



HIS
NAME
IS

McNamara

JACKIE McNAMARA



HIS NAME IS
McNamara
JACKIE McNAMARA

Foreword by Henrik Larsson



Contents

Foreword by Henrik Larsson11
Prologue.15
1. The Pressure Pot	17
2. Beginnings	25
3. Playing to Par	37
4. Progress	48
5. Welcome to Paradise	59
6. Stopping the Ten (Part One)	75
7. Stopping the Ten (Part Two)	90
8. The Doctor	104
9. A Matter of Trust	126
10. 'Extraordinary'	143
11. Born of Frustration	158
12. Reality	172
13. The Change.	185
14. 'Wee Jackie'	203
15. New Era.	213
16. Jagged.	229
17. My Time on Tayside	243
18. A City Interlude.	262
19. Aftermath.	280
20. Reflections	291
21. Looking Ahead	303
Acknowledgements	314

Prologue

ME?

I'm a fighter.

Always have been.

Maybe it's something to do with being a middle child, coming along as I did a year after my brother Steven and four before Donny to my parents, Jackie and Linda.

In a house with three boys, I was always going to have to punch above my weight just to be heard.

My career was the same. Always fighting to prove my worth, my value to a team whether it was school or district right up to senior professional level.

In ten years at Celtic, I had *six* managers and to every single one of them I had to fight to be a part of their plans.

Football is like life – you have to scrap for everything – but it's not more *important* than life.

Nothing is.

* * *

Saturday, 8 February 2020 was just like any other Saturday in my world.

For the past two years, my wife Samantha and I have lived in Malton. It's a beautiful, quiet market town in North Yorkshire, close to the breathtaking scenery of the scattered, lonely Moors and not too far from the great city of York itself.

We moved there in 2018 with our children, Erin, Sidney and Evie, just after I left my job as chief executive of York City Football Club where I had also been, in the first instance, manager from November 2015 to October 2016.

That first week in February, I had travelled through to Edinburgh on business with my company Consilium Sports Group, caught up with a friend or two and then grabbed the train back to Yorkshire on the Friday night.

Erin is actually living in Edinburgh with my mother-in-law as she is studying for a journalism degree while Sidney goes to school there as he is also an aspirant footballer with the Hibernian FC Academy.

Therefore, it was just ourselves and Evie back in Malton for the weekend. She attends St Peter's School in York on a Saturday, so Sam dropped her off there in the morning.

It was a cold weekend but perfect for dog-walking so, just ahead of lunchtime, Sam and I took James and Gerry, two of our three dogs, for a walk. The surrounding countryside is gorgeous and we took our usual route through the fields and then down into town before picking up coffee to drink on the way home.

Nothing strenuous, just a normal walk on a lovely winter's day.

Getting back to the house, Sam started working in the garden and she hollered out to me to come down and cut away a troublesome branch that jutted out of a large tree. I duly grabbed a saw and started hacking away at the wood when something happened. Something not right.

The Pressure Pot

I WILL never forget the sunshine.

The warmth that bathed you in heat, the feel of the sun on your face and yet, that freshness in the air as well that reminded you that it was still only late spring rather than a full-blown summer.

To me, there were two Celtic Parks.

European nights. Always a midweek fixture, invariably through autumn, winter and possibly, spring.

Floodlights fully on, trained down on the pitch but also a beacon in the night sky that could be seen for miles across Glasgow to let everybody know that Celtic were in continental competition at home.

The night-time match brought its own excitement. It was like a transformation at the ground with 'CELTIC FOOTBALL CLUB' lit up in huge green lettering across the top façade of the North Stand. Unmistakable, unavoidable – this was the home of the Celts. Coming out of the tunnel, into an arena beside foreign opposition and looking at their faces as they took in Celtic Park

in full colour with a full-throated support roaring the team on to the pitch.

The scarves aloft and 'You'll Never Walk Alone' playing out across the PA as we lined up for the official photograph and the atmosphere crackling with electricity.

Atmosphere – that was the thing.

And then there was Celtic Park on a bright Saturday afternoon around 2.55pm with the sun spilling into the ground and on to the pitch.

Supporters basking in the sunshine, clad in Celtic tops, T-shirts with heroes and slogans, the inevitable scarves hanging loosely around their shoulders waiting for the moment when they could raise them high as we took to the pitch.

Walking out into a *different* arena, squinting your eyes as they adjusted to the sunlight with the smell of the grass in your nostrils, Glen Daly chanting 'The Celtic Song' as your entrance soundtrack and the feel of the lush, green turf beneath your boots.

As I say, *two* Celtic Parks.

I hadn't slept well that first week of May 1998, which was unusual for me.

As a professional footballer I looked after myself, subscribing to the regime of healthy diet, regular training exercise and sleep to rest my body in preparation for the battle ahead – but *that* week was different.

I knew what it was, of course.

Here, now, was a week unlike any other in the story of Celtic Football Club and on a personal basis, unlike anything I had ever experienced in my life before.

I had been at Celtic for a little over two and a half years by that point, a Tommy Burns signing and arriving with the belief that I could help the team to win trophies.

By the time I picked up my first cup in December 1997, the Coca-Cola Cup, Tommy had left the club and I was under the charge of Wim Jansen.

The relaxed Dutchman had arrived the previous summer as Tommy, despite having his team playing some of the best football seen at the club in almost a decade, paid the ultimate price for not halting a Rangers surge towards yet another league title – their ninth in a row.

Wim was an unknown quantity to us all but he had made his mark quickly by bringing in a raft of new players, including Craig Burley from the English Premier League outfit Chelsea, and UEFA Champions League winner Paul Lambert. He'd also gone back to his former club Feyenoord and picked up a striker he had worked with before, Henrik Larsson.

New managers have their own ideas, of course, and once again, I knuckled down to the job in hand of fighting to retain my place.

Tommy had me playing as an overlapping right-back as was traditional at Celtic. The brief was to defend but also get down the flank to link up play, provide crosses and get in around the action.

Wim dropped me after a couple of 2-1 defeats to Wacker Innsbruck and Dunfermline Athletic respectively and played David Hannah in my place.

I wasn't happy and, to be honest, a little mystified as I didn't feel I had played that badly in both matches.

The next game was a League Cup tie against St Johnstone in Perth, so I found myself in the unaccustomed position of watching that one from the stand at McDiarmid Park.

I asked to speak to Wim in private and he opened the floor to me.

It was simple enough. I wanted to know why I had fallen out of favour.

He responded casually but also with authority, 'I do not like my full-backs to overlap.'

I stared at him, 'But everybody's used to seeing me do that out on the park. That's my game.'

He remained resolute, 'Well, I don't want that. I want my full-backs to stay in position and *defend*.'

He was my manager, and we were trying to come to grips with each other in these early days, but I still had an answer.

'Well, you need to *tell* me that,' I replied.

Former Celt Murdo MacLeod was his assistant and Wim insisted that he *had* told me that but, in all honesty, I can't recall it.

Anyway, I had knuckled down, reset myself to win him over and within a couple of weeks, I was back in his plans – as a right midfielder.

It was a new position to me, but I adapted and changed my game accordingly to the point that I was awarded the Players' Player of the Year honour for the season by my fellow professionals.

So 1-0 to Wim Jansen, then!

The overall season had been one of nip and tuck with ourselves, Rangers and Hearts vying for top spot.

THE PRESSURE POT

Of course, this wasn't just *any* other campaign. This wasn't just about Celtic winning the 46th title in their history.

Season 1997/98 was about only *one* thing – stopping the ten!

In clinching that ninth title in a row, our rivals had equalled Jock Stein's proud record from 1966–74 and now they wanted to go one better.

It was simple – we had to stop them reaching double figures and for that alone, the pressure was immense!

The legacy of Stein's Lisbon Lions was in our hands.

There was a moment of real incentive in mid-April when we had gone to Ibrox, three points clear of the home side and lost 2-0 to a couple of breakaway goals after playing really well.

Both teams were locked on points and although we had scored more, Rangers were ahead on goal difference.

On Sunday, 3 May we travelled through to East End Park, the home of my former club Dunfermline Athletic for the second-last fixture of the season.

A 1-0 defeat for Rangers to Kilmarnock the day before at Ibrox meant that we could be champions by winning through in Fife.

I had played with Dunfermline for five years, but I had never seen the old ground as full as that before and the majority of them were wearing green and white.

This was the day of deliverance.

The day when ten years of pain could be washed away by the capture of three points.

For my part, it was all a bit surreal to be back at East End, with the stadium rocking to Celtic songs and the expectation thick in the air on a beautiful day in Fife.

The game itself seemed to be a microcosm of the season.

We dominated the play, got the breakthrough goal when Simon Donnelly took a reverse pass from Henrik Larsson inside the box to finish with a nice first-time strike into the net, and then we had the chances to put the whole thing to bed.

We entered the last ten minutes still with that slender lead but with Dunfermline pushing forward, willed on by a support who would not have wanted a title-winning party in their own back yard.

I can't say there was a fear factor although, looking back, Wim was urging us to push out a bit as the home side won a free kick in the middle of the pitch. A ball was floated into the box and out of nowhere, an on-loan substitute called Craig Faulconbridge (some names you can't forget!) got above everybody else and sent a looping header beyond Jonathan Gould and into the back of the net.

It was a punch to the gut. Freakish. The first real glove that they had laid on us all day and now that expectancy of a title party was in real jeopardy.

The manager made a couple of late changes, and I gave way to Harald Brattbakk as we looked to grab a winner – to no avail.

It was sickening to trudge off the pitch knowing that we had let one go.

Wim came into his own in the dressing room. In a situation like that, when everything was on the line; when you could almost taste a victory that meant so much to so many people only to fail in the last moments, it would be easy to start finger-pointing and search for blame.

That, as we had come to learn and appreciate, wasn't Wim's style.

His was an inclusive dressing room – a collective of experienced professionals and his leadership was about getting you to think about your own performance and look ahead to the next game.

It was still there for us in six days' time – at Celtic Park against St Johnstone in front of our own fans.

We needed to match any result Rangers got at Tannadice against Dundee United, but if we won?

If we won, Tannadice was immaterial.

One of my immediate concerns was that I had agreed to go to a supporters' club in Paisley after the Dunfermline match, and I dreaded the prospect now of let-down among those who were coming to it – if indeed they still *were* coming.

I needn't have worried. It was a superb night with singing and dancing which fairly lifted my spirits and made me realise that they still believed we were going to cross the line the following Saturday.

Now began one of the longest weeks of my life.

I was struggling a bit as I had been fighting an injury dating back to mid-season against Aberdeen when I'd taken a knock on my patella tendon after a rash tackle.

By this point in the campaign I wasn't even training during the week and, frankly, was running on sheer adrenaline between treatments.

There was a confidence about the lads but, equally, a nervousness. By the same token, none of us could wait for Saturday.

On the day itself, there was a quietness in the camp as Wim had taken us away to a hotel the night before so that we could relax without press intrusion and focus on the job in hand.

There was a huge crowd waiting outside Celtic Park as we arrived at the ground and, equally, inside the stadium.

The fans were in buoyant mood but it wasn't difficult to also feel the tension as we went through our paces, warming up out on the pitch.

Wim had announced his team an hour and a half before kick-off.

Again, he wasn't a man to play his hand early so subsequently, no one was ever 100 per cent sure they would start a match.

The hands of the clock ticked away towards 2.55pm as we pulled on our green and white jerseys, then settled down for the final words from the manager.

He was the essence of calm. The message was simple. We 'all knew our jobs – it had been a long season – had come this far and now we had the chance to go out on a high'.

The knock on the door from the referee alerted us that it was time to go and so, with the familiar 'tick-tack' of studs on the floor, we stepped out of the dressing room and lined up with St Johnstone before pressing through the tunnel and out into the light where the Celtic support awaited us – where *expectation* awaited us.

Every stand in the ground erupted as we entered the fray.

The stakes were incredibly high. Whatever happened on that day, 9 May 1998, it would be historic in Scottish football – but you have to be on the right side of history.