



Mark Poole

99 ICONIC MOMENTS IN SCOTTISH FOOTBALL

From the Famous to the Obscure,
Scotland's Glorious, Unusual and
Cult Games, Players and Events

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Introduction

Finding out about St Mirren winning the Barcelona Cup was my first step down the path to writing this book.

Led down a fascinating rabbit hole by a post from the National Library of Scotland, I stumbled across a picture of 1920s St Mirren dignitaries with the Barcelona Cup. What's the Barcelona Cup? And how come our very own Buddies won it?

Further down the hole, I found out that Motherwell had won the same Catalan trophy too – and a few days earlier they'd also won the Copa del Rey.

I love stories like that; the sort of ideas that I like to research and write for magazines.

I quickly compiled a list of my favourite moments in Scottish football and was soon approaching 100. There was a book in this – a curated list of assorted anecdotes from Scotland's unique football history.

The list eventually swelled to 117 moments. The 99 that I researched, wrote up and included here are chosen not just because they're the best ones, but for their variety too; I resisted the temptation to include too many classic cup finals or glorious European adventures.

So Kilmarnock thrashing Eintracht Frankfurt, Hibs finally winning the Scottish Cup again, and Rangers and Aberdeen's epic 1987 League Cup Final all narrowly missed out. But I had to draw the line somewhere. Maybe I'll write about them all later. And there are plenty more stories about Killie, Hibs, Rangers and Aberdeen in here.

As well as choosing as many different types of stories as possible – from the glorious to the obscure; from cult players to off-pitch intrigue and loads more between – I’ve included teams of all sizes, from across the country (first up, Royal Albert).

I found out things that I didn’t previously know about famous stories and I stumbled across fascinating hidden gems that I couldn’t believe I didn’t already know about.

And although I have my own club – and assorted opinions on just about every other team in the country – I strived to choose stories fairly. Not by ‘balancing out’ East Fife winning the Scottish Cup, for example, by finding a story for their local rivals Cowdenbeath, but by treating every club fairly and without prejudice. And if it’s balance that we’re after, it helps that Celtic and Rangers both outclassed Leeds in the European Cup.

Apart from the final three, top, moments, there’s no specific order to the rest of the book. It’s not chronological; it’s not a countdown. I took the same approach as how I imagine a band compiles an album, giving myself the freedom to mix it up in a flow that felt good, and with a few natural segues between pieces that sit nicely next to each other.

I’ve loved researching and writing this book – the subject matter is so far up my street that it’s moved in next door. There aren’t many experiences as satisfying as finding that extra bit of detail and colour that’s been lying dormant for many decades, waiting for you, in an old newspaper in a library reading room, and breathing new life into it. I hope that you enjoy reading it just as much.

Saturday, 6 June 1891

*James McLuggage Scores the
World's First Penalty*

The International Football Association Board's 1891 Annual General Meeting was particularly productive. In spite of their grand name, IFAB, the guardians of football's laws, only featured representatives from Scotland, England, Ireland and Wales. Even now, the UK FAs still hold half of the decision-making power on football rules.

At that busy meeting at Glasgow's Alexandra Hotel, four men – Messrs Snedden of Scotland, Crump of England, Reid of Ireland and Hunter of Wales – formalised multiple innovations that are still integral elements of the game.

They formalised pitch and goal dimensions, ball sizes and weights, and the latest pitch markings – including, for the first time, a centre spot with its now-so-familiar ten-yard circle.

They also revolutionised the referee's role and introduced linesmen. Previously, the referee operated from the side of the pitch, while two umpires were on it. Snedden, Crump, Reid and Hunter decreed that umpires should be removed and that the referee should be allowed on to the pitch, with wide-ranging powers, assisted by neutral linesmen. Basically the arrangement that continues to this day.

But probably the most controversial rule change ratified in Glasgow that evening was the introduction of penalties.

Previously, fouls or handballs right up to the goal line were rewarded just by free kicks, which were easy for defenders and goalkeepers to block, and which consequently rewarded deliberate rule-breaking. Penalties would change that, but, like any football innovation, the idea was treated with suspicion, particularly from ‘gentlemen’ footballers who couldn’t tolerate the mere suggestion that a player would seek to gain advantage from foul play. Remarkable sporting all-rounder C.B. Fry reportedly said that the new rule was an insult to sportsmen and that it was based on the assumption that players behaved ‘like cads of the most unscrupulous kidney’.

But the traditionalists would have to tolerate the insult. Penalties were introduced, initially to be taken from any point on a new penalty line, running across the pitch. The goalie could advance off his line, but no more than six yards, and all other players had to be at least six yards behind the penalty taker.

Just four days after the IFAB meeting, and only 12 miles to the east, at Mavisbank Park in Airdrie, Royal Albert player James McLuggage took – and scored – the world’s first ever penalty, against Airdrie.

The *Coatbridge Express* reported that, about 15 minutes into the final of the Airdrie Charity Cup, the referee, James Robertson, ‘pulled up Mitchell for throwing Lambie and granted a foul under the new law’.

The *Scottish Sport* reported that the players were initially confused by the new rule and tried to form a wall between McLuggage and veteran Airdrie goalkeeper James Connor, until Mr Robertson set them straight, and McLuggage made history by shooting past Connor.

McLuggage, who was born in Ireland and moved to Scotland as a child, had an otherwise modest football career. Royal Albert still exist, and now play towards the bottom end of the West of Scotland Football League. Mavisbank is now a neighbourhood park. The location and protagonists may be unremarkable, but they were central to a key event in global football history.