



Rangers

v Celtic

The Gers
Greatest Old Firm
Victories

Jeff Holmes

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Introduction

Rangers Football Club means so much to hundreds of thousands of followers the world over. For generations, supporters have picked up the red, white and blue scarf at a young age and followed in the family tradition. Happily wandering down the Copland Road just as their forefathers did. It's that kind of club.

As someone once said, bluenoses are born, not manufactured.

And that means Follow Following when Rangers play pre-season friendlies down south, Scottish Cup ties in the north of Scotland, or European matches in far-flung parts like Vladikavkaz, some 4,000 kilometres from home.

But there is one fixture more than any other that is always guaranteed to get the juices flowing. Since the first encounter in May 1888, it has taken on a life of its own. Now, more than 130 years after the first meeting, Old Firm games are as keenly contested as ever, and that intensity shows no sign of abating.

So, what makes this fixture different from, say, the Merseyside or Manchester derbies, or its equivalents in either Madrid or Buenos Aires?

First of all, it's 'our' big game, and while it's not quite a matter of life and death, as the late, great Bill Shankly once suggested, it's not a kick in the backside off it.

The match means so much to so many people, and win or lose, it's about far more than bragging rights. That's just paper talk.

If Rangers are on, say, a seven- or eight-match unbeaten run against Celtic, then that manifests into power. When we were winning nine titles in succession, the football power in the city rested south of the River Clyde. Even if Rangers weren't playing their greatest football, managers like Walter Smith always found a way to beat Celtic. He had their number. His sides normally did just enough, and it wasn't always down to good fortune.

And then there are the resounding victories, such as the 5–1 mauling in August 1988, when it was a great time to be a bluenose. Mind you, has there ever been a bad time? But Rangers were 5–1 up a little over an hour into the game that day, and that was the way it ended, much to the chagrin of the great many supporters who sensed a mauling. To this day, some speak with forked tongues about 'letting them off the hook'. They wanted double figures – complete and utter humiliation.

The Old Firm match is part power grab, part religious, part territorial, part political, part lots of things. It brings out the best in people, the worst in others. With both clubs having such massive fan bases, then we can expect all kinds of views and emotions, from the sublime to the ridiculous. But even the most moderate among us still craves victory in this fixture over just about any other.

When it comes to the players, some can handle it, while others are found wanting. In a nutshell, it separates the men from the boys.

Rangers great Sandy Jardine once described the Old Firm game as ‘like no other’. He added: ‘The build-up starts from the beginning of the week and you train harder and think about the game a lot more than normal. All players are affected. If you’re not, you’re made of stone.

‘Then there’s the pre-match tension. It’s like nothing else. Players who are normally free from bad nerves are jumpy, or stay very quiet. As you change in the dressing room the atmosphere seems to creep under the door and set you tingling. You can hear the crowd building up and the singing gets louder, more intense.

‘The occasion really gets to you. In fact, it’s almost a relief to get out on to the pitch and get the game started. Much better than in the dressing room. Once the game is underway it’s so hectic that you just have to push everything else out of your mind. The game is fast and there is little time to think.

‘I’ve heard a lot of words that describe the Old Firm game: endeavour, excitement, tension, glamour, drama, frustration, joy. Yes, they’re all pretty appropriate.’

My greatest memories as a Rangers supporter are of matches against Celtic. Victory in this fixture always means so much more than any other game. From my first Old Firm encounter, in the early 1970s, to the final match of the 2018/19 campaign, I’ve enjoyed/hated every single one, and I plan to go on enjoying/hating these fixtures

until my number is called. Hang on, maybe they are more important than life itself!

Anyway, enjoy reading this list of cracking Rangers victories.

Jeff Holmes

August 2019

Rangers 3 Celtic 1

Saturday, 18 February 1893
Glasgow Cup Final

FOOTBALL supporters venturing in the direction of Hampden Park can pop into a once famous old Glasgow ground as they make their way along Cathcart Road. Cathkin Park – former home of the great Third Lanark – still exists in ghostly form just a mile or so from the national stadium.

You can stand on the terrace, lean against a red crash barrier, and imagine you've travelled back in time. How about to Saturday, 18 February 1893? In your mind's eye you will be witnessing a little piece of football history. Well, just about. Technically, the Cathkin Park that remains is the second incarnation, with the original just across the road, but why let the facts ...

That day, Rangers chalked up their first ever victory over Celtic, their great Glasgow rivals. Ten thousand spectators filed into Cathkin expecting to see a clever Celtic side continue their dominance of the Light Blues. It had been five years since the formation of the Parkhead side and they'd hit the ground running, leaving Rangers, and just about everyone else, trailing in their wake. Thus, backcourt bookies had made the Celts red-hot favourites to land their third successive Glasgow Cup.

Rangers, on the other hand, had yet to win the old trophy despite reaching the first final against Cambuslang. Mind you, they had looked impressive while disposing of Northern, Linthouse, Queen's Park and Glasgow Thistle en route to this latest final.

Rangers must have taken heart from seeing Celtic lose just their second competitive game of the season the Saturday before, when Paisley side Abercorn won the Scottish League match 4–2 at Underwood Park.

With the kick-off just a few minutes away, members of the Glasgow committee found it difficult to hide their disappointment at the turnout, but there were a number of reasons for it. First of all, the weather. It was a dreich afternoon, which had no doubt kept many a supporter indoors. The admission money was also higher than normal, while many fans regarded the result a foregone conclusion.

The Rangers players could do nothing about admission prices or the weather, but they could have a good go at sorting out number three!

When Celtic captain James Kelly led his team out from the pavilion, a few of his team-mates appeared a little subdued. Half the crowd reckoned the Abercorn result had taken the wind from their sails, while others perhaps thought an easy win lay before them.

Regardless, it was the Rangers that set the early tempo, and a contemporary match report stated that 'the daring, dashing play of the Light Blues was something to behold', but could they keep it up for 90 minutes?

The initial pace was certainly hectic, thanks to the work put in pre-match by trainer Johnny Taylor, and while the players would go on to lift the cup with verve and style, Taylor was hailed as a major reason for Celtic's downfall. The players looked incredibly fit, worth its weight in gold on such a heavy pitch.

That said, Celtic certainly didn't fold like the proverbial pack of cards. They battled gamely but simply failed to get into their stride, not only at the start, but throughout the game. Combination and close passing, which had carried them to many a victory, were conspicuous by their absence, partly due to their inability to adapt quickly to the soft ground, but mainly because the Rangers half-backs had the measure of their opponents and their tackling was spot on. Not a Parkhead man could put his foot on the ball but there were two Gers men immediately on top of him.

The half-back line of Robert Marshall, Hugh McCreadie and David Mitchell broke up any attempts Celtic had at passing it around. The Celts might have exhibited something less than their true form, but never before had the Rangers played up to them so staunchly.

The Ibrox men certainly gave their critics – and there were many – something to chew on, and exposed the weaknesses of the Celtic forward line. Suddenly, Madden, McMahon and Campbell were

considered human, as the Rangers half-backs and backs snapped at their ankles the moment they received the ball.

Rangers all but won the game in the way they set out their formation. Captain David Mitchell coached his team superbly from the first minute to the last, while the cries of their 'touchline men' could be heard throughout the ground.

The Rangers' style was cool, clever and confident. They made winning the ball in the middle of the park a priority, and when they did so they wasted not a single moment, but lashed the ball on, and raced after it for all they were worth.

Neil Kerr turned in a real man-of-the-match performance, and defied those who had called him 'chicken-hearted' in the run-up to the game. He was gameness personified. He had the beating of Dan Doyle, he bagged the second goal, and he fed Davie and McPherson with some delightful passes throughout an entertaining contest. After such an intelligent performance there was talk of a Scotland call-up for the Rangers centre-forward.

The sound defence of Reynolds and Doyle prevented the Celts from an even heavier disaster. Their half-backs failed them, bar Kelly, and Rangers gave neither Dunbar nor Maley any chance to tackle, so fast and open did they continue to keep the play. And when they got within range of Joe Cullen in the Celtic goal they let fly, so that even Doyle and Reynolds weren't given time to tackle.

Cullen lost the first goal rather easily, but John Barker's play deserved it. Barker's was one of the reputations the final improved. He had a dashing, light, free-and-easy style that pleased the eye.

Although the Rangers were going brilliantly, and deserved more than their lead of a goal at half-time, still everybody was waiting for the Celts to rise; but they were doomed to disappointment, for they didn't respond or ever rise to the occasion.

If it was possible, Rangers looked even sharper at the start of the second half. They kept up the pressure on Celtic and, if the truth be told, had them completely mastered, so much so that long before their second goal, they missed out on one of the easiest opportunities ever to score. A shot came off the bar and stopped on the line, the sodden turf holding it in its place, and with Cullen out of his goal, it remained there until dramatically cleared by a defender.

Celtic had a couple of chances but David Haddow, in the Rangers goal, was very assured, and saved well on a couple of occasions. In fact, he also saved a fierce drive by heading it away! Haddow was a

class, cool keeper, and it's a surprise that he only ever played once for Scotland.

There was one other save of note for Rangers – but it wasn't made by Haddow. With Haddow off his line, John Campbell looked set to score for Celtic, but he didn't reckon on the acrobatic qualities of defender Jock Drummond, who was able to 'knee' the shot to safety!

It was not till 15 minutes before time that the Celts showed anything like their true form. They pinned the Rangers back for a spell but the game was all up long before then. Rangers, from a corner, managed a second goal, scored by Kerr, and not long after, midfield ace John McPherson thumped home a third. Celts managed a consolation seconds before the final whistle.

There is no doubt the best team won. Rangers were better all over the park and in Mitchell they had a player who tackled, passed and coached superbly. It was one of his best performances in a Rangers jersey.

Haddow was safe and sure. Hay sound, not a showy player, but with a large soul. Drummond was solid, while Marshall had the measure of Willie Maley. Another reputation strengthened.

McCreadie mastered Madden, and while few people would have thought Rangers could master Celtic in defence, they did.

In attack, Kerr was fantastic, and was backed up superbly by Barker, whose only fault was a penchant for straying offside. Hugh McCreadie and McPherson supported the forwards well.

The game was conducted in a sportsmanlike spirit. It was a final in which Rangers had all the glory, but Celtic no shame.

It was the pleasure of Baillie Primrose to accept the trophy for the winning team. After being presented with the handsome trophy, the Rangers official said that there was no team which Celtic would rather see win the cup, a comment which was endorsed by President Glass of Celtic.

The kindred interchanges of mutual good feeling were a fitting climax to one of the best and friendliest finals ever witnessed.

Rangers: Haddow, Hay, Drummond, Marshall, A. McCreadie, Mitchell, Davie, H. McCreadie, Kerr, J. McPherson, Barker.

Celtic: Cullen, Doyle, Reynolds, Maley, Dunbar, Madden, Campbell, McMahon, Kelly, Towie, Blessington.

Referee: Mr Hay

Attendance: 10,000