



More Than Argentina

**The Biography of
Ally MacLeod**

Ronnie McDevitt
with contributions from
Andy MacLeod

Foreword by Sir Alex Ferguson

Contents

Introduction.....	7
Preface.....	11
Foreword	13
1. Young MacLeod	15
2. Alistair the Third	20
3. Briefly a Buddy	29
4. Ally the Anglo.....	32
5. Noddy Goes to Wembley	44
6. A Capital Captain	56
7. Back to Cathkin	66
8. An Honest Man	69
9. Bouncing Back	75
10. Full-time Boss	85
11. Mr Ayr United	90
12. A Citizen of Ayr	97
13. Top Ten Target	104
14. A New Don	111
15. The King of Aberdeen.....	118
16. A Wembley Winner	127
17. On the March	136
18. The Summer of '78	145
19. Argentina	154
20. Retention and Resignation	166
21. The Fir Park Experience	174
22. Life with the Diamonds.....	186
23. Home Again	193
24. Somerset Sunset	201
25. A Dumfries Swansong	207
26. A Commercial Opportunity.....	215
27. The Final Whistle.....	218
Postscript: Blackburn Revisited.....	223

Introduction

THE seed for this biography was sown when the retro football magazine *Backpass* accepted an article of mine reflecting on Ally MacLeod's career and crucially chose to feature the subject on the cover of its spring 2013 edition.

This prompted an e-mail to the editor from Ally's eldest son Andy asking him to pass on his thoughts to me. After the exchange of a few messages I decided to broach the idea of a more in-depth study of what I could already see was a fascinating story.

Andy was enthusiastic although I stressed it had to be an honest account which would likely include some criticism. 'I wouldn't expect anything less than a balanced view, that's why I'm quite happy to get involved,' was the welcome reply and on that we had the basis of a good working relationship.

Following Pitch Publishing's positive response to my proposal, we arranged a meeting in Andy's son Ryan's flat in Glasgow, which was between our homes in Ayrshire and Fife, to check through Ally's own scrapbooks and other memorabilia.

Ryan's flat-mate Ellen is from Ireland and was curious enough to ask, 'Was he a bit of a character then?' The three of us just sat there in silence for a few seconds, looking at each other before laughing.

Over the next few months the project was a pleasure with days spent in the library or at my laptop more of a joy than a chore.

In some respects Ally was ahead of his time in that he was one of the first tracksuit managers who would take training while many of his contemporaries rarely left the office.

One of the things that came out of the dealings with his former players was that he was a master of motivation who knew how to get the best from footballers.

Some of those players concede he was not a great tactician but times were different then. When Ally started out in management most teams had a similar philosophy of concentrating on their strengths and scoring more times than the opposition.

Blackboards and positional strategies were things of the future and the abilities of his own team the main focus for a football manager. In this respect the master Jock Stein and the underrated Eddie Turnbull were ahead of the game

as far as Scottish football was concerned with Jim McLean and Alex Ferguson following them in later years.

Eccentric? Sure Ally was eccentric but this did not inhibit his motivation of players. Other successful managers such as Bill Shankly, Tommy Docherty, Brian Clough, Jock Wallace and Martin O'Neill were known to have their eccentricities but they all used this to their advantage. Equally men like Wallace and Willie Ormond were not considered to be master tacticians but they knew how to get the best out of players and enjoyed considerable success.

That Ally played for Blackburn in the FA Cup Final, won the League Cup with Aberdeen then promised he would bring the World Cup home to Scotland pretty much sums up the popular opinion of his time in the game. He is perceived as a court jester who fooled a gullible public and it is commonplace to see mention of his name followed by the obligatory derogatory comment. But as the title of this book suggests his career spanned so much more than that.

As a supporter at the time I had always considered it a myth that he said Scotland would win the 1978 World Cup and other contributors such as Dick Malone and Davie Hay agree on that point. There was an often referred-to but never repeated quote about winning a medal which I was able to track down and have included within the text.

The chain of events which led to Ally's appointment as Scotland manager is fascinating. It commenced with Ayr beating Rangers on the same day Aberdeen lost to Celtic, forcing Jimmy Bonithrone's resignation at a time when Ally had not responded to the offer of a job outside of the game.

Again as a fan the three best Scotland matches I have ever attended came within four months of each other in 1977. When Scotland won in France in 2007 it was undoubtedly one of the best results in their history but as far as the occasion was concerned it could not hold a candle to the events of Wembley 1977 or Anfield.

With only 16 finalists Scotland did have a chance of winning the World Cup in 1978. The Dutch had an identical record of one win, one loss and a draw in the first phase and progressed all the way to the final itself.

I had always been puzzled as to why, having ridden the storm of Argentina, Ally then left to take over at a First Division club...and departed the post after a matter of weeks. It is all much clearer now.

Ally did make mistakes but what manager didn't?

Andy MacLeod deserves full credit for conducting the interviews with Ally's old Blackburn team-mates, former Ayr players, Joe Harper and others detailed in his own preface although I did supply him with some questions. Andy also travelled to Manchester to speak with Sir Alex and arrange the foreword and I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to those contributors also.

I would specifically like to thank Davie Hay, Bobby Clark, Henry Templeton and Ian Clinging for sharing their thoughts with me, and also Chris Gavin of the Aberdeen FC Former Players Association for his help, plus Richard McBrearty at the Scottish Football Museum.

I was always keen to get the supporters' angle on record and for this I am most grateful to the following for their time and contributions: Scott Bremner, Tommy Petrie, Jock Vila, Tommy Collin, John Grigor, Alan Roxburgh, Graham Barnstaple, John Kennedy and Geoff Nicholson. It was a pleasure to deal with you all.

Thanks also to Paul and Jane at Pitch for their faith and support and for accommodating the ever-increasing word count!

When I went to Ayr to meet Faye MacLeod, a lovely woman, she displayed her husband's sense of humour as I sat on the couch armed with 1,001 questions. 'I hope you're not superstitious as you're sitting where he was when he died!' was one of the first things she said! Her contribution to the book, along with Andy's, is invaluable; likewise Faye's daughter Gail Pirie whose input was fascinating. It was a pleasure speaking to you all.

It was interesting to hear both Andy and Gail refer to their father by his christian name which is how they and everyone else knew and remember him, a name which did not appear on his birth certificate as I discovered. Had it not been for his mother's preference of Alistair we may all have been on the march with Sandy's Army in 1978.

People spoke warmly of Ally and although it would be wrong to say he never made any enemies in the game (players he moved on for example) he clearly got on with most people. 'He was revered wherever he went,' says Craig Brown.

It is the family's belief that his playing career has been overlooked and they were also very keen to stress that his sense of humour was one of his most endearing qualities.

I hope I have been able to deliver adequately on both. It is also the MacLeods' wish that one day Ally will be inducted into the Scottish Football Hall of Fame where he surely merits a place.

One other consistent theme throughout his life was Ally's loyalty to those he valued, something which may have cost him during his time in charge of the national side.

This is perhaps best summed up by Davie Hay to whom he gave his first role in management, 'As well as being a loyal person, he was a decent person as well.'

Ronnie McDevitt
May 2014

1

Young MacLeod

THURSDAY 26 February 1931 was a mild day in the west of Scotland. Items in the news included a report that a British seaplane had crashed in Buenos Aires, Argentina, after catching fire. Closer to home the Corporation of Glasgow voted by a majority of 51 to 26 for a ten per cent reduction of teachers' salaries for the ensuing year.

The main topics discussed by football fans scanning the newspapers were of the previous day's Scottish League management committee meeting where a letter had been read out complaining about the sale of a player to an English club. A commission had been appointed to look into the matter while the books of the anonymous club concerned had apparently been called in for examination. Also announced at the meeting was the intention to restructure the two divisions from the start of the 1931/32 season, reducing the lower league from 20 teams to 16.

Scotland's goalless draw in Belfast the previous Saturday ('very disappointing' was the *Glasgow Herald's* assessment) was still being digested while Motherwell were three points clear of Rangers at the top of the league with Celtic one point further adrift.

All of this would have been of no interest to a new arrival on the south side of Glasgow that day, born in a bottom tenement flat at 273 Allison Street, Govanhill, just a stone's throw from Cathkin Park where he would later first make his mark in the game of soccer.

Alexander Reid MacLeod was the first child of William and Jane (known as Jean) MacLeod who named him after an uncle who had been killed in the Great War. Another uncle, Robert, had been a goalkeeper with Queen's Park and Raith Rovers and his cousin Jim MacLeod had played for Dumbarton. Continuing this footballing tradition yet another of his uncles, Tommy MacLeod, had turned out for Third Lanark in the days when they were known as the Third Lanarkshire Rifle Volunteers.

Jean's preferred choice of name had been Alistair but it was traditional in those days to name children after relatives. But from his early days both parents called him Alistair which he would be known as until he chose to abbreviate it to Ally.

Even at an early age young Alistair was soon kicking a ball around and it is said that he suffered a 'footballer's knee' at a mere 18 months. Later in life he was to reveal that his father William, who suffered from polio – hence the allocation of the ground floor tenement – had been a major influence. Despite the amputation of a leg William still turned out as goalkeeper for an amateur side, and Ally said, 'My father lost his leg and played in goal for his team. That was my driving force.'

Before long the MacLeods departed Govanhill for Dalmuir where William was employed in the Singers sewing machine factory in nearby Clydebank, one of the largest employers in the west of Scotland at the time. Their home was at 27 French Street and Alistair attended Dalmuir Primary School where his sister Christine, younger by five years, recalls that he was a popular lad who made friends easily.

One of the MacLeods' near neighbours was a professional footballer whom Alistair often called on after school to see if he fancied a kick-about, an invitation which Christine says was rarely declined.

During the Second World War the Clydebank area, with its shipyards and munitions factories, became a prime target for the Luftwaffe and following two nights of sustained bombing over 12–13 March 1941, 528 civilians were killed and a further 617 seriously injured. In the region of 4,000 homes were destroyed as over 1,000 bombs were dropped in what came to be known as the Clydebank Blitz.

In that first night of bombing the house opposite the MacLeods' was flattened and their own windows blown in. This forced the family to retreat to the air raid shelter where Christine remembers they remained until the bombardment finally halted.

In the morning the MacLeods made a decision to uproot to the more peaceful surroundings of Moffat in Dumfriesshire where they had relatives. It was a decision which may even have saved their lives as the Germans returned that night to inflict further devastation on the area just as the locals were coming to terms with the nightmare they had already endured.

It was in Moffat that, at the age of ten, Alistair won his first football trophy in a five-a-side tournament. His team-mates were incidentally all residents of the local borstal.

The horrors of the war seemed to be following the MacLeods when a German aircraft, pursued by an RAF fighter following another raid on Glasgow, jettisoned the last of its bombs on the outskirts of the town. There was a suggestion that the pilot had deliberately dropped his cargo away from any houses. A decision was then taken to return to Glasgow after an 18-month absence and the family settled in Mount Florida, in the shadow of Hampden Park and close to Alistair's Govanhill roots.

Following a brief spell at Lea Primary, Alistair was then enrolled at Queen's Park Secondary School in Grange Road where comedian Stan Laurel had been a former pupil. Many years later when a journalist from the *Scotsman* newspaper pointed out that all three of them had attended the same school (Oliver Hardy

was two years younger than Laurel), Alistair's response was, 'But I was a bigger comedian than Stan ever was!'

It was his sense of humour which many of those who knew Alistair would remember him for and his sister says he was a practical joker from an early age.

While at Queen's Park, Christine recalls that Alistair 'took up sport with a vengeance'. Alistair was in the school football, cricket and tennis teams. On occasion if they were short of numbers he had been known to turn out for the rugby side.

Christine recalls that he was already then displaying signs of leadership and had a wide circle of friends. Among those friends were three who went on to play football with Queen's Park FC: Johnny Little, who later signed for Rangers; Bert Cromer; and Junior Ormand. Another close school friend and keen sportsman was John Anderson who would later work as an athletics coach for Commonwealth and Olympic Games athletes with David Moorcroft, Liz McColgan and David Bedford among them.

Anderson is, however, probably best remembered as the judge on the ITV entertainment series *Gladiators* which ran from 1992 until the end of the decade.

Alistair was in those days quite a tennis fanatic and Christine remembers they could often both be found at the Holmlea tennis courts in the summer evenings. Christine often did not have the required two pence for a game but she knew that when her big brother turned up he would see her right.

At home the two of them would play table tennis with a four-penny ice cream cone the prize for the winner. Also in the MacLeod household they made use of their mother's large dresser in the kitchen. The dresser was used as a goal with Christine always ending up as the keeper while her brother practised hitting a football as hard as he could. Christine recalls regularly running to her mother, complaining, 'He's hitting the ball too hard at me!'

Like many lads of his age, Alistair had become a member of the Boys' Brigade whose premises were attached to Mount Florida Church. He was soon turning out for their football team on a Saturday morning and if his beloved Third Lanark were playing at home he could often be found on the slopes of Cathkin Park in the afternoon. His heroes in the Thirds team, also known as the Hi Hi, were Jimmy Mason, a right-back who would later be capped seven times for Scotland, and Bobby Mitchell, a forward who would also represent his country.

As with many club nicknames and songs the origin of the term is unclear with one rumour that the Cathkin crowd chanted 'High! High!' when an opposing defender cleared the ball into the air and soon adopted the phrase as a cry of encouragement.

Living in Glasgow meant there were plenty of opportunities to watch other teams and in the schools commemorative handbook Alistair recalled skipping afternoon lessons at Queen's Park in November 1945.

Taking a bus to Ibrox where Rangers were entertaining Moscow Dynamo in a 2.15pm kick-off, he had just boarded when he spotted his headmaster Mr Gilmour behind him in the queue. Horrified, he climbed the stairs to the

upper deck, looking down through the window at each stop to see where he disembarked. Alistair had to wait until the bus had passed Ibrox meaning an unexpected walk back towards the stadium.

The next day he was called into the headmaster's office to be met with, 'Well MacLeod, what have you to say about missing school yesterday afternoon?' 'I looked him straight in the eye,' he recalled 'and asked, "Did YOU enjoy the match, Sir?"' He looked back at me in astonishment until I explained that we'd been on the same bus. I was dismissed – no lines or detention and nothing more was ever said about the incident.'

That same year a scout from Celtic Park had turned up at the MacLeod home keen to sign the promising 14-year-old on schoolboy forms. Father William's response was to tell the scout to come back when Alistair was 17. Two years later an enquiring scout from Ibrox was given similar advice.

His mother was happy to encourage her son's love of football and Christine recalls Jean would be up at 6am to join the queue at nearby Hampden Park when international tickets went on sale. She would keep his place in the queue until he took over at 8am.

Jean MacLeod also played a vital part in him signing for the Hi Hi. She was a regular shopper in the local fishmongers where she passed the time with the other customers, one of whom was the wife of Jimmy McManus, the head scout of Third Lanark. Mrs McManus told her husband how his mother had been raving about Alistair and the scout's curiosity was aroused enough to go and watch the youngster play which led to him signing schoolboy forms with the club in 1947.

Then 16, Alistair left school that summer. Soon he was working as an apprentice draughtsman at Caldwell's in Clydebank for a wage of £4 per week. Unhappy there – Christine recalls he 'hated it' – he eventually returned to Queen's Park school for a further year.

During that additional year the school held mock elections and keen to enter into the spirit, Alistair stood for the Communist Party. Without taking it too seriously he promised the voters shorter school hours and longer holidays. Not surprisingly this swayed the students and he won the ballot. This was later picked up by the *Morning Star* newspaper which reported, 'Queen's Park School Goes Communist'.

Alistair's first appearance in a Third Lanark jersey was in a reserve match at Brockville Park on 9 April 1949 but not until after he had turned out for the school team in the morning. The home side Falkirk won 6-3 although most football fans were more interested in events 400 miles away at Wembley Stadium where Thirds' Jimmy Mason scored the first of Scotland's goals in a 3-1 victory over England. The game at Brockville was the last fixture in the Thirds' reserve-team calendar that season but there were still other opportunities for the youngster to showcase his improving skills.

His first real football honour came just three days after the Falkirk game on 12 April when he was chosen for the Glasgow Schools side for a representative match against the Rest of Scotland Schools at Celtic Park which Glasgow won 2-0.

One clipping from his own scrapbook shows that he clearly caught a journalist's eye that day, 'McLeod (Queen's Park) was the danger man among Glasgow's forwards and was directly responsible for Crawford (Govan) opening the score eleven minutes after the interval.'

Another anonymous report contained the following, 'With McLeod serving up some mazy runs on the touchline it was no surprise when they took the lead in eleven minutes, Crawford heading home from McLeod's cross.'

The tendency for these scribes to spell his surname incorrectly, without the 'a', would prove to be consistent with their colleagues well into his senior career.

The youngster did not have to wait long for his first medal. That came when he was selected for the Scottish Schools FA in the National Youth Championship at the end of the season. He got his name on the scoresheet in the semi-final against the Scottish Welfare FA at Brockville Park where his side won 5-2.

Another unidentified entry in his scrapbook records, 'Within a minute of the restart Crawford had a beautiful goal for Schools and McLeod added another with a shot which glanced off a defender's leg.'

In the final at Hampden Park the Schools side triumphed 3-0 against the Scottish Churches team with Alistair supplying the cross for Crawford to score the third. Such fixtures always attracted the attention of the scouts from the senior clubs and there was more than a little interest in the youngster from Queen's Park that day.

2

Alistair the Third

IN June 1949, having recently left Queen's Park Secondary School for the second time, Alistair MacLeod was signed as a professional for Third Lanark, the team he supported, by manager Jimmy Carabine, a former Scottish international. His first weekly wage was £4. There had been another invitation to visit Celtic Park around this time but it is unclear if terms were offered.

In an *Evening Times* article the following year, their scribe offered the following, 'I hardly know whether to describe Alistair McLeod of Third Lanark as "Wonder Boy" or credit Cathkin's Hugh Good as "Wonder Trainer". A year ago Alistair was a star member of the all conquering Scottish Youth Team. Only one thing kept admiring clubs from rushing for his signature. He was only 5' 3" tall and weighed only 9 stone 2. Today he is 5' 11" tall and 11 stone 2 in the short space of twelve months.'

The *Times* article then relates how Good had encouraged Carabine, 'You sign him and I'll build him up.' His mother was now a regular spectator at his matches and had once been mortified to hear someone in the stand utter, 'That MacLeod would be a better footballer if his mother gave him a good feed!'

He was back in the reserve side for the opening Division C fixture of the new season at Cathkin on 13 August when Thirds' A team lined up against Partick Thistle's reserves. During the match he netted his first goal for Thirds albeit in a somewhat unorthodox manner. The *Evening Times* reported, 'In twenty-eight minutes Third Lanark opened the scoring when McLeod placed a corner which Ledgerwood touched but could not stop.'

That game finished 2-2 and Alistair kept his place in the reserves until he got his chance in the first 11 on 5 November 1949. Ironically the opportunity was due to an injury to his idol Jimmy Mason.

Carabine reshuffled the side, bringing in Alistair at outside-left against Stirling Albion at Cathkin Park that Saturday. Watched by a crowd of 9,500 Stirling won the match 4-2 although Thirds' case had not been helped when their goalkeeper John Petrie suffered a leg break in the 66th minute following a collision with Albion's Jones. Despite the score the new boy's debut did not go unnoticed. Writing in the *Evening Citizen*, Archie MacGregor noted, 'Newcomer

McLeod caught the eye when he neatly tricked McKeown to cross accurately' while Bob Russell offered the following in the *Sunday Empire News*, 'Eighteen year old Schoolboy Alastair McLeod, brought into the outside left position, was perhaps their most useful prospect but he will have to put more life into his play to reach the top grade.'

The debutant created a headline in an unidentified newspaper with 'A Third Find'. The article reported, 'In his initial try-out youngster McLeod passed the test despite the lack of service from Cuthbertson. He has veteran coolness and can cross the ball with accuracy.'

The defeat left Thirds third from bottom in Division A and in danger of finishing in one of the two relegation places.

Alistair retained his place in the team for the visit to Raith Rovers the following Saturday where he scored his first senior goal in a 1-1 draw. The *Evening Times* report described it thus, 'In the forty-fourth minute McLeod opened for Thirds when he plodded home a Scott cross after McGregor had parried the ball.'

A narrow 2-1 defeat at Celtic Park was followed by Alistair's next home match on 26 November with Hibernian's feared 'Famous Five' forward line of Gordon Smith, Bobby Johnstone, Lawrie Reilly, Eddie Turnbull and Willie Ormond gracing the Cathkin turf. Goals by Johnstone and Reilly (a highly contentious award with the home players claiming offside) gave Hibs a 2-0 win but the Thirds youngster still impressed. John McShane, in the *Evening Citizen*, recorded, 'Third Lanark's school winger Ally McLeod had a dazzling run, beating man after man, only to see his shot at goal rise over the bar.'

As the crowd were leaving the ground an oil stove knocked over in the recently-vacated press box set the area alight with the flames soon spreading to the stand. Or as the *Evening Times* put it, 'The blaze spread with astonishing rapidity and in no time flames were leaping out.'

Units of the Glasgow Fire Brigade promptly arrived on the scene and soon had the blaze under control but the press box was completely destroyed as was part of the centre of the stand. 'Thousands who had been present at the match watched this extra thrill,' was how the *Edinburgh Evening News* reported the spectacle.

This incident is sometimes wrongly linked to Ally's first match against Stirling Albion although given his debut took place on Guy Fawkes Day it would perhaps have been more appropriate.

The Hi Hi finished the season in 12th place, five from the bottom and nine points clear of relegation. Alistair made a total of 11 appearances that term, scoring twice. His other goal came in a 5-1 defeat at the home of Glasgow rivals Partick Thistle against the same goalkeeper he had outwitted in the reserve match.

It is worthy of mention if only because of the rather eloquent description given by 'Olympic' (many sports writers of the time used a pseudonym) in the *Evening Times*, 'In the eighteenth minute Friel centred to the far post. McLeod was there and for quite a time he stood fiddling with the ball at his feet. It was

surprising that Ledgerwood did not act before McLeod wakened up and shot through.'

Thirds manager Jimmy Carabine retired from football at the end of the season with Alec Ritchie succeeding him.

Unlike Carabine, Ritchie chose to nurture the young Alistair (he was still only 19) and he failed to turn out for the first team at all during the following season, 1950/51. Undeterred, Alistair still managed a few games (and goals) for the reserve team.

Although his mother had always encouraged his football Jean stressed on him the need to gain further qualifications should he need a career outside of the game. In 1950 Alistair enrolled at Paisley Technical College for a course in applied science. Alistair opted for a part-time course with evening classes which allowed him to train with Thirds during the day.

Third Lanark finished that campaign in 13th position, one down on the previous season, but come the new term the determined youngster was banging on the first-team door. At the end of August 1951 Alistair scored four times for the reserves in a 6-1 victory against Dumbarton which led to his recall to the senior team on 1 September. The opponents at Cathkin were Airdrie in a League Cup match and again Alistair found his name on the scoresheet with a header in a 5-0 victory. Records give the crowd as 16,000 that Saturday.

Ritchie now had no doubts that Alistair was ready for a run in the first team and he went on to play in 22 of the club's 30 league matches that season. He managed just one league goal in a 3-2 victory over Aberdeen at Pittodrie in January. Other highlights in a campaign which saw the team finish in the familiar territory of 12th place included a 3-3 thriller with Celtic at Cathkin and a 2-2 result in the return at Celtic Park. Two 1-1 draws with Rangers showed they could raise their game against the best sides although twice they lost five goals to eventual champions Hibernian.

But it was in the cup competitions that the Thirds produced some of their best football in 1951/52. Despite failing to progress from their League Cup section, finishing third to Celtic and Morton, the Hi Hi went all the way to the semi-final of the Scottish Cup.

Following a goalless draw at Celtic Park in round one, Thirds won the replay in extra time by the odd goal in three. Alistair later recalled the first match was played on an icy pitch which caused him to slip and miss 'a cert' close to the end. All was forgiven when Thirds won the replay and the directors saw the match takings his miss had generated.

Hamilton Academical were then overcome in the next round following another replay. Victories over Albion Rovers and Falkirk set up a semi-final with Dundee at Hibernian's Easter Road ground and Thirds went into the game on the back of an 11-match unbeaten run. But the Dark Blues ran out 2-0 winners only to lose heavily to Motherwell in the final.

Along with the Glasgow Cup, the Glasgow Charity Cup was popular at that time with those tournaments' importance only diminished with the arrival of

European competition a few years later. A crowd of 75,000 turned up at Ibrox to watch Rangers play Third Lanark for a place in the final. Just one goal separated the sides – and it was scored by none other than Alistair MacLeod, best summed up by the *Evening Times*, ‘It was in the eighteenth minute of the first half that Thirds got the solitary goal of the match – a short cross from the right, headed on by Dick, came right across goal to the completely unattended McLeod, who had ample time to place his header into the corner of the net.’

Previewing the final with Clyde on 10 May, Alan Breck of the *Evening Times* was of the opinion, ‘Thirds have very likeable forwards ... McLeod is always full of zest.’

In what the *Herald’s* scribe described as ‘an exhilarating final’ the match at Hampden finished 2-2 after extra time with the attendance given as 25,000. There was no replay and the two clubs shared the trophy for six months each.

Alistair had now succeeded in establishing himself as a first-team regular and earned a reputation as an entertainer who having beaten an opposing player, often could not resist the temptation to repeat the exercise. He was easily recognisable too with a mop of fair hair, considered long for the time if not by today’s standards, and his prominent nose.

In the first *The Scottish Football Book* published a couple of years later the editor Hugh Taylor said of Alistair, ‘He follows in the distinguished footsteps of Bobby Mitchell, the Third Lanark outside left who went to Newcastle United.’

Looking back at his Cathkin days in the eighth volume of the same publication the player himself confirmed this to Taylor, ‘I tried to emulate Bobby’s ball-playing style, for he was a truly great player. I never considered passing a ball until I had beaten at least one player.’

The following season, 1952/53, was not a good one for the Hi Hi although it started well, winning their League Cup section and finishing above East Fife, Falkirk and Queen of the South. They then had the misfortune to draw Rangers in the quarter-finals, losing 2-0 on aggregate.

Alistair played in 19 of the first 20 league matches and scored once, a sequence which saw the club acquire just 13 points. During that first half of the season they lost 4-3 at Aberdeen and 5-4 at Celtic Park to a last-minute Charlie Tully goal, defeated Hibs 2-0 at Cathkin but were heavily beaten 5-1 at Falkirk. A home loss to Aberdeen on 17 January saw Thirds slip to the bottom of the table.

When injury kept Alistair out of the side to face Hamilton in the Scottish Cup the following week, his place was taken by Willie Barclay, an outside-left who had recently been signed from Clyde. Due to his committed style of play Alistair found himself ruled out through a number of injuries in his days with the Thirds including torn ligaments and a broken collarbone.

Fit enough to play for the reserve team three weeks later at Ayr United, Alistair was unable to fight his way back into the senior team with Barclay performing well. He played just two more league matches that season, against East Fife and Clyde, and made no contribution to Thirds’ march to the semi-finals of the Scottish Cup. On the day the senior side played Aberdeen at Ibrox

for a place in the Scottish Cup Final MacLeod turned out at Cathkin against Kilmarnock reserves. There was no place for him in the semi final replay either (the first match ended 1-1) as the Dons won 2-1.

League results did not reflect the club's cup form and a 5-2 defeat to Clyde at Shawfield on Wednesday 22 April confirmed Thirds' relegation to Division B. Alistair had been recalled to the side but was unable to inspire his team-mates. Eighteen defeats throughout the campaign (including seven at home) and just eight victories saw them finish bottom of the table with 20 points from 30 league matches.

But Alistair had more than football on his mind at this time. Having achieved an 'A' pass in an applied science course with a score of 72 per cent he had begun working as a chemical analyst for a company called Tatlock and Thompson in Bath Street in the centre of Glasgow.

The determined youngster was back in the first team for the opening game of the 1953/54 season. Recreation Park was the venue where he scored twice as Thirds romped to a 10-0 win over Alloa Athletic in the League Cup. 'THIRDS MAKE MINCEMEAT OF ALLOA' was the *Evening Times* headline.

Again Thirds topped their League Cup section after scoring no less than 25 times against Alloa, Cowdenbeath and St Johnstone. Cowdenbeath had also found themselves on the wrong end of a heavy 7-0 drubbing when they visited Cathkin on the last Saturday in August. The Hi Hi however got a taste of their own medicine in the quarter-finals, losing home and away to Hibs by a 4-0 score on both occasions.

At the end of September 1953 Thirds were at Hampden to face Rangers in the final of the Glasgow Cup but were always second best, losing 3-0 with the *Herald's* football correspondent considering, 'Rangers can rarely have had an easier task.' He did however single out Alistair as 'Thirds' best forward', advising he had been unlucky with one effort which hit the underside of the crossbar with the deficit then 2-0.

That year Alistair met Faye Dunwoodie, his future wife, at a dance in the Kingsbridge Halls in Croftfoot. Today Faye recalls that Alistair, who turned up with some friends, ought not to have been there as he was not from the area but the group had managed to get someone to sign them in.

'All the local kids went dancing there,' Faye recalls of the Kingsbridge, noting that boys and girls sat on separate sides of the hall. 'We just started dancing and that's it,' she says of their first meeting.

Faye knew nothing about football and laughs, 'When he said he played football I thought he played for the former pupils. So he wasn't very chuffed, I don't think. So I can't say I went with him because he was a footballer.' But before too long Faye became a spectator at Cathkin Park where she watched his matches alongside his mother Jean.

The winger found himself the subject of transfer speculation throughout the season. 'ARSENAL MAY BID FOR MCLEOD' ran one headline after the London club were said to have been represented at the Thirds v Motherwell

match that November. In another piece 'Sauchie Hall' valued the player at £15,000. Four years into his professional career the press were still unable to spell his surname correctly although I suspect the initial cause of this was Third Lanark whose matchday programmes continued to list him as McLeod, just as they had done from his earliest appearances.

Playing in the lower division did not seem to be a handicap and as well as the transfer speculation there was the possibility of international recognition. That 1953/54 season would be the closest Alistair MacLeod ever came to representing his country.

Selected for a B international team to play England at Sunderland's Roker Park on 3 March, he would have the opportunity to impress the selectors ahead of the Home International against the English in April. In those days there was no such luxury as an international squad for the manager to select 11 players from. The Scottish FA selectors would announce a team of 11 with one player listed as a 'travelling reserve' (there were no substitutions allowed) generally about ten days ahead of the match. So if your name was on the list, barring withdrawal, you knew you would be playing.

The selectors on this occasion listed all of six new players with no international experience at any level which drew praise from Alan Breck in the *Evening Times*, 'The selectors will not be criticised for not being adventurous. It is a team very much selected on current form.'

Thirds were at home to Rangers in the third round of the Scottish Cup four days before the Sunderland match. The match drew Cathkin Park's all-time record attendance with the official crowd given as 45,591 although the *Glasgow Herald* noted that this figure 'excluded several hundred who managed to "break in"'. Indeed the kick-off was delayed as hundreds of spectators rushed the main gates, resulting in some people being trampled on and many treated for injuries.

With the game goalless and entering its final stages Alistair had the chance to win the tie as an anonymous report in his scrapbook records, 'Just before the final whistle MacLeod after a lovely solo run struck the post with Niven nowhere.' This was apparently one of the game's few bright spots as the same report summarised the match thus, 'What a disappointment this game was... almost devoid of any thrills.'

With the Ibrox replay set for the Wednesday, Alistair had to withdraw from the Scotland squad along with Hearts' Willie Bauld who had picked up an injury. The two replacements for the trip to Sunderland were Jackie Henderson of Portsmouth and Celtic's Neil Mochan.

The *Scottish Daily Mail's* Andrew Clunie paid the MacLeod household a visit and the player confessed to being disappointed. 'But it's not so bad. Maybe I'll get a cup medal instead,' he reasoned, displaying the optimism which would be so prominent throughout his career.

If the first match had been a bit of a let-down the same could not be said of the two replays. On the Wednesday afternoon the sides were level at 3-3 after 90 minutes with Thirds having fought back from a 2-0 deficit. Eventually the

tie finished 4-4 after extra time. Although such scorelines were perhaps not the norm high-scoring matches were frequent in those days with little thought given to negativity and stifling the opponents' game, but instead an emphasis on trying to score more times than they could find the net. A spectator that afternoon was 12-year-old local lad Alex Ferguson.

Today Sir Alex still recalls Alistair's performance, 'I remember the first time I saw Ally play. I went to the football with my staff sergeant in the Boys' Brigade Alistair Miller who was inside-left at Thirds and went on to play for St Mirren. In the first game at Ibrox Ally gave George Young a really hard time of it. Big Corky was a great Rangers player and Ally really gave him a hard time. It was freezing cold and I was in the Celtic end as it was the nearest to where we lived in Govan. Normally I would go to the Rangers end where the atmosphere was fantastic.'

Later that night (with floodlights permitting an evening kick-off) the B international finished level at 1-1 and was summed up by the *Glasgow Herald* headline, 'SCOTLAND LUCKY TO DRAW AT SUNDERLAND'.

Alistair soon made the headlines again with 'MCLEOD'S "CAP" CLAIM STRONGER THAN EVER' in an unidentified publication.

The report read, 'Alastair McLeod of Third Lanark surely deserves the most serious consideration for a cap against England following his magnificent exhibition against Rangers. It is difficult to recall a wingman enjoying such spectacular success against a Light Blues defence at Ibrox. On three occasions he dribbled through the centre almost from mid field to lay on two goals and one near miss. If gamble it is we say it is a worthwhile gamble because in addition to his solid merit, McLeod is in the tradition of Patsy Gallacher and Tommy McNally – an entertainer, something out of the common rut.'

The writer was by no means a lone voice as Morris Peden echoed the sentiments in the *Daily Herald* with 'LET'S BE ADVENTUROUS IN SELECTING', calling for the selectors to include not only MacLeod but also Celtic's Willie Fernie and Jock Aird of Burnley.

None of Peden's recommendations were included although one irony was the selection of Jackie Henderson for the England game after he had been Alistair's replacement in the B squad. Alistair may not have realised it at the time but there would be no further approaches for him to play for his country. It would be another 23 years before Scotland came calling on him again.

The second Scottish Cup replay the following Monday, also at Ibrox following the toss of a coin, was another thriller. Thirds scored first through Bobby Kerr but exited the tournament on the wrong end of a 3-2 scoreline. Sir Alex also attended this match and his memory is, 'Thirds really should have won in the third game. There was nothing in it and Rangers just pipped it.'

The three cup ties had produced an average of over four goals per game which is not a bad statistic considering the first match had ended scoreless.

Third Lanark did end the season on a high when they gained some revenge on Rangers for the Glasgow and Scottish Cup defeats in the final of the Glasgow Charity Cup at Hampden on 7 May, a Friday evening.

More convincing than the one-goal victory may suggest, the press were unanimous as to who had been the better side. The *Glasgow Herald* report contained the following, 'There can be no diversity of opinion as to the correctness of Third Lanark's victory.'

Singling out two players the scribe continued, 'Dick and McLeod in particular tantalised Rangers' defence with immaculate ball control and precise passing.' Indeed the match's only goal came as a result of a series of passes between the two allowing Bobby Kerr to finish off the move. Writing in the *Daily Record*, 'Waverley' (real name William Gallagher) was in agreement, 'Third Lanark were good winners. For most of the game they played super football.'

The Hi Hi finished third in Division B that season and missed out on promotion by six points. There had been some bizarre league results by today's standards – notably a 9-1 home win over Dundee United, a 9-2 victory against St Johnstone at Cathkin and a 6-0 win at Ayr United. These results however were counter-balanced by a 6-1 reverse at St Johnstone and a 7-3 home defeat to Morton.

Towards the end of the season both Newcastle and Rangers, who had an offer turned down, were said to be interested in signing Alistair but he was to remain a Division B player for the following term.

The winger had now established himself in the first team and had been an ever-present that season, playing in all 45 of Third Lanark's competitive matches. The statistics are 30 Division B matches, eight League Cup ties and seven in the Scottish Cup. He amassed a total of ten goals – seven in the league and three in the League Cup.

No sooner had the new season started than Alistair was called up for National Service at the age of 23. Most fit youngsters of the time were enlisted when 18 but because of his studies his date had been deferred by five years.

He and two other footballers, Davie Mathers and Willie Crawford, both from Partick Thistle, reported to Glencorse Barracks in Midlothian on Thursday 19 August to begin their two-year conscription, or as the *Daily Record* put it, 730 days.

Writing in the *Evening Times* 'Jaymak' informed readers that the trio had 'a depressing introduction. The barracks were grim in the rain and to welcome them were lined up two press photographers and Sergeant Major John Craig of the Headquarters Company, who is by the way of being slightly "Rangers daft"'

Alistair referred to the type of posting as BHFF – Be Home For Friday. This meant he was off duty at weekends which was ideal for seeing Faye and turning out for the Hi Hi. Indeed he played for Thirds at Broomfield just two days later where Airdrie defeated them 2-0 in a League Cup tie in which, again quoting 'Jaymak' in the *Evening Times*, 'Soldier McLeod had a lean game.'

The following Monday all three of the new recruits were included in a Scottish Command side to play Hibs at Easter Road. Hibs fielded pretty much a reserve team but did include two of the Famous Five in Ormond and Turnbull.

They won comfortably 5-0 although in his match report Jim Rodger considered the goal margin 'unfortunate' and absolved Celtic keeper Andy Bell (also serving with the Royal Scots) of any blame for the goals.

'The crowd were entertained by the delightful play of the Partick and Third Lanark players,' he added, singling out MacLeod and Joe McInnes (also with Partick and serving with the Glasgow Highlanders) as 'stars' while 'Crawford and Mathers were heroes in the Army defence'.

Just two days later Alistair was given an early pass from Glencorse to catch the 4pm train from Edinburgh Waverley to Glasgow from which he made a quick dash to Cathkin Park for a Glasgow Cup first round tie. This was hardly ideal preparation for a game against Rangers but he was there in time to start the match which finished 2-0 in favour of the visitors. Since joining up at the barracks just six days earlier Alistair had already managed to play three 90-minute games of football as part of his hectic new lifestyle.

Ally was made ration corporal at Glencorse which meant he was never short of food and he made sure he kept on the right side of his sergeant by giving him extra helpings. As a corporal he was often in charge of the Guard House and on one occasion there he 'accidentally' spilled an ink bottle on the leave book. When he went to apply for some time off he was advised he had exhausted his entitlement. Alistair disagreed and asked to see the ledger after which he was granted his day off!

That season he made 20 league appearances out of a 30-game fixture list, played in six League Cup matches and both Thirds' Scottish Cup ties where they went out to Motherwell after disposing of Queen's Park. He did manage to get his name on the scoresheet during the 3-1 reverse to the Steelmen.

He also found the net once in the League Cup which had been a disappointment with failure to progress from the qualifying section, Thirds finishing second to Airdrie and above Cowdenbeath and Queen's Park. Four league goals took his scoring total to six for the season.

Thirds finished in fifth place in the Division B table having won 13, drawn seven and lost ten of the 30-game schedule. The highlight in the league had been a 9-0 mauling of Ayr United in December and a thrilling 4-3 home defeat to champions Airdrie who were promoted with Dunfermline.

Interest in Third Lanark's prized asset had continued throughout that season with both Sunderland and Stoke City having offers rejected. Now writing as a journalist for the *Scottish Daily Express*, the manager who had first signed MacLeod, Jimmy Carabine, ran a story with the headline 'NEWCASTLE AFTER MACLEOD' which included, 'Recent improvements in the play of Third Lanark's soldier outside left Ally MacLeod has again attracted the attention of Newcastle United.'

Before the end of the campaign Rangers had another offer rejected by Thirds manager Jimmy Blair who had succeeded Alec Ritchie earlier in the year. It was said they were believed to be holding out for £5,000 before sanctioning Alistair's departure.