

JEFF HOLMES

A SEASON TO BE CHEERFUL

GLASGOW RANGERS 1992/93



JEFF HOLMES

A SEASON

TO BE

CHEERFUL

GLASGOW RANGERS 1992/93



Contents

Acknowledgements	9
Foreword	11
Introduction	13
1. McCoist makes it to Tuscan Paradise	17
2. Dave McPherson.	28
3. League Flag Flies Proudly on Opening Day	40
4. Ally Maxwell	51
5. Lyngby are 'Dane For' in Euro Qualifier.	58
6. Bomber Brown.	67
7. Goals Galore for Super Ally	79
8. Battle of Britain	88
9. Old Firm Joy for Gers.	98
10. Ian Durrant	110
11. Fergie Outguns Russians in Bochum	117
12. Gary McSwegan.	127
13. A Two-Horse Title Race	143
14. David Robertson	155
15. Gers are Top of the Hit Parade!	161
16. Dale Gordon	170
17. Huistra Grabs Euro Point In Bruges	177
18. Archie Knox	190
19. French Farce Ends Euro Dream	202
20. Stuart McCall	210
21. McSwegan Seals Title Glory.	223
22. Pieter Huistra	232
23. Make Mine a Treble!	238
Statistics	247

Introduction

WEDNESDAY, 21 October 1992; not a date that rolls easily off the tongue, but one which presented me with a dilemma. I knew I would be asked to work late that afternoon, and that was the problem. A big problem.

At the time I was employed by Scottish Television as a stagehand/prop man. It was a good job, my first job actually. I had started in the Cowcaddens television programme factory in January 1977. I was an extremely loyal employee, but that day I would have to introduce a little cunning.

I was working on the latest episode of the cop drama *Taggart*, and we were filming in Airth, a little village close to Falkirk. The one-off special was called 'Fatal Inheritance' and starred Hannah Gordon as the proprietor of an upmarket country club-cum-spa. The show was due to air on New Year's Day. Detective Chief Inspector Jim Taggart books into a health farm to keep an eye on the good doctor, after she receives a Not Proven verdict in the court case relating to the murder of her husband's lover. The usual Taggart fare.

That was all good and well, but I had a more pressing problem; how to get out of working late that Wednesday. Due to the nature of the filming, a string of night shoots were necessary, although the only place I wanted to be that evening was Ibrox as Leeds United visited in the second round, first leg of the European Cup.

I had a ticket, of course, and the only thing left for me to do was convince the production designer (my boss) that I had to be elsewhere from around 6pm until around 10pm. He wasn't a football man, and it would have been unprofessional to have asked for time off, especially as half the crew were Rangers supporters and were desperate to be at the match. No problem. A future location required some finishing touches and as I drove off in the rented Transit van, he waved with a mixture of friendliness and suspicion. I had

convinced him the job only required the services of one man for a couple of hours. He would never know, would he?

I motored towards Glasgow and the traffic was heavy. After all, 43,250 others had the same idea; maybe not to bunk off work, but to get to the game on time. I had left Airth with time to spare so I had little to worry about.

Arriving at the ground, I searched for a parking space in the pot-holed streets surrounding Ibrox and eventually paid a couple of mini Goodfellas to 'watch my van' and walked the short distance to the ground.

Striding towards the Broomloan Road stand I could feel a real sense of anticipation within my fellow supporters. There was a real sense that this could be our night. Of course, Leeds were a top team and had some fantastic players but our collective spirit, I felt, could see my team prevail over two legs and qualify for the group stages of the first ever Champions League.

That was the hope as I filed into the stadium, grabbed a pie and soft drink and took my seat a dozen rows from the front in BF2, just to the right of the goal, as you look on to the lush green grass of home.

I was in 20 minutes early and began squinting through my programme as the Leeds players were put through their paces 20 yards in front of me. Some did a series of little stretches, others practised heading, and half-a-dozen took shots in at John Lukic.

The guy next to me, a middle-aged man with a Fife twang, sipped on his coffee while telling me exactly why we would put three or four past the big Serbian. I was (half) listening but the poor sod wouldn't be around much longer as the moment he raised his paper cup to his mouth, a wayward Gary McAllister shot missed the goal completely but struck Mr Fifer perfectly on the nose, sending a mixture of coffee, glasses, the pages of my programme and blood up into the air and back down again in slow motion as my buddy-for-the-evening bit the dust. He was out of it. McAllister was completely unaware of the pandemonium his rotten attempt on goal had caused as the very minute the ball left his boot, the Leeds players were summoned to leave the field and head back to the dressing room for one final pre-match pep talk.

The paramedics attended to Mr Fifer and he was taken off on a wee stretcher never to return. The incident left a strange feeling in the moments before the big game, but sadly Mr Fifer was all but forgotten as the teams made their way on to the park amid a

crescendo of noise. No away supporters (allegedly); just Rangers fans willing their team on to a famous victory with cheering, screaming, singing and roaring. Would it be enough? We were only seconds away from finding out. Let the long-awaited Battle of Britain commence.

The game started and we settled down for the evening. The weeks leading up to this vital European Cup tie had dragged but it was finally here. Now to enjoy. Whoops, here comes Leeds straight away. WOAH! That Gary McAllister has the ball on the edge of the area. Duck everyone, we don't wanna end up like Mr Fifer! We breathed a huge sigh of relief as the net saved us from a fate similar to that of Mr Fifer. The downside? We were 1-0 down inside the first minute!

Okay, the goal was scored at the opposite end of the ground, but have you never heard of dramatic licence?

Well. I didn't see that coming, if you know what I mean. Thankfully, though, John Lukic threw one into his own net and Ally McCoist bagged a second to give us a slight advantage to take down to Elland Road a fortnight later. The final whistle blew and there was a surreal cloud of apprehension hanging over the stadium as we filed out into the night; perhaps we all reckoned the 2-1 lead wouldn't be enough to get us through to the promised land of the Champions League.

Anyway, I had more pressing matters to hand. Like would my hired Transit van still be in one piece; would it be on bricks – or empty? I needn't have worried as the Ant Hill Mob proved very able custodians, and I sped (not illegally) back to Airth to re-join the crew. On entering the expansive grounds of Airth Castle, the first person I encountered was our production designer, who greeted me with a warm smile and asked if I had enjoyed the game! I was about to put on my best 'confused face' when he added, 'We seen you on the TV,' when Ally McCoist scored, and with that he flashed another smile and walked off. He knew how much I loved Rangers.

Rumbled. It had been an eventful evening and I joined in the night's filming and not another word was spoken. Oh, and 2-1 proved more than enough for us to progress in the competition and collect our 'Fatal Inheritance'.

The 1992/93 season was certainly proving eventful, and as it wore on, we would come to discover just how successful it would be.

Jeff Holmes
September 2017



1

McCoist makes it to Tuscan Paradise

PRE-SEASON started belatedly for eight members of Walter Smith's squad as they were given extra time off following their participation in the European Championships in Sweden, although eyebrows were raised when goal king Ally McCoist insisted on returning to training early!

The wily gaffer added three new faces to his group, with two of them – Trevor Steven and Dave McPherson – returning to Ibrox after spells away. Former Motherwell goalkeeper Ally Maxwell, who had spent the previous season in dispute with the Fir Park club, also signed as back-up to Scotland's number one Andy Goram.

The new arrivals aroused speculation that Smith would have to offload players to balance the books but he insisted that wasn't the case, saying, "There is no way we are actively trying to sell anyone. We used 27 players in our first team last season, so this year will be every bit as difficult. If you take that into consideration nobody can say we have too many players.

'Demands on players in the modern game are far greater than they have ever been, so it's important to have a large squad to cover injuries and suspensions.

'Transfer speculation will always follow a club the size of Rangers but we just have to put up with it. I don't want to sell anyone, but if

a club is interested in a player who is not featuring for the first team then we will consider it.'

Smith reckoned he had assembled his strongest squad since joining six years previous, and while that was naturally seen as a positive, the flip side meant some players would be left disappointed at not getting regular first team football in the coming season. However, the boyhood Gers fan insisted he wouldn't flinch at making the kind of decisions that would keep Rangers at the forefront of Scottish football. Smith's side had won four titles in a row and players like Trevor Steven had been acquired to ensure competition for places would remain as keen as ever.

The players returned for pre-season training buoyed by the prospect of a tilt at a brand new European competition – the Champions League. The new initiative did exactly what it said on the tin, unlike the present day when as many as four clubs from some countries take part. It would begin life as the European Cup, with 36 teams battling to get into a group stage called the Champions League. The winner from each group of four would meet in a winner-takes-all final.

The draw for the first round – which was made while Rangers were at their pre-season training camp in Italy – paired the Light Blues with Danish champions Lyngby, a tie Smith had been keen to avoid. The Danes had provided their national squad with four players, and each played their part in the Scandinavian country's unlikely Euro Championship success in Sweden.

Smith said, 'Last season you wouldn't have wanted to face Sparta Prague as a non-seeded side and I think this year you would have picked Lyngby as one to avoid. That was my immediate reaction and I think it will be an awkward tie.'

Lyngby had won the Danish championship for only the second time in their history and were something of an unknown quantity. With this in mind, Smith planned to watch them in action at least twice.

But while the top-team players were just getting down to some serious work in readiness of a tough season ahead, two under-age representative teams had just returned from Northern Ireland after taking part in the prestigious Milk Cup competition for youth teams.

Rangers' under-16s and under-14s had been to Coleraine for the event and the older age group beat Nottingham Forest 2-1 in the final in front of 10,000 fans at The Showground.

The under-14s were desperately unlucky as they fell to Norwich City at the semi-final stages, losing 3-2 with a goal conceded in the final minute of extra time. Norwich went on to beat Hearts in the final.

Rangers' goal hero in the final of the under-16 competition was none other than Charlie Miller, who bagged a double and earned himself the Golden Boot as the tournament's top scorer. Young Ger Andy O'Brien picked up the top goalscorer award in the under-14 section and Rangers were named most successful club.

Ibrox youth coach Alistair Stevenson said, 'The standard of play at the Milk Cup is very high so we were delighted with the showing of both our teams. We were given fantastic backing by Rangers supporters in Ulster and received many presentations.'

On their way to winning the competition, Rangers' under-16s beat Londonderry Select 3-2, IDV, from Iceland 5-0, Austrian side Steyr Wels 13-1, and Priory County, from England, 4-0 in their sectional games. In the quarter-finals they thumped Grasshoppers Zurich 9-1 before edging Crewe – widely acknowledged as having one of the best youth policies in Britain – 1-0 in the last four.

With assistant manager Archie Knox looking on, Rangers led Forest 1-0 at half-time in the final but conceded an equaliser. Roared on by a partisan crowd, though, Miller scored a sensational winner to earn Gers the gold medals.

The under-14s scored 30 goals in their three sectional games, which included a 20-0 rout of an Icelandic side.

Meanwhile, one player who was hoping to put his own personal nightmare behind him was Dutch winger Pieter Huistra, who admitted he had felt really down after being left out of the previous campaign's Scottish Cup Final win over Airdrie. It was the second season in succession that Huistra had brought down the curtain on a campaign with a scowl on his face rather than a smile.

At the end of 1990/91, Huistra missed out on the deciding league match with Aberdeen. Twelve months later, and after a starring role in the Scottish Cup semi-final, the Dutchman failed to make the squad for the final against Airdrie – which he felt contributed to him being omitted from the Holland squad for the European Championship finals.

The then 25-year-old moaned, 'After injuries, that fortnight has been the worst experience in my career. The same thing happened the previous year when I was involved in every match of the season except the league decider against Aberdeen.'

‘Last season, I was involved in most of the games before the cup final, and with a place in the European Championships also at stake, it was even more disappointing to miss out. I think my chances of playing in Sweden would have been better had I played in the cup final. I was part of the preliminary squad of 25, and when two pulled out, I thought I would have been in contention for a place but the coach picked Rob Witschge, who wasn’t even involved in the original 25!’

Despite being involved in all the earlier rounds of the Scottish Cup, Huistra didn’t get a winner’s medal – and insisted he didn’t know why he was being left out of the Hampden 13. He said, ‘Only the manager can answer that. It was his decision and he will have his reasons. To be fair, it was a hard decision for him to make, but it was also a tough one for me to accept. It is something I will be reminded of even after my career is over, just because it was such a huge moment.’

However, the Dutchman was ready to knuckle down, work hard and fight for a regular first-team place. And there was one more man he wanted to impress, new Dutch coach Dick Advocaat!

He said, ‘If I am playing well for my club, I hope to be involved with the national team again. It’s a big honour to play for your country, but my main consideration is playing for Rangers. After all, it is the club who pay my wages.’

The month of July saw the Light Blues head for the luxurious Il Ciocco resort in Tuscany, where coaches Archie Knox and Davie Dodds put the players through their paces. Mind you, there was still time for some light-hearted banter – which would always be the case with players such as Ally McCoist and Ian Durrant in the squad. In fact, ‘Coisty’ came away with arguably the line of the trip when he quipped, ‘I’m so sharp I could open a tin of peas with my foot!’

Mind you, Durrant wasn’t too far behind, and when he saw nonsense striker Paul Rideout warming up he said, ‘Paul is taking the bounce games seriously. I caught him sandpapering his elbows!’

But even before the squad departed for Italy, there was a shock in store for everyone. McCoist had been on a family holiday in the Seychelles and was due to hook up with Smith, Knox and co. at Heathrow. Knox wagered that legendary latecomer McCoist would live up to his reputation but it was Durrant who pocketed the cash when McCoist was on time, and at the airport long BEFORE the rest of the squad! It was perhaps the first, and last time it would happen.

Mind you, when the players clapped eyes on Coisty's luggage, the banter was soon flowing again. He had a 'Hilda Ogden' trolley with him, and inside was a couple of t-shirts and shorts, a pair of boots and two CDs – Guns 'n Roses and Bruce Springsteen. Thankfully, kitman Jimmy Bell had packed his training gear and clothes before leaving Glasgow.

Full-back David Robertson hopped aboard the flight as a first-time dad, with his wife Kym giving birth to daughter Chelsea just a fortnight beforehand.

The flight to Pisa took two hours and after arriving at Il Ciocco just after 4pm, the players had a short training session to loosen up before returning to the hotel about 8pm and eating, which was followed by a game of cards and then bed. The schedule for the week-long training camp was: a light breakfast at 9am, meet at the hotel entrance for 10am and the five-minute drive up the mountain to the pitches, which are set at an altitude of 700 metres. Training until noon, and then back down for lunch and an 'everyman' break from 1pm until 2pm. That was followed by a two-hour siesta and then another session between 4pm and 6pm.

The morning session was definitely the toughest, and consisted mostly of running, interspersed with games of Torro to re-establish the first touch. The work was hard for the players, but even harder for Steven Pressley and David Hagen, who were responsible for helping Archie Knox set up training exercises, move goals, collect balls and assist Jimmy Bell with training gear and fridge coolers full of water and ice.

However, Hagen said, 'We're the youngest here so it's only right we help out. Besides, we're used to it from our time on the groundstaff. It was an unbelievable bonus when we were told we would be making the trip a few days beforehand. The training has been difficult, but you only pick up good habits from the more experienced players. They are full of encouragement and point out if you are doing anything wrong. The trip is all about experience and it can only help us for the season ahead.'

Rangers were the first of three teams to use Il Ciocco that summer. The week after, Liverpool were scheduled to arrive, and a further seven days later, AS Roma were due. Quite incredibly, staff at the training complex were expecting 5,000-6,000 Roma fans to arrive just to watch their favourites train.

Assistant boss Knox was adamant there would be no slacking, and said, 'If the players try to get fly, we've got to be equally as fly,

if not flyer.’ But he added, ‘There is only so much you can get out of people and we’ve got it – and a little bit extra.’

One man who was hoping for a quiet week was club doctor Donald Cruickshank, who had been at Ibrox for 20 years prior to the trip. He said, ‘In the past, pre-season tended to be very haphazard. We used to go to Sweden and play a few games and it was more like training during the season than intensive pre-season work.’

‘The training conditions in Italy are ideal with one exception – the pitch can sometimes be a bit hard, but they’ve had a lot of rain recently so it should be perfect. The type of food is also a great benefit as it is high carbohydrate with plenty of fruit – ideal for athletes.’

But he added, ‘In my opinion, players who return to pre-season training vastly unfit very rarely ever catch up with their team-mates. These days, most players learn to look after themselves on their holiday and I reckon fitness at this stage is much better than in previous seasons.’

And it would have to be as there was a long and gruelling season ahead. Each top-flight team was scheduled to play an energy-sapping 44 league games, and if the Light Blues were to be successful in both domestic cups and Europe, they were looking at a 65-game campaign!

Mind you, one of the most overworked staff members at Il Ciocco was kitman Jimmy Bell, whose equipment list read like an inventory of the Ibrox boot room – and more. Some of the items he was asked to take included; three sets of training gear for each player (t-shirt, slip, shorts, socks, training shoes, flip-flops and moulded kangaroo-skin adidas Copa Mundial boots – although those with individual boot deals could wear whatever they chose). His trunk also included 20 adidas footballs, spare boots, laces, insoles, boot stretchers, polish and 48 packs of Gatorade juice.

The players would also go through around 20 two-litre bottles of water a day at training sessions, although that was provided by the centre. It was originally hoped that Jimmy would drive to Il Ciocco with the five hampers of kit plus mountain bikes before the players’ arrival but the French drivers’ dispute put paid to those plans.

The gruelling sessions were intended to build up sharpness, not just physically but mentally too. At one point, a Davie Dodds thunderbolt in a training game cracked the bar and fell at an awkward height for Ally McCoist, who managed to control it with one touch and thunder it past Ally Maxwell. As soon as the ball hit

the back of the net, Coisty walked over to John Spencer and said, 'Spenny, I want your comments on that piece of finishing.' Quick as a flash, Spenny replied, 'Ally, there are only two players in Scottish football who could have scored that type of goal – and I'm the other one!'

But despite the razor sharp reflexes that helped him score the goal, Coisty let slip that he was considering a change of position. 'Did you see me there?' he asked his team-mates after an impressive display in the middle of the park. 'I was like Ray Wilkins, picking up passes from the back four and spraying them about the park. I fancy moving to that position in my mid-30s!'

The highlight of the final day at Il Ciocco was a friendly seven-a-side match between a Rangers staff line-up and a waiters' select. However, the staff side was dealt a pre-match blow when Archie Knox was forced to call off with an injury, although his place was ably filled by a female Italian gynaecologist who was staying at the hotel on holiday and had wandered up to watch training. She proved a more than adequate replacement as the Gers turned in a fighting performance to win 8-5. Physio Bill Collins played a blinder in goals, while Walter Smith and Davie Dodds held the defence together. The watching crowd – made up of excess players and waiters – enjoyed the spectacle!

It was soon time to leave Il Ciocco but when the squad arrived at Pisa Airport, they learned of an hour's delay to their flight. While waiting, the Liverpool squad arrived and there were handshakes all around as Graeme Souness – looking fit and healthy after a heart operation – met up with his former colleagues.

John Brown would be a key participant in the forthcoming campaign, and he went into the season having taken strides towards completing his UEFA A Licence qualification at the SFA's Inverclyde coaching centre. He said, 'Players tend to take coaching for granted but I find the courses really open your eyes to the job coaches do and the preparation they undertake. It was rewarding to speak to other players, coaches and managers, even from the amateur levels. Everyone can learn from each other.'

'There was a lot of group work, which was very rewarding, with other players and coaches such as Murdo MacLeod, Keith Wright, Gerry Collins, Ray Farningham, Ally Dawson and Davie Irons participating. Stuart Munro was also there attempting to get the "A" advanced certificate, which is the third qualification, and I think he was successful. These courses set you up for later life, but in the

short term they are also worthwhile as they get you in good shape for the season ahead.'

Off the field there was plenty of praise for Rangers supporters from Chief Superintendent Jim Kay of Govan Police Office. Mr Kay was complimenting fans on their good behaviour inside and outside Ibrox during the previous season. The number of arrests was reduced by 50 per cent from the campaign before, with the majority for drink-related offences.

He said, 'Rangers supporters have established an enviable record of good behaviour over recent years. I am looking forward to the new season and I am sure the supporters will continue to show that their behaviour is an example for others to follow.'

During the 1991/92 season, Ally McCoist scored 39 goals in 49 matches, which led to a clutch of awards coming his way, and none were as welcome as the adidas Golden Boot, with Super Ally reinforcing his reputation as one of the best finishers in Europe.

But as he entered his tenth season with the club since John Greig signed him from Sunderland, he had a message of caution for his very own follow-follow brigade and said, 'I don't think I can score as many goals or as many important goals as I did last season. I know I say it myself, but last season the important and spectacular goals I scored were a dream. Hearts at Tynecastle, Hibs at Ibrox, Celtic in the Scottish Cup and the two against Aberdeen on the last day of the season – they were all vital goals and it will be difficult to match that.

'I also don't think it's getting any easier to score in the Premier League, but if there's one thing I've picked up in my time it's experience, so I'll be doing my best to match those past achievements.'

McCoist was quick to praise strike partner Mark Hateley for his role in their smash 'n' grab partnership, which contributed 62 goals to the Rangers cause in 1991/92, and with comeback king Ian Durrant also looking to fully reintroduce himself to the team, there was no way McCoist would fail to reach a personal target of 200 career Rangers goals (he was sitting on 179) through a lack of ammunition.

He said, 'There seems to be some sort of telepathy between Ian and myself. He always seems to know the runs I make and the passes to play. We saw some of that towards the end of last season – although I'm not happy about him getting the man of the match award against Falkirk when I scored a hat-trick!

'Seriously, the wee man has had a very thorough pre-season. He's been looking good and that will make him sharper for the year ahead, and that's great news for Rangers.'

Meanwhile, one player who couldn't wait for the action to begin for real was 24-year-old Scott Nisbet – despite the Edinburgh-born defender knowing he was facing a real scrap to win a starting place.

Nisbet's favoured position was central defence, and the close-season signing of Dave McPherson – his main rival for the berth alongside Richard Gough – certainly didn't scare big Nissy, but with Gary Stevens out injured, the right-back berth was also up for grabs.

Nisbet said, 'Just because we've signed Davie doesn't mean my best chance of a game is at right-back. There's nothing to stop me aiming for a game in the middle of the defence.'

Nisbet had starred for Rangers in the first half of 1991/92 in central defence before injury forced him on to the sidelines and allowed Oleg Kuznetsov and then John Brown to take over. But right-back was also a position the versatile Nissy had filled on numerous occasions.

He said, 'I played at right-back for just about the whole season when Terry Butcher broke his leg and I've covered for Gary [Stevens] quite a few times, but it's up to the manager to make the decisions on where I'll play.'

'To be honest, I don't mind competing for any position, no matter where it is. I have no preference for either full-back or central defence, just as long as I get a game. Full-back is definitely the harder position to play. You must watch the line more carefully for offside and physically it is more difficult as you have to constantly be in support. David Robertson and Gary Stevens both fill the role very well because they are excellent athletes as well as very good players.'

Nisbet added, 'I didn't miss a day's pre-season training and now it's up to me to win my way into the team. If I achieve that, I then need to put pressure on Walter Smith with my performances so he can't drop me. It's up to me to make his job much harder.'

Brian Reid was two years younger than Nisbet, but his aims and objectives were exactly the same: he was gunning for an elusive defensive role. The talented youngster had just endured a nightmare eight-month spell on the sidelines and was desperate to get back playing regularly. He had managed a couple of comeback games at the tail end of the previous season – but that was for the Ibrox second and third strings.

He said, 'I surprised even myself by just how well pre-season training went. I thought I would struggle, but I kept up with the front pack, although I probably helped myself by doing two weeks' work before the trip to Italy. Hopefully I impressed the coaches in

training. I don't know if they thought I would be a bit behind, but I feel I've been holding my own.

'I also feel I have to work harder than the other players as they have last season under their belts, so it has been a challenge to get to their level of fitness. Now I'm ready to start afresh, just like everyone else at the club.'

As for the added pressure of McPherson re-signing for the Light Blues, Reid said, 'Davie's signing means I have to work even harder to get into the side. It's just another challenge I have to face, but I'm taking the season game by game, and if I get my chance I aim to take it.'

'My confidence has also been helped by those few games I managed towards the end of the season. I sometimes worried if I would be able to make a comeback at all, but I played through those games quite well and that has given me a boost.'

The former Scotland under-21 man also spoke about winning the tough mental fight associated with such a long lay-off, and said, 'I don't think I'll worry about tackling as I said to myself when I was out for a year that I was going to shut it from my mind because if I thought about it my performances would be affected. And the signs are good as I haven't thought about the injury during training games.'

'Rangers have a big squad, but last season we used all our recognised central defenders, so I'm hoping to get my chance and take things from there.'

Prior to the opening league match of the season against St Johnstone, Rangers hosted French champions Marseille in a challenge match which drew in excess of 40,000 fans to Ibrox. The fixture had been organised as part of Trevor Steven's £2.4m switch to Rangers a week before the start of the season.

The 28-year-old midfielder had moved from Rangers to the southern French port less than a year previous for a stunning £5.5m – although his dream of playing abroad soon turned sour. Steven said, 'I had problems as my contract wasn't being honoured and that cast a shadow. Those problems didn't make it easy for me to settle and at times I simply had to grit my teeth and get on with producing the performances on the pitch.'

'But it was always an ambition of mine to go and play abroad and see what life was like and I thoroughly enjoyed that aspect of my move to France. It was an experience which broadened my horizons, and that's now the way I'm looking at my time on the continent.'

During his short spell in France, there was almost constant speculation that Steven's contractual problems would lead to his departure, and a host of English clubs were reportedly ready to battle it out for his signature. But Rangers got there in the nick of time to help end his French farce.

Steven added, 'A move to Leeds United in particular was being discussed, but even then I was always hopeful Rangers would maintain their interest. I always dreamed I would end up back at Ibrox and thankfully that has happened.'

However, Steven was forced to limp off after 70 minutes of the game against Marseille with a hamstring injury – and that ruled him out of the league opener against Saints. Two goals in two minutes – the first from Rudi Voller and a wonder-goal by Didier Deschamps – gave Marseille a 2-1 win. Mark Hateley hit a late consolation from the penalty spot. Marseille, one of the favourites to win the inaugural Champions League, included stars such as Marcel Desailly, Basile Boli, Franck Sauzee and Abedi Pele.