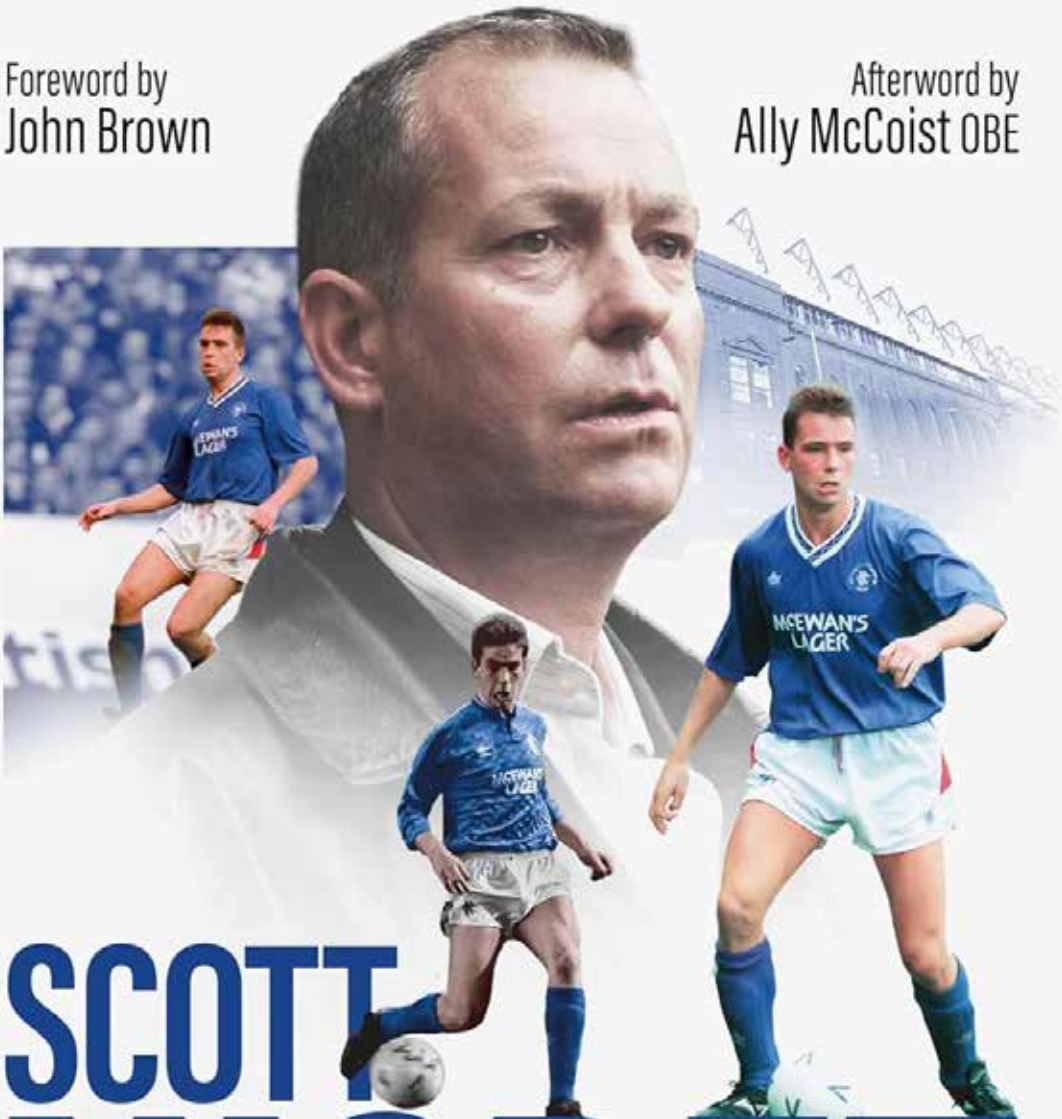
RED, WHITE AND TRUE

Foreword by
John Brown

Afterword by
Ally McCoist OBE



SCOTT NISBET

My Story

With Alistair Aird

RED, WHITE AND TRUE

SCOTT NISBET

My Story

With Alistair Aird

Foreword by
John Brown

Afterword by
Ally McCoist OBE

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements 7

Foreword by John Brown 11

Prologue: The End 15

1. Where It All Began 21
2. Magic in Malta 53
3. From Front to Back 70
4. Becoming a Regular 86
5. From Hampden Hero to Zero 104
6. Making Inroads … Eventually 128
7. Walter 153
8. Into the Darkness 167
9. What Happened Next? 179
10. Back to School 183
11. Getting the Boots Back On 191
12. The Big C 204

Epilogue: Rangers Then and Now 233

Scott Nisbet by Those Who Know Him Best 241

Afterword: Alistair McCoist OBE 269

Statistics 273

Index 282

CHAPTER ONE

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

I WAS born on 30 January 1968 in the Western General Hospital in Edinburgh. My mum worked in a fashion shop called Richardsons in Princes Street. Although she was registered with the name Beatrice, she hated it and, instead, wanted everyone to call her Tracey. My dad, David, was a foreman on the myriad building sites that were dotted all over the city.

I had a good relationship with both my parents but it's fair to say that their marriage was volatile. I witnessed several altercations between them and these were both verbal and physical. And by the end of their marriage, by which time I was around 12 years old, they were at war with each other.

On one occasion, the police had to be called and it took six officers to intervene and wrestle my dad out of the house. It was no real surprise when their marriage ended but, although the split was acrimonious, my mum and dad made sure that I wasn't caught in the crossfire. I stayed with my mum after the divorce but there were no issues regarding access. I would still see my dad, who lived in Goldenacre, which was only a ten-minute bus ride away, on a regular basis.

After my parents divorced, my mum had to supplement her income from her full-time job by working at the George Hotel. And when my older brother and sister left home, that often meant

I would be home alone, as her shifts at the hotel would usually be at night. But I understood that that had to be the case, as my mum needed to go out to earn money to make sure we had food on the table and clothes on our backs.

My mum had two sisters – Margaret and Caroline – and I would go to one of their houses each night for something to eat. Both stayed near us, with my Auntie Margaret living in the police houses in Muirhouse Avenue, as her husband, my Uncle David, was a policeman, while my Auntie Caroline stayed in Granton. Having them close by was perfect, as it meant that, after quickly scoffing my dinner, I could join my mates outside a set of high-rise flats in Martello Court to play football. A new 15ft wall had just been built, so that would act as our goals as we played things like two-v-two. And since my mum's shift would usually end at 2am, we would play there until the early hours of the morning. It was brilliant and I would far rather have done that to pass the time than sit on my arse all night on a games console like the kids of this generation do.

My mum taught me the importance of saving money, too; none more so than when I first signed for Rangers. I was paid £10 a week and she took everything I earned and put it into a savings account. And when I turned 16, she cashed in the account and gave me the money.

My dad was typical of that generation. He worked hard to earn his wages and after he had been paid, he went down to the pub for a few drinks. He would usually get paid on a Thursday, so he would be in the pub Thursday night, Friday night and Saturday. He would often do so caked in mud and still wearing his rigger boots.

These were the days before bank transfers and electronic payments, so my old man would get cash in an envelope. And that means of payment meant I had a job to do after my mum

and dad split. My mum knew when my dad got paid, so I would be dispatched to go around his usual haunts to get the child maintenance money that was due. When I found him, there would be no issues with him hsetting up. He would take me outside and hand me what my mum was to get but it was made clear that I wasn't to 'fucking lose any of the money or you'll get slapped'. And when I got back in and handed over the money, my mum would invariably ask me: 'Which fucking pub did you find him in this time?'

My dad passed away in March 2010. A two-inch blood clot had formed around his heart and when part of it broke away, it moved down into his leg, rather than up into his brain. That meant he had to have his leg amputated from the knee down. But when he was in hospital, he picked up one of the superbugs and had to be put into isolation. And while he was in there, infection spread into his leg and the rest of it had to be amputated.

Even though he now had one leg, my dad was philosophical. 'Shit happens, son,' was what he told me. He ended up in a wheelchair and he battled on for a few years before his health deteriorated and his organs started to shut down. He was admitted to Edinburgh Royal Infirmary and I got the call in Lanzarote to come home, as he was in a bad way. When I arrived at the hospital, he had an oxygen mask on. I joked with him about timing, telling him he had 365 days a year to get ill but he chose to do so at Easter when the flights were extortionate. My dad smiled before slipping his mask to the side and telling me: 'Son, that's me fucked now.' Those were the last words he ever said to me. Later that day, he was moved into a private room, as it was only going to be a matter of time before he died.

My arrival had completed our family unit. Joining me in the house were two older siblings; my brother, David, who was five years my senior, and my sister, Debra, who was ten years older.

And although there were the usual squabbles you had with your siblings, I looked up to and admired them both.

David was a good footballer – he played for Scotland at Under-18 level – and he was a smart cookie as well. When he left school at 18, he had the qualifications to get into university in Edinburgh but he ended up crossing the Atlantic Ocean instead.

I remember one day my mum taking a call from Campbell University in North Carolina. It turned out that David and a lad called Mike Muirhead were being offered scholarships; David for soccer and Mike for golf. In Scotland, getting offered an opportunity like that was rare and they both followed in the footsteps of the swimmer, David Wilkie, who was offered scholarships by Harvard University, the University of Southern California, Florida, Alabama and Miami after he won a silver medal at the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich.

It was a great achievement for David and we were all very proud of him. He was in the US for four years, between 1981 and 1985, and came home with a degree in business and economics. And when he got back to Scotland, he tried to make a go of it as a professional footballer.

He was offered a trial by Manchester City, who at that time were managed by Billy McNeill. But when that didn't work out, David came back to Edinburgh, where he got the chance to train with Hearts and Hibernian. Hearts had a formidable side at that time and they would end up being pipped for the double in 1985/86. They had a strong and settled squad, so it looked like David would have a better chance of getting a game in a green jersey rather than a maroon one. But towards the end of his five-week spell at Easter Road, the manager, John Blackley, told him that he didn't have the money to sign him.

David had had enough at that point, so he got a job as a sales rep with Sondico. He also played football part-time for

Meadowbank Thistle. Terry Christie, a close friend of the Nisbet family and the man who saved my own football career, was the manager and David was playing alongside the likes of Darren Jackson and Alan Lawrence. He made 28 league appearances and scored once – against East Stirlingshire – as Meadowbank finished third in the Second Division. The following season, he played 19 times as Meadowbank were crowned champions. He also had a month on loan at Alloa Athletic.

David would later be promoted to the role of Sondico's national accounts manager before becoming their national sales manager and national sales director. In his time there, he signed David Beckham, Gareth Southgate, Bryan Robson, Ian Rush, Goughie, Coisty, Paul McStay and Gazza. And goalkeepers who donned Sondico gloves included Chris Woods and Andy Goram. David would later buy the company from Seton Scholl Healthcare in 2003 before selling to Mike Ashley and Sports Direct in 2008.

As David was older than me, before he left for America, he would often be the one charged with looking after me when my mum went to work. And there was only one way to placate me; take me to play football with his mates. Among them was Kenny Lyall, who would precede me at Rangers.

Kenny was left-sided and played in midfield. He joined Rangers from Tynecastle Boys' Club in 1981 and made 12 appearances for the first team before leaving to join Motherwell late in 1983 as part of a swap deal that saw Kenny and Kenny Black go to Fir Park and Nicky Walker sign for Rangers. After a year at Motherwell, Kenny went to St Johnstone and then Brechin City before joining Newtongrange Star.

I was about five years old when I started to play with my brother and his pals and they used to stick me in goal. But as I got older, I got to play outfield and coming up against older

kids made me a better player and probably accelerated my own development.

I was also offered a scholarship like David. The call came from a university in Cleveland, Ohio, and, after speaking to me, they asked me to hand the phone over to my mum. It turned out the offer was a conditional one. I had to get at least three O grade passes – O grades were equivalent to what is now national five level, which is studied in fourth year at secondary schools in Scotland – but, as you will soon discover, I was never the greatest at attending school, never mind completing schoolwork. Irrespective, I never got the chance to even try to secure the scholarship, as my mum told them that I could be at school for the next ten years and still not get three O grades. She put the phone down and my American dreams were dashed.

In fairness, working towards a degree was part of the scholarship, so that was never going to be a road I would go down. However, although I wouldn't be following in David's footsteps by moving Stateside, his progress in the game served as extra motivation for me that a career as a footballer was the path I wanted to follow.

Debra and I were close. I really looked up to her and she was the anchor of our family. She had a business brain and left home around the age of 17 or 18 to work in a property business in Milton Keynes. In 2012, aged 54, she was still living there with her husband, Nick, and her adopted son, Louis. But that year, our lives would change forever thanks to a botched operation at Milton Keynes General Hospital.

Debra had been diagnosed with cancer, with a tumour discovered on her left kidney. She was booked in for the operation to remove her kidney on 17 September 2012. Two days later, she was dead.

During the operation, which should have been routine, Debra suffered a massive bleed. The urologist called in a vascular surgeon to control the bleeding but, in their attempt to do so, they stitched up one of the main arteries, the aorta. According to the inquest that followed, this had been done 'inadvertently' and, in the end, that error cost my sister her life.

Essentially, the flow of blood to the vital organs and the rest of Debra's body was blocked. Her organs were starting to shut down and when she woke up, she told Nick that she couldn't feel her legs. In her own inimitable style, she told her husband she was 'fucked'. It would be the last thing that she ever said to him.

Although Debra had woken up, she was still in intensive care, so Nick called me and told me to get down to the hospital as quickly as I could. I got the train from Edinburgh to Milton Keynes but by the time I got to the hospital, Debra's condition had deteriorated rapidly. She was unconscious and on a life support machine. I called my brother, David, and told him he needed to get to the hospital, as the doctors were telling us that they had no option but to amputate Debra's legs due to lack of blood circulation.

At that point, we had a decision to make. I believed we should let Debra die with dignity. Even if she survived the operation to remove her legs, we were informed she would be on dialysis for the rest of her life. Nick wanted to proceed but when David arrived, he was of the same opinion as me. By now, Debra was getting worse. Her organs were shutting down, so we decided to say our goodbyes and turn off her life support machine. Debra passed away on 19 September 2012, the day of her son's 23rd birthday.

Losing my sister was one of the hardest things I've ever been through. It still haunts me to this day. And what she went through, how her life was cruelly cut short, all came flooding

back when I was also diagnosed with cancer. Just like Debra, I had a tumour on my kidney and in addition to fearing that the cancer would take my life, I was also terrified that I would suffer a similar fate to Debra when I went in for the operation to remove my kidney. Thankfully, my case was handled by the right people and the reassurances I got from my oncologist played a huge role in settling me down for my life-saving surgery.

Eventually, after an inquiry, a coroner's report into my sister's case confirmed that the hospital had been negligent on several occasions. It even stated that had the cataclysmic error of stitching up the aorta been detected early enough, there was a chance that Debra's life would have been saved. The catalogue of errors only served to fuel our frustration.

The autopsy also confirmed that even if the operation to amputate Debra's legs had gone ahead, she would still have died because of the error made by the surgeon. But as much as that gave the family some closure, it didn't bring Debra back. I miss her.

Debra's death and the circumstances that surrounded it had a profound effect on my mum's health, too. Like all mothers and daughters, Debra and my mum had that unbreakable bond, a love that was unconditional. That's why when Debra passed away, my mum went off the rails. She hadn't been able to get to the hospital, so said goodbye to an unconscious Debra over the phone. And what followed saw my mum being hospitalised with a couple of mini strokes due to her not managing her blood sugar levels. Essentially, she gave up on life and wanted to die.

My mum was a diabetic and her excessive sugar consumption meant she ended up with hyperglycaemia. It was all self-inflicted and was her way of dealing with Debra's death. She would starve herself, too, and turn off her heating when she was at home. She was neglecting herself, as she simply couldn't cope without Debra.

And a few years after my sister died, my mum was gone, too. She died on 4 August 2018 at the age of 79.

* * *

When I was a kid, our family lived at 29/7 Muirhouse Drive in Muirhouse. It was one of the roughest and toughest areas of Edinburgh and was infamous for its drug culture. However, despite being one of Scotland's drug capitals, houses were very rarely broken into. This wasn't due to the vigilance of any Neighbourhood Watch Scheme, though. In essence, if any of the junkies threatened to do so or did, indeed, manage to break in, the hard men and the dealers would batter them. A house break would attract the attention of the police and bring a patrol car out to the area. From the perspective of a junkie and a dealer, any sort of police presence wasn't exactly good for business!

The Irvine Welsh book and subsequent film, *Trainspotting*, was based on what went on at that time in Muirhouse. In the book, which was published in 1993, I'm mentioned as someone from the area who resisted the temptation to do drugs and instead go on to find success. One of the central characters, Spud, who was superbly portrayed in the movie by Ewen Bremner, said that I wasn't the 'waster' that most folk reckoned people from the area were. Instead, I was in the 'Rangers first team, haudin his ain against aw they expensive international signins ay Souness ken?'

Irvine was a junkie and I knew of him when I was growing up. But he sorted his shit out and the *Trainspotting* novel, his first, sold more than a million copies. I'm still waiting for my share of the royalties or an invite to appear in one of his movies, mind you!

I could quite easily have fallen on the wrong side of the tracks and become a junkie. When I was growing up, a lot of my classmates at school were addicts, taking drugs, including heroin, and smoking marijuana. Most of them are no longer with us.

What stopped me from being sucked into the drug culture and becoming tagged as a 'waster' was football. All I wanted to do when I was growing up was go out, get the jumpers down for goalposts and play football in the streets with my mates. For us, that street was our Ibrox, Tynecastle, Easter Road or Hampden, although I'm not sure any of those venues had the same amount of dog shit we had! We had no need for fancy cones to help us hone our dribbling skills, we simply weaved our way around the piles of shit. But that was all part of the experience and it certainly didn't deter us; our focus was always on the ball.

I attended my first games of senior football at the age of nine and the vantage points for my football education were the sloping terraces of Easter Road and Tynecastle. My mum had three brothers, John, Dykes and Malcolm, and they would take me along and lift me over the turnstiles to get me in. That was common practice for kids of my age back then. With the fixture list likely to have Hibernian or Hearts playing a home game on alternate weekends, I would be going to at least one game a week before I started to play for my boys' club. After I started playing, the only times I would go would be if my games were postponed because of the weather.

I can still remember my first games at each stadium. Both were brilliant experiences. Although both sides were struggling at the time – Hearts were relegated in 1978/79, with Hibernian dropping into the First Division the following season – crowds were still decent and I loved the atmosphere that was created. I remember the songs that were sung and the swear words that regularly tumbled out of the mouths of the supporters. And there was the reek of fags, booze and pish, too, as I stood among the cigarette butts and empty glass bottles that were littered around the terracing. Mind you, some of the bottles weren't empty, having been filled with the contents of someone's bladder before they were discarded.

Hearts had the likes of Cammy Fraser and Jim Jeffries in their squad, while Hibernian could call upon Tony Higgins and Ally McLeod. But there is one player from that era that I most remember watching – George Best.

I was aware of what Best had achieved when he was at Manchester United and how he had, at one time, been regarded as one of the best players in the world. But his life away from the pitch soon got in the way and, after several instances of indiscipline, he left United in 1974. After short spells with Stockport County and Cork Celtic, Best joined up with another maverick, Rodney Marsh, and England's World Cup-winning captain, Bobby Moore, at Fulham. He then spent time in the USA with Los Angeles Aztecs, Fort Lauderdale Strikers and San Jose Earthquakes before his surprise move to Easter Road in 1979.

Although he was rumoured to be going to Rangers, Best instead ended up in Edinburgh and kicked off a turbulent spell that saw him score three great goals and thrill youngsters like me, while enjoying life off the pitch in what was now becoming customary fashion for him.

He made his debut against St Mirren at Love Street on 24 November 1979 and made a total of 16 appearances in the 1979/80 season. Unfortunately, Best couldn't stop Hibernian slipping into the First Division but he was box office and attendances at Easter Road rose as a result.

I've read that the Hibernian manager at the time, Eddie Turnbull, didn't want to sign Best. He reckoned it was a car crash waiting to happen but the Hibernian chairman, Tom Hart, pulled rank and supposedly paid Best's wages out of his own pocket. Turnbull would be proven right, though, as Best failed to report for training not long after he had signed. He was pictured coming out of a nightclub in London and then, a couple of weeks later, was sacked after embarking on a marathon drinking session

with the French rugby team at the North British Hotel. The sanction was later reduced to a one-week ban.

When Best signed for Hibernian, my whole family were buzzing. They were desperate to go and see him in action. I had been to Easter Road a few times before he signed but the first game I saw him play in, the place was sold out. That meant we were crammed in tighter but I would always stand down the front near the track with some of my cousins, who would go to the games, too. That meant I had a great position to see Best up close. Although he had lost his edge and wasn't the same player he was in his early days at Old Trafford, he was a class above most of the players in Scotland. He still had great vision and he used to simply drift away from defenders with ease. As a kid with aspirations to be a footballer, getting to see one of the greats of the game strut his stuff only served to provide more motivation for me to achieve my ambition.

In fairness, Best wasn't the only one that enjoyed a drink or three after games. My uncles did likewise. They always stood at the same spot at each game we went to, so they would be easy to find. Once the match finished, my cousins and I would meet them and after fixtures at Tynecastle, we would go to the BMC club in Westfield Street and when we went to Easter Road, the meeting place would be the Persevere Bar. My uncles would meet their wives there and would get pissed while I sat in the corner with my cousins eating bags of crisps and drinking bottles of Coca-Cola. I'd stay for a couple of hours before getting the bus back home. It was a great experience for me but my dad rarely joined us, as he used to referee games on a Saturday afternoon in a pub league.

In addition to taking me to games, my uncles would also tell me tales of their experiences in the game, particularly my Uncle Malcolm, who was a bit of a schoolboy prodigy in the 1950s.

Aged 15, he had played for Scotland Schoolboys against England at Goodison Park in 1955 and he looked to be on Rangers' radar but he instead ended up joining Hibernian. He was delighted, as he had been brought up as a Hibernian supporter.

Uncle Malcolm made his debut for the first team against Dunfermline Athletic at Easter Road on 18 March 1959. He was 19 years old. Des Fox, John Fraser and Andy Aitken scored in a 3-1 home win and Uncle Malcolm kept his place for the next league match, a 1-0 defeat against St Mirren. He played at outside-left in both games and I remember him telling me about what the St Mirren right-back, David Lapsley, said to him during the game. Uncle Malcolm nutmegged Lapsley at one point and was then promptly told that if he did it again, he would get his leg broken!

Uncle Malcolm only played one more first-team game for Hibernian. That was a 3-1 defeat against Falkirk at Brockville on 27 March 1963. Again, it was on the wing. He always felt his best position was as an inside-forward but competition for the forward places for Hibernian was fierce during his time there, with the likes of Gordon Smith, Willie Ormond, Johnny McLeod and Eric Stevenson in contention. That's why he played so few games.

After six years at Easter Road, Uncle Malcolm was released. Jock Stein wanted to sign him for Dunfermline but Hibernian wouldn't allow him to go. Instead, he ended up signing for Grimsby Town, who were playing in the old Division Two in England. Although he only stayed with Grimsby for a year, the legacy of his time there would be the family holidays we would enjoy many years later. When he was there, Uncle Malcolm discovered a holiday park in Cleethorpes and that would become the destination for our family holiday every year. All my cousins would be there and we would go to the Beachcomber Club. It was great fun dodging in and around the caravans and

chalets and pumping our loose change into the fruit machines every night.

After leaving Grimsby, Uncle Malcolm had a season with Aldershot Town before coming back to Scotland. He worked as an electrician but kept playing football, turning out for the likes of Hawick Royal Albert and Newtongrange Star. He also managed a team in a cup final at Hampden when he led Bo'ness United to the final of the Scottish Junior Cup in 1979. I was at that game which, unfortunately, Bo'ness lost 1-0 to Cumnock Juniors.

I'm grateful to all my uncles for helping me fall in love with football. They were all a huge influence. I loved listening to Uncle Malcolm's stories, while my Uncle Dykes was friends with John Greig, as they had played together for Crossroads Boys' Club.

I also enjoyed playing golf and I was good enough at badminton and squash to play in competitions against other schools. But football was number one and I was soon making an impression.

Thanks to my brother, David, I started out with a team called North Merchiston Boys' Club. David was playing with one of the higher age groups and he took me along one night to training and I ended up joining in with the younger ones. I played with them every Saturday and I remember being in the team that won the Scottish Cup. I was also playing football for the school team and represented both Edinburgh Schools and Lothian Schools.

I must have done well, as I was invited to train with the likes of Hibernian, Hearts, Dundee United, Leeds United and Tottenham Hotspur. The training would be in the evenings at Saughton or in the case of Hibernian, indoors at Easter Road.

To have clubs of that stature showing an interest in you was a great feeling. However, I knew there wasn't much scope of an immediate offer from Leeds or Spurs, as the English FA rules differed from those of the SFA. English clubs couldn't sign you until you turned 16, so that gave the other clubs I was training

with an edge. But as much as I enjoyed the training and the experience it gave me, I only had eyes on one prize; I wanted to play for Rangers. And when I was 13 years of age, they came in for me.

I was asked to train every Tuesday night on the red ash park at The Albion, which was across the road from Ibrox. Mr Penman, who was a Rangers scout, would take me and a few others there in his car. Often, it was freezing cold and pissing down with rain. We would be doing slide tackles through puddles most of the time and sessions would often end with us prising bits of red ash out of the grazes on our arms and legs. But I loved it. If the weather was too severe, we would train inside in what was the warm-up area under the Main Stand.

When I signed for Rangers a few years later, one of the things we would do in that same warm-up area was play head tennis. And Davie Cooper, who was often untouchable on the pitch, was unbeatable when it came to this game, too.

If you needed to find Coop before training, you didn't have to look very far. Nine times out of ten, he would be in the tunnel area playing head tennis. There was a pipe on one of the walls that sat above the net and every time he served, Coop would hit it. But he would do so in such a way that it spun off the pipe in different ways. To this day, I still don't know how he did it.

The only player I can remember that got close to Coop was wee Solo – John MacDonald – and we would play every single day. It became a ritual. We would play singles, doubles or sometimes three-v-three. It was a great way to hone your touch and it was a great laugh, too.

When the Main Stand was refurbished, the warm-up area was taken away. That meant we had to improvise. Rather than play head tennis, we moved into the dressing room, got in a big circle and played 'keep ball'. The rules were simple. You had to

keep the ball off the ground. If the ball hit the deck, then the last player who touched it was out. Just like the head tennis, this was ultra-competitive. We used to rattle the ball at each other as hard as we could. But it made you more alert and responsive and focussed you on making your first touch even better. And it was great for team spirit, too.

Training at The Albion was overseen by Stan Anderson and I did enough over a period to convince John Greig, the Rangers manager at the time, to come to my house with one of his coaches, Davie Provan, to sign me on a schoolboy form. I'll never forget that moment. By now, I was living with my mum at 50 Muirhouse Gardens but it was still in the ghettos, so when a maroon-coloured Jaguar appeared in the street, it was a big deal. Curtains twitched, doors opened and soon the whole street was out on the pavement. I'm sure Greigy was used to this kind of reception but, if I'm being honest, when I saw the car rolling up to my house, I was more worried about the wheels getting nicked!

John Greig, who knew my family, came in and spoke to my mum but I did a runner, as I was so nervous about two famous Rangers people being in my house. It was my mum, therefore, who signed the forms that made me a Rangers player but not before she confirmed that I was a Protestant. Rangers were rumoured to have a signing policy at that time that was such that they didn't sign Roman Catholics, so that perhaps explains why my mum was asked the question about my religion before the forms were signed.

In terms of what I would earn, today's young players don't know how lucky they are. While kids now are earning thousands of pounds a week, when I signed for Rangers at the age of 12, I was on £10 a week. And that was BEFORE tax! And when big Jock signed me as an apprentice in 1985 on a YTS scheme, my wage 'soared' to £29.50 a week.

It was a Friday night when the deal was done. My mum and dad were now divorced, so I walked from my mum's house to where my dad stayed in Morrisons Street. He wasn't there but I found him in a nearby pub. He was working on a building site at the time and he was having a few beers with his mates at the end of their shift when I walked in.

'I've got something to tell you, Dad,' I said.

His initial thoughts were that I was coming on behalf of my mum to ask for more money but I told him it wasn't that – instead I was there to tell him that I had signed for Rangers.

'Fuck off,' was his immediate reply.

I told him that my mum had signed the forms but he still didn't believe me. These were the days before mobile phones, so he went and got change from the bar and called my mum from a payphone. When she confirmed that I had joined Rangers, my dad was the happiest man in the world.

For the rest of the night, he plied me with Coke and crisps as he celebrated the fact that his boy had joined Rangers. I had to carry him home afterwards! I then missed the last bus home, so had to walk. I think I got into the house at about 1.30am.

But I almost ruined my chances of making it with Rangers – or, indeed, as a professional footballer – when I got kicked out of Craigroyston High School when I was 14.

It's fair to say I wasn't much of a scholar. I attended Seven Hills Primary School, then moved on to Craigroyston, a high school that had been attended a couple of years before I arrived by future Scotland manager Gordon Strachan. But by the time I came through the doors at Craigroyston, I wasn't interested in learning. I was never disruptive; I just didn't study and wasn't very good at doing exams. But I got on well with everyone, including staff and my fellow pupils. However, that all changed after I signed for Rangers.

I never once boasted about joining Rangers or made myself out to be the great 'I am'. But I could sense a change after John Greig had come to my house to sign me. When a man of that renown and stature visits a housing estate in Muirhouse, word gets out and it was soon common knowledge that I was going to train at Ibrox. And it didn't take long for the wee hard nuts to start picking on me and asking for a fight.

My move to Rangers also coincided with the start of the 'casual' culture and because I had joined Rangers instead of Hearts or Hibernian, I had an even bigger target on my back. And it was never one-v-one, either. The other kids would arrive mob handed and I would be expected to fight two or three of them at the same time.

I never once went looking for trouble but signing for Rangers essentially made me a marked man. I never instigated any of the fights but I had been brought up to be streetwise and handle myself. That meant I never shirked anything or ran away, even when I was outnumbered. I gave as good as I got and I reckon I won more fights than I lost.

Something had to give eventually and my playground battles, coupled with telling the guy who was hosting me for a week of work experience to 'stick it up his arse', brought me to the attention of Mr Hugh Mackenzie, who was the head teacher at Craigroyston.

The Nisbet family were familiar to Mr Mackenzie, as he regarded my brother, David, as his golden boy, having achieved that scholarship in America. I would be the polar opposite, though, and I knew when he called my mum into his office for a meeting that the outcome wasn't going to be a positive one.

When we arrived, Mr Mackenzie was wearing dungarees and sitting with his feet up on his desk. He started to speak but my mum interrupted him and told him to take his feet down.

She felt he was being disrespectful. He did as she asked but then proceeded to say that I wouldn't amount to anything in life and that I was being expelled.

As much as I hated school, getting expelled was still embarrassing and I felt I had let my mum and dad down massively. I knew I had crossed the line too many times, albeit in fights that I hadn't started. But that didn't matter to my old man. I was about to feel the full force of his wrath.

When we got home, my mum phoned my dad to tell him what had happened and my dad was invited down to the house by my mum. I don't recall my dad being in her house prior to that, so, given how they felt about each other, I knew at that moment just how much I had fucked things up.

When my dad got to the house, I was on the receiving end of one of the hardest slaps I had ever been given. I still wince when I think about it today. But my dad wasn't pissed off because I had been expelled from school; his fury was because my exclusion meant I wouldn't be able to play for the Scotland Schoolboys team against England at Wembley.

We were due to face the Auld Enemy at the home of football on 5 June 1982. Two of my future team-mates – Dale Gordon and Derek Ferguson – played in the 0-0 draw and I would have been on the hallowed turf with them had it not been for Mr Mackenzie's decision. The match was a big deal, a proper showcase occasion. It was beamed back to the nation on ITV and my mum and dad would have taken a great deal of pride in seeing their boy perform on that stage. And the fact that my brother had been capped at schoolboy level probably fuelled their disappointment, too.

I did eventually get selected to play for Scotland against England at Under-18 level but it was at Swindon Town's County Ground rather than Wembley. That was in the Centenary Shield

and Scotland were the holders when we faced the Auld Enemy in April 1984.

To qualify to play in the competition, you needed to meet the following criteria:

1. A player should have attained their 16th birthday but not their 18th birthday before 1 January at the beginning of the year in which the competition is taking place.
2. In addition, players should be bona fide scholars in full-time education on the roll of a recognised school or college which is affiliated to the association they represent.
3. A player who has a signed contract of employment with a club registered with a national football association and receives payment in excess of necessary hotel and travel expenses is ineligible to play in the Centenary Shield competition.

Fortunately, by 1984 I was back in full-time education – more on that shortly – and it was a great experience pulling on that dark blue jersey. The match programme for the England game referred to me as a 'skilful, industrious centre-forward' but, unfortunately, we went down 4-1.

We got a more favourable result the following month when we faced Wales at Gayfield in Arbroath. With his scholarship now at an end, my brother, David, landed at Prestwick Airport and was picked up by my brother-in-law, Gerry, so he could attend the game. Given that David had won five caps at the same level in 1981, it was great to emulate him and have him there to see me play. And he witnessed a Nisbet goal, my free kick in the second half one of three scored by Scotland in a 3-2 win.

Back to my expulsion from Craigroyston. I didn't just let my family down, I let myself down, too. And as well as fucking up

my chances of playing for Scotland Schoolboys, I almost blew my chance to make it as a footballer with Rangers. When he heard about what had happened, John Greig asked to see me. I was summoned to his office and he gave me a proper bollocking and made it clear that this wasn't the type of behaviour he expected from someone who aspired to play for Rangers Football Club. He could have binned me at that moment but he gave me another chance. That was the boot up the arse I needed. I knew that if I wanted to make it, then I would need to steer clear of trouble and that's exactly what I did.

I needed to get my shit together and find a new school but, after my expulsion, I struggled to find a school in Edinburgh that would take me on. I got knocked back from Royal High School and Broughton High School but I eventually made an agreement with Terry Christie, who was the head teacher at Ainslie Park High School. Terry, who was friendly with my uncles, was also manager of Stenhousemuir at the time.

Terry agreed to enrol me – I call it a 'free transfer' – with the agreement being that I didn't have to attend all my classes Monday to Friday on the proviso that I would turn up on a Saturday morning to play for the school football team. All I had to do was go to the registration class each day and, after that, I would either go to Terry's office to talk about football or walk into the city centre. Terry would phone my mum every Friday and let her know where the game was being played and, given that I didn't enjoy school, that suited me perfectly!

My new-found desire to stay out of trouble and keep my nose clean was tested inside my first couple of days at Ainslie Park. I met the school bully, a lad called Smithy, in the corridor and he challenged me to a fight. Words were exchanged but I knew that if we got into a scrap, I was fucked, not just at school but with Rangers, too. We went our separate ways and,

in the end, we became good mates and played together in the school team.

I got abused walking home from school, too. It was about two miles from Ainslie Park back to the house in Muirhouse and I would be subjected to the usual verbal assaults due to my association with Rangers. But, as difficult as it was, I just bit my tongue and laughed it all off. I had no other option, as I would have been binned by the school and Rangers had I reacted.

I was thriving as a footballer and I got the opportunity to play at the home ground of one of the Scottish Premier Division's top clubs, Dundee United, when Edinburgh Schools reached the Scottish Schools Under-15 Cup Final. We faced Aberdeen Schools and in the opposition XI was a quiet lad called David Robertson. We would later line up alongside each other in the back four at Rangers but that day at Tannadice, we were adversaries.

I almost created the opening goal for Edinburgh but my cross into the penalty area was headed wide. Aberdeen took the lead a minute later and doubled their lead four minutes after half-time. But we were far from out of it at this point and I remember their goalkeeper made a great save to prevent me from making it 2-1. But tiredness caught up with us and we conceded a third goal with five minutes to go.

Losing a game of football is never easy but at that stage of my career, it was all about development. And as well as regular game time with the school teams, I was pulling on a royal blue Rangers jersey.

In addition to training one night a week with Rangers, we would play games, usually once a month, and the staff would watch those games to gauge how you were progressing. I felt I was making good progress and I understood the coaching team's feedback on me was positive, too.

But it was all change at Rangers in late 1983 when John Greig resigned and Jock Wallace took over.

Big Jock was coming back to the club after he left in the summer of 1978 to join Leicester City. He did so after doing what no other Rangers manager had done before or, indeed, since; win two domestic trebles. He had also been in charge when Rangers stopped Celtic doing ten in a row in the 1974/75 season.

There's always a concern when a new manager comes in that he might not fancy you as a player but I was determined to show big Jock that I had what it took to be a Rangers player. And I must have done enough to catch his eye, as he signed me as an 'S' Form in 1984.

My cause may have been helped by my performances in the Under-16 and Under-18 teams. In December 1983, I was on the bench when Rangers played in their first-ever tie in the newly established SFA Youth Cup. We had been given a bye in the first round and in round two, we played Motherwell at Ibrox. Games like that used to attract decent crowds and it was a great experience playing at the stadium. We won 3-0 – Vance Haddow, Robert Fleck and our captain, Hugh Burns, scored the goals – and I came on for John Davies.

The first time I saw Ibrox in the flesh, so to speak, was when I signed for Rangers. I was too young to make the journey from Edinburgh on my own before that but when I first set eyes on the place I still call home today, I was in awe. Walking through the oak-panelled main entrance, I gazed up at the marble staircase and at the top of the stairs, there was the majestic Trophy Room. I can still remember the distinctive smells of the place, too, notably the liniment or Deep Heat from the away dressing room where we got changed and the stench of sweaty feet when you opened the door to the Boot Room.