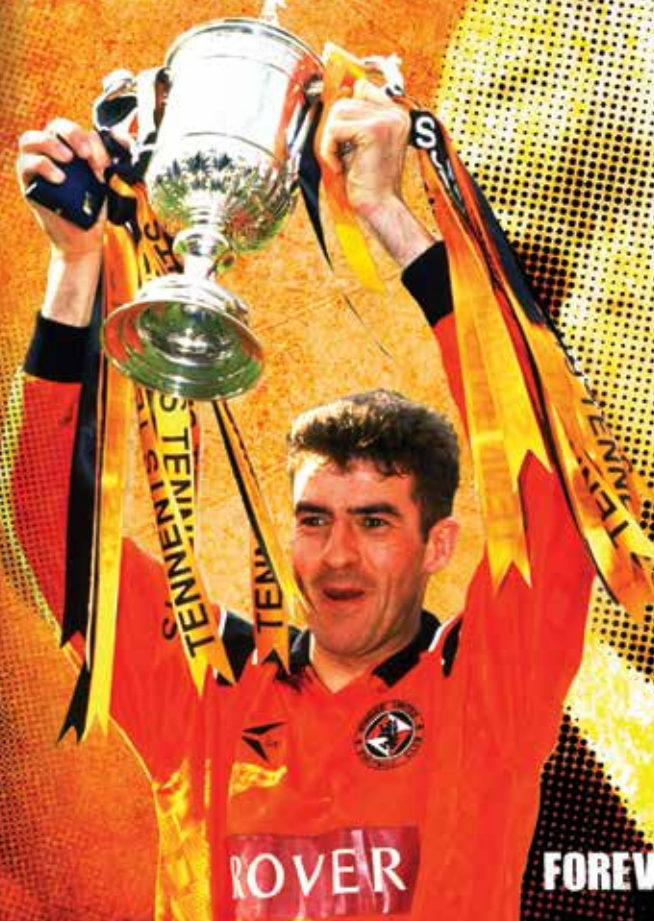


GREATEST GAMES
DUNDEE UNITED
MIKE WATSON



FOREWORD BY DAVE BOWMAN

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Introduction

WHAT constitutes a great game? How long is a piece of string? For some football fans a last-gasp winner – or even an equaliser – can turn what has up until then been an utterly forgettable performance by their team into a ‘great’ game, particularly if it involved an old rival. Of course, that’s a rather narrow interpretation of what makes watching your team special, though there are many fans – and fair play to them – who adhere to the time-worn cliché ‘if they win, then I’m entertained’.

When I first attempted to compile a list of the most notable games played by Dundee Hibernian and Dundee United through 105 years of the club’s rich and varied history, certain occasions naturally jumped out: the five major trophy wins; the UEFA Cup Final, though it ultimately ended in anti-climax, was also an automatic choice. Victories over some of Europe’s biggest clubs, too, self-nominated – but then what?

I decided to include under the heading of ‘great’, those occasions when a record score was achieved, or the most goals in a game happened, or when a player scored a record number of goals, or when a fightback was particularly remarkable (even when, on two occasions, it didn’t avoid a defeat).

I didn’t have great difficulty in reaching a total of 50 games that I felt merited inclusion but I did anticipate the inevitable reaction of many Arabs who would wonder why on earth a certain match had or hadn’t been included.

There can be no such thing as a definitive list of the club’s greatest games but I felt it might help if I involved fellow Arabs by inviting them to let me know what encounters – apart from the obvious ones – should be included.

The club’s matchday magazine and weekly e-newsletter conveyed that invitation and I was thrilled by the response. There were not that many suggestions that I didn’t have on the original list and, with very few exceptions, they have been included.

Any football fan relishes the opportunity to proclaim, when a particular match is brought up in discussion, ‘I was there.’ But this club is about much more than the present or the recent past. Its history, particularly the often faltering steps that it took to advance to where it is today, is of fundamental importance to an understanding of the club and what makes it so special to so many people.

There were occasions when Dundee Hibernian (1920s) and Dundee United (1930s) came perilously close to going out of existence. That would have left a void not just in the city of Dundee but in Scottish football, a void that United have filled with such distinction on so many occasions over the past 50 years, based particularly on the Herculean efforts of managers Jerry Kerr and Jim McLean.

I hope, for whatever personal reason, you will enjoy the moments and the memories recalled in this book – and in doing so will join me in keenly anticipating great Dundee United games to come.

Mike Watson
August 2014



v Albion Rovers 6-1

Scottish League Second Division

Tannadice

19 December 1914

Attendance: 250

DUNDEE HIBERNIAN

Grieve

Chaplin

Forbes

Govan

Hughes

MacDonald

Low

Cheyne

Martin

Linn

Cavanagh

Manager: Pat Reilly

ALBION ROVERS

Harrigan

Trainer

D. Ewing

Gray

R. Ewing

Wallace

Boylan

Ralston

Hendry

Denholm

Greenlees

(Club run by committee)

IN normal circumstances, Dundee Hibernian manager Pat Reilly would have been looking to build on the most successful season in the club's five years in existence. They had finished 1913/14 fourth in the Second Division and Reilly might have had in mind a promotion challenge in the new campaign, perhaps even a tilt at the championship.

But there was nothing normal about the summer of 1914 and when Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August that event had for some time seemed inevitable.

It might have been thought that the football season, to begin 11 days later, would have been postponed but it kicked off as scheduled. Although newspapers optimistically suggested that the conflict would be over by Christmas, the first casualty lists were already beginning to appear as Dundee Hibs travelled to meet Dunfermline Athletic at East End Park on the opening day.

The decision of the football authorities to carry on like nothing had happened was widely condemned. There was considerable questioning of the appropriateness of men being paid to chase a ball while their fathers, brothers and cousins were putting their lives on the line in France. But the Liberal government, led by Herbert Asquith, was apparently of the belief that it would prove beneficial for the morale of the general public if professional football was allowed to continue.

However, it was made clear to the respective football associations that no one should be allowed to make their living from the game during the conflict. For that reason, the Scottish League decreed that 50 per cent was the minimum reduction in pay that should be applied at First Division clubs, where most of the players were full-time.

For Dundee Hibs players, who were all part-time, the cut was 20 per cent. To take account of wartime conditions and the need to attract crowds, the League also announced that admission to grounds would be reduced and at Tannadice it was halved, to 3d.

The wage reduction was not a concern for those players who joined the rush to sign up for a very different type of payment – the King's shilling. Hibs players Tom Boland and Fred Stoessel were among the early volunteers at the recruiting office in Dundee.

Dundee United's Greatest Games

Whether a man decided to enlist or not depended on his own response to the situation, though in some instances it could be influenced by the moral pressure exerted upon him. As far as Scottish football was concerned, the pattern was uneven. Some of the bigger clubs, most notably Hearts and Queen's Park, saw virtually their entire first team squads enlist; in Hearts' case they met at Tynecastle and then walked to the recruiting office. At other clubs, especially Celtic and Rangers, players were more cautious.

Other Hibs players soon followed Boland and Stoessel's example and this led to the club's directors responding in a similar spirit of commitment to the cause. They announced that, to help the players' families while at the same time being seen to aid the war effort, for the duration of the war the board would pay the wages of their players in the military. Given the club's precarious financial situation at the time it was a remarkable gesture and the board went further, deciding that all servicemen in uniform would be admitted to Tannadice at half price.

As the season developed, it was clear the progressive loss of players to the forces made it impossible for the Hibs to maintain the momentum of the previous campaign and they didn't win any of their opening six matches. Arguably the team's most important asset did remain, though. With 18 goals from 22 matches, centre-forward Collie Martin had ended 1913/14 as the leading Second Division scorer and in the new campaign he actually improved on his prolific rate.

David Martin – the origin of 'Collie' isn't known – was born in Brechin in 1890. He had played against the Hibs for Brechin City in the Northern League before being spotted by Dundee. But when he failed to make the breakthrough at Dens Park, Hibs manager Pat Reilly stepped in to sign him in July 1913, thus enabling Martin to join what today remains a select band of players to have signed on at Tannadice direct from Dundee.

He was an immediate success, scoring regularly including five on the road to the club's first national final, the Qualifying Cup. That ultimately ended in disappointment but, on a personal level, he had the consolation of ending the season as the Second Division's top marksman. Martin again scored freely as season 1914/15 progressed and by mid-December he had 14 to his name from 16 appearances.

By then, Dundee Hibs were languishing in 11th place (out of 14) as they prepared to face Albion Rovers at Tannadice. Rovers sat two places above them in the table and had become something of a bogey team. Seven weeks earlier, when the teams met at Meadow Park in Coatbridge, the home side had won 3-0, a repeat of the scoreline in the second replay of that Scottish Qualifying Cup Final the previous December. The first league meeting of 1914/15 simply continued the trend set by the five matches between the two the previous season, none of which the Hibs had managed to win.

As they prepared to face Rovers at Tannadice, revenge might well have been a motivating factor used by Reilly in his pre-match talk to the players. However there was no logical reason for them to take the field with confidence and a win by the narrowest of margins would have been a more than welcome outcome.

There didn't appear to be much enthusiasm for the encounter among Hibs supporters because the following day's match report estimated the attendance at just 250 which, if accurate, was their lowest of the entire season. There was of course a war under way and it was just a few days before Christmas; after the turn of the year attendances did at least reach four figures.

As things would turn out those who chose to stay away were the losers because the game didn't just result in a resounding win, it saw a player score five goals in a match for the first time in Dundee Hibernian's five seasons as a league club.

With the war the main focus of newspapers, reporting of football was limited, particularly the Second Division. What information was given tended to make reference to little more than the names of the goalscorers and unfortunately that practice was not dispensed with even when an exceptional performance had taken place.

The first half at Tannadice was described as 'scrappy', due largely to a frost-bound pitch, but the men in green dominated it and took an early lead through Martin. He soon scored his second, which came as a result of a defensive blunder. In a Hibs attack, Stephen Trainer won the ball near the penalty spot but dithered and allowed Martin to dispossess him before firing past Duncan Harrigan.

With around half an hour played the score was 3-0 after the Hibs won a penalty. There was no doubt as to who should take the kick and Martin lashed the ball into the net. That was his third and it's interesting to read newspaper reports describing it as a 'hat-trick', because his goals came 'in succession'. At that time, a player who scored three times was not given that accolade if goals by a team-mate or an opponent were scored before the third was reached.

Isaac Hendry pulled a goal back for Albion Rovers shortly before half-time but no sooner had play resumed than Martin had the ball in the net again. This time he dribbled past three defenders before shooting strongly past Harrigan, who by now must have been heartily sick of the sight of the centre-forward.

And he was not finished. He was on hand when the hapless Harrigan dropped the ball from a cross and Martin had to do little more than touch it into the goal, stretching the lead to 5-1.

The match seemed to be winding down towards the final whistle when, with just a few minutes remaining, something strange happened – Dundee Hibs increased their tally to six and the goal wasn't scored by Martin. More confusion in the visitors' defence allowed James Cheyne to add his name to the scoresheet to complete a resounding victory, only the Hibs' fourth in 18 league games played that season.

The *Evening Telegraph* summarised proceedings in the quaint language of the period, 'The Tannadice Park team worked with an enthusiasm and vim which was quite refreshing and the dashing raids of Martin fairly upset the backs, who frequently were quite at a loss what to do.'

The representative of the *Coatbridge Express* was there primarily to report on his local team but he, too, was fulsome in his praise for Martin and the Hibs, writing, 'To be plain, the Hibs were absolute masters of the situation and Martin was quite rampageous. Encouraged by success, the hard ground had no terrors for them and they gave their opponents a trouncing which will not be forgotten for a long time. Needless to say the Rovers' return was rather sorry.'

The measure of Collie Martin's feat in scoring five times is that in the 105-year history of Dundee Hibernian and Dundee United only four players have equalled it while just one has exceeded it, with six.

Then what happened?

Martin maintained his prolific scoring for the rest of the season. In the remaining eight Second Division matches he hit a further 11, ending with the remarkable total of 30 from just 25 league appearances. He retained his crown as the division's leading scorer, which in itself was particularly noteworthy as at no stage of the season did the Hibs occupy a place in the top half of the table and the team managed to score only 48 league goals in total!

Dundee United's Greatest Games

Martin scored a further eight times in other competitions that season, which turned out to be the only one in which the Second Division operated during the First World War. At the end of the campaign the clubs met and, having decided that travel was both too awkward and too costly, they formed into regional leagues, with Dundee Hibs playing in the Eastern League between 1915 and 1918.

Martin began 1915/16 where he had left off and after nine Eastern League matches he had 11 goals to his name – but the penalty he scored against Armadale on 16 October was to be his final goal for the club.

That month he became one of the three million men who volunteered for the British armed forces during the first two years of the war (conscription was introduced in 1916). He was the 12th Dundee Hibernian player to do so and like most of his team-mates he joined his local regiment, the Black Watch.

Martin was promoted to corporal, the rank he held when it was announced in March 1917 that he had been killed in action near the Belgian town of Ypres. He was 27.

In a letter to his family, his company sergeant-major said, 'The Germans tried to raid us and Collie was hit by a shell. He never spoke and died in a few minutes. When I saw him he had a smile on his face. He was a good soldier and greatly respected by everyone. He was a great favourite and Brechin today is the poorer for the loss of one of her gallant sons.'

Although every member of the team that played against Albion Rovers joined the forces at some stage during the war, thankfully Martin was the only one who lost his life. But for another of those men, the horrors of war nevertheless exacted a heavy price. Jock Low returned suffering from injuries sustained in a gas attack, serious enough to prevent him adding to the 72 Scottish League appearances he made for the club between 1911 and 1915.