, because when we qualified for Euro '92, we were one of only eight teams that qualified. Steve Clarke was correctly getting a lot of praise just recently for qualifying for the European Championship, but 24 teams qualified. Andy Roxburgh qualified when only eight teams qualified, so you had to be in the top eight in Europe to get to Sweden.'

Tenacious midfielder Stuart McCall, who won 40 caps for Scotland and played at three major tournaments, provided us with a player's perspective of the heavy defeat and the end of an era: 'Goughy [as] captain, [Craig] Levein, [Jim] McNally, [Stewart] McKimmie, [Dave] McPherson was a back five. Me, John [Collins], and Paul [McStay]

in midfield, and Kev [Gallacher] and Ally [McCoist] up top. Nevin then came on for Craig Levein and we went to a back four. I remember Paulo Futre was to be man-marked by Craig Levein, and they played Jorge Cadete as well. Not a bad bloody team that was, we did well to keep it down to five! I remember they scored three in five minutes by the way, Futre, Barros and Cadete, and there was still 20 minutes to go. Gee-wiz. Yeah, gosh, it was a bad, bad night that's for sure.

'When somebody mentions that game I probably think of four things. Obviously the depressing result which was horrendous. Obviously Coisty broke his leg that night, and I remember the boy Paulo Sousa, the top midfielder, who went on to manage Leicester City. He played for Juventus, and I'd played against him a couple of times for Rangers, and they had done us 4-0 and 4-1. For Portugal he played in the middle of the park, and I always put him down as my most difficult opponent, because actually over three games he skelped me 13-1! I remember straight after the game he wanted to swap shirts. I don't know how many thousand Scotland fans were there. I thought it'd be pretty disrespectful swapping a shirt at the end of the game when we'd just been done 5-0. So I sort of said no, and he looked at me. Anyway, as we walked off, it must have been the longest dressing room corridor in history, and I sprinted after him and swapped for his shirt!

'I remember I got an absolute doing. That was probably my most difficult opponent. Plus Coisty breaking his leg, and it just being the night a team died. I think he [Andy Roxburgh] said that, didn't he? It was just so humiliating really, even although obviously they were a good side when you look at the individual players they had. At that

time we were off the back of doing well, qualifying for tournaments, and that just put paid to everything I think.'

Scottish football pundit and journalist Chick Young, a longstanding backer of Andy Roxburgh in the face of opposition from media colleagues, also told us it felt like the end of an era: 'My memory is we were beginning to disintegrate a little bit actually. I don't think it was just one night, but teams lose 5-0. Good teams can lose seven, but I think we began to see it coming. When you look back at these things you think, "What did I think at the time?" Because your experience of history changes your mind. I absolutely think it was going down that road. We were drawing a lot of good teams in competitions, and that's always a problem, and nothing lasts forever. Andy had a fair old run didn't he? To qualify for two finals, which was great. I'm not saying you saw 5-0 and everything going wrong coming, but nobody thought we were going to win in Portugal that night.'

So what did the fans make of all this? Tartan Army foot-soldiers Kevin Donnelly, author of *Le Kilt*, and Jim Brown, founding member of the West of Scotland Tartan Army, were both in Lisbon. Jim recalls, 'I remember the game horribly well, unfortunately. There's a lot of games that I can forget quite quickly, but this one, this one stuck with me. There was about 50 from our Tartan Army club who travelled down to Heathrow by luxury coach to catch a flight. Flights down from Glasgow to London were just far too expensive at the time. We flew over to Lisbon to be met by an even more luxurious coach, which took us to our hotel, and I use that term very loosely, in the Alfama district. It was a complete and utter hovel. It had one star! The guidebooks that we were using said it was three stars.'

Remember this is before the internet really took off, so you were struggling to find things. It really set the tone for this particular match.

‘Having said that, having drawn 0-0 with Portugal the previous October we hoped for possibly another draw. We got gubbed. Completely gubbed. The love-in with the fans that had happened at Euro ’92, when the mass ranks of the Tartan Army applauded the team and Roxburgh got his photograph taken, went right out of the window. Fans were climbing on fences at the end of the match to hurl abuse down at the players. It really was that bad. We got shredded down the wings from what I can remember. I can’t remember who the full-backs were, I think McKimmie might have been one. They were getting ripped apart on both sides throughout the game. It was very wet as well, so it was a bit of a slippery surface. I don’t know if that had anything to do with Ally McCoist breaking his leg in the game, which is a horrible thing to happen, but it felt like a lot of the players were actually playing with broken legs, they were that bad. It really was a bad, bad sight.

‘The other thing I remember about the match is that Jorge Cadete was playing, who later joined Celtic. The reason I remember him is that he actually played for Partick Thistle for five games or something [in 2004]. He made a cameo appearance! Cadete scored twice that night, and at the time we thought, “He’s a bit of a player.” I think it was a few years before Celtic came in for him, so I don’t know if it was that game that drove on the transfer. We were gubbed, pure and simple, a horrible, horrible night.’

Kevin Donnelly added, ‘OK, I’m gonna have to make an admission, this was probably the most drunk I’ve ever

been at a Scotland game! The thing I remember most was that the ground was half-empty. It wasn't a sell-out, and you could easily move between the upper and lower tiers. I sort of moved around, hoping to get a better view of the damage that was being inflicted, and every time I moved they seemed to score. I definitely remember people hurling their scarves on to the dugout, and being extremely upset to put it mildly. In my state, I thought, "I'm not having this. Right, I'm looking for answers."

'I was on my own. I'd travelled on my own, and I went round to the players' entrance at the end of the game. They pulled the bus right up to the door, so that if you were a player, when you stepped out the stadium, you stepped immediately on to the bus. So I didn't have a chance to hurl abuse or ask any questions, nothing. I remember seeing McCoist getting carried, probably into an ambulance. One of the first people on to the team bus was Roxburgh, and I was outside and banged on the window where Roxburgh was. Finger pointing, the works, "I want some answers from you, 5-0, what's the story?" He looked down at me and just shrugged his shoulders. I thought, "That's it, a shrug of the shoulders? We've just been beaten 5-0!" There wasn't even a placatory gesture, that was it.

'I was playing for an amateur team in London at the time, and the team came out for a tour the following weekend. I've got to admit I had one of the best weekends of my life in Lisbon, because we were shown outstanding hospitality by the hosts. But a horrible, horrible night and one to be filed under F for forget. That was a really good Portugal team. Some of the classic Portuguese stars of the '90s were in it, and they didn't qualify for that World Cup.'

As emotions ran high and sparks flew in every direction in the aftermath, spare a thought for Ally McCoist, who was accompanied to hospital by Roxburgh after the match. McCoist biographer Alistair Aird describes the horror incident in *Portrait of a Hero*: ‘He drew back his right leg in anticipation of a scoring opportunity, but his marker, Oceano Cruz, moved in to challenge him and won the ball. McCoist followed through with his attempted shot at goal, though, and his shin met with the knee of the big Portuguese defender. He knew something was seriously wrong straight away. McCoist recalled, “Hughie Allan [physiotherapist] came on and said, ‘How are you doing?’ I said, ‘Just a bit sore, get me up,’ so as he lifts me up my next statement was, ‘That’s good, that’s the first step, now get me aff!’”

Scotland’s medical team, led by Dr Stewart Hillis, confirmed the leg was broken, but the Lisbon dressing room stories are of McCoist’s irrepressible humour. McCoist, famously averse to taking pills, reportedly consumed red wine for the excruciating pain, and joked, ‘It could be worse, we could’ve lost 5-0!’ It is always darkest before the dawn, and this was far from the end for the irrepressible McCoist – a key player in Scotland’s Euro ’96 story.

On a night when Scotland were tested to their limit, the famous and admirable humour of McCoist had shone through, but this fateful evening in Lisbon spelt the end of several proud international careers. Captain Richard Gough, who famously stated afterwards he would be unavailable for Scotland as long as Roxburgh was in charge, was not picked again. Dave McPherson and Jim McNally also won their final caps in Lisbon,

and Maurice Malpas bowed out having won his 55th and final cap against Italy at Ibrox. Roxburgh had galvanised the Scottish football scene with intellect, patriotism and a measured class. Even so, it was the end of the road for his team, and although he remained as manager temporarily, the writing was unfortunately on the wall. Consecutive home and away wins over Estonia briefly lifted the gloom, but Roxburgh resigned following a 1-1 home draw against Switzerland on 8 September 1993.