

John Bleasdale



SCOTLAND'S SWEDISH ADVENTURE

*The Story of
Scotland's European
Championship Debut*



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Recovery from apathy

SCOTLAND'S JOURNEY to Sweden wasn't exactly plain sailing. There were some difficult obstacles to overcome throughout their qualification campaign in their bid to achieve something that arguably greater Scotland men's national sides couldn't do before.

In fact, right back at the very start of this campaign, not all was rosy in the Scotland camp going into the opening game against top seeds Romania at Hampden. The report card from Italia '90 did not make for great reading amongst most critics. Sure, the records will say that Scotland exited the World Cup on goal difference for the fourth time in five tournaments. They will also point out that it took a combination of a Jim Leighton error and a world-class save by Taffarel from Mo Johnston that saw us go down 1-0 to Brazil in a game where a draw would've taken us through to the knockout stages.

However, the disappointing result in the opening game against Costa Rica was, undoubtedly, our downfall and, despite an impressive performance and result against Sweden in the second game, it became too big a task to recover. Add to that reports of player unrest in the camp, there was an air of apathy towards the men's national team going into the Euro '92 qualifying campaign.

Journalist Hugh MacDonald, who was still going to matches as a fan back then before his successful career in the newspaper industry, remembers the negative atmosphere towards the Scotland side following Italia '90, and that Roxburgh was very much a man under scrutiny at that time. He said: 'There was a lot of disillusion after the World Cup. It's quite funny when you look back in the cold light of day, our record in World Cups is pretty decent in the group stages. You would take it now. Costa Rica, for example, doesn't look such a bad result in hindsight as it did at the time, but at the time it was a dreadful result. Every time, it was portrayed as a sort of republic that no one had ever heard of, it was almost a humiliating result. So yeah, there was a lot of apathy. And remember as well, by 1991/92, we had a wee bit of history of qualifying for World Cups as well, so the ache of never qualifying for anything had passed, possibly to be replaced by a bit of disillusion once we got to finals.'

It summed up the level of expectation, that Scotland came under fire after that tournament; after all, it was their fifth consecutive appearance at a World Cup finals. Guiding the team to Italy in the first place definitely helped buy Roxburgh more time in the job, though it was not too uncommon in those days for international managers to get more than two campaigns, as demonstrated with two of his predecessors, Willie Ormond and Jock Stein. Even Ally MacLeod, for all the ridicule he was subjected to after Argentina '78, was given the following European Championship qualifying campaign before he tendered his resignation after the opening qualifier against Austria.

Each of those subsequent European Championship qualifying attempts would end in disappointment as Scotland would often finish a distant third or fourth in their section. Despite this, there were no calls for managers' heads as it was clear that Scotland were building for the next round of World Cup qualifiers, which, as discussed in the introduction, had greater odds of qualification.

That mentality would change after Italy, and Roxburgh made it his mission to become the first manager of the Scotland men's national team to lead his side to a European Championship finals. He revealed that his bosses at the SFA shared this vision

and made qualification to the finals in Sweden their immediate priority over building for the next World Cup in the USA. In an interview we conducted for *Famous Tartan Army Magazine*, Roxburgh said: 'All I was asked to do was get us to the next World Cup, and then when we got to that World Cup once that task was completed, it was one of these things – "Well, why don't we try to get to the Euros? We've never done that before so why don't we add that on." And that became the next challenge. It flowed from one thing on to the other, that's the background to it.'

A total of 34 UEFA nations were entered for the 1992 European Championship qualification draw, which was made in February 1990. The initial format would see six groups containing five nations and one group of just four, where only the side finishing top of the section would join hosts Sweden at the finals. This quickly changed when West and East Germany, coincidentally drawn together in the same group, unified that year, resulting in just one German side competing in international competition going forward, making it 33 nations fighting for just seven spots in the tournament.

Little did we know it at the time, the German reunification would begin the change of the European landscape, and in their case the amalgamation of two nations or states would be an exception. By the time

the draw for the finals came around, the Soviet Union would break up and ten new nations would be formed as a result. Shortly before the finals themselves, Yugoslavia were forced to withdraw from the tournament amidst the ongoing war that saw Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia and Bosnia Herzegovina become independent, whilst Czechoslovakia broke up in 1993 to become Slovakia and the Czech Republic. By the time the qualifying draw for the 1996 edition of the European Championship came around in January 1994, there were 46 UEFA nations taking part for 15 available spaces alongside hosts England (the 48th UEFA nation, Yugoslavia, were still banned from international competition following their political issues). Nowadays, the Euros has increased to 24 teams as there are now 55 UEFA nations, where the delayed Euro 2020 finals saw qualification spots for the top two sides and winners from the inaugural UEFA Nations League for the multi-host competition. It really is changed days!

Back onto the Euro '92 qualifying draw, there would be no second chances for the sides who finished runners-up or even the safety net of a play-off via the Nations League in the current climate. Only the seven group winners would qualify for the finals, so it was first or nowhere! Scotland were given pot two status and the draw saw them placed in Group 2, alongside

top seeds Romania, a Bulgaria side from pot three whom they'd beaten in Euro '88 qualification to deny them a place in West Germany, pot four side Switzerland, and minnows San Marino from pot five, who were making their debut in international-competition history.

It could be argued that Romania were the preferred option from pot one when you consider the other possibilities we could've got. The other top-seeded sides were reigning European Champions the Netherlands, newly crowned World Champions West Germany (latterly becoming Germany as previously highlighted), World Cup semi-finalists Italy and England, quarter-finalists at Italia '90 Yugoslavia, and a tough Spain side. On paper, the Romanians were less daunting, but they were a more-than-capable side, as they showed in Italy when they defeated the Soviet Union and drew with Argentina en route to the last 16, where only a penalty shoot-out saw them exit the finals to Republic of Ireland. They had the talents of Gheorghe Hagi, who had moved to Real Madrid that summer and would also go on to play for Barcelona, which gives an indication of what a top player he was. Add to that the goalscoring threat of Marius Lacatus and Florin Raducioiu, plus future Chelsea full-back Dan Petrescu, and you get the idea of the quality the Romanians possessed.

Hagi and co. rolled into Glasgow for the opening night of Euro '92 qualification on Wednesday, 12 September 1990, confident that they could come away from Hampden with a positive start. Scotland, on the other hand, had to overcome their post-Italia '90 blues if they were going to get off to a winning start in their bid to reach their first-ever European Championship finals. Interestingly, it was two points for a victory at this point and not the three you see more commonly in the modern era. Another key rule back in the Euro '92 adventure was that goalkeepers could still pick up back passes passed by foot, with the change not being implemented until after the finals in Sweden.

It may have been billed as a crucial match prior to kick-off, but it didn't convince the general public as a paltry crowd of just 12,801 entered the national stadium. Stuart McCall may have missed the game through injury, but he was all too aware of the apathy surrounding the men's national team going into that opening game and the effect it had on the crowd. Having played in all three games at Italia '90, and netting his solitary Scotland goal to open the scoring in the 2-1 victory over Sweden, he admits to being a little puzzled at how much the post-Italia '90 hangover affected the nation. 'I remember the crowd not being big,' he said, 'but when I look back and there was only 12,800 there, that shows you the apathy that was

surrounding it. I even thought, having been involved in the World Cup, that we let the nation down against Costa Rica, but then I thought we won them over with the performance against Sweden, and certainly the performance against Brazil where we were unfortunate not to go through. I don't know why there was such apathy, I've got to be honest. Everyone will remember the Costa Rica game, but I don't think we came home in disgrace because we won the Sweden game and pushed Brazil all the way.'

Whilst apathy played its part, there were other factors behind the low attendance that wet Wednesday evening. Despite what fans growing up in the modern era might think, the midweek slot was not one of them as almost all qualifying matches for international competitions were played in midweek, with weekend games not becoming a thing until the mid- to late-90s. Wednesday night games were most definitely the norm for international football in 1990.

What was rare was that the game was broadcast live on BBC One Scotland. The television contract allowed just one home qualifier to be screened live to the nation, along with all away matches, with the rest of the home games being restricted to highlights only. They decided on this game, with it being against the top-seeded side in the group, and the game being televised was also considered a

factor behind the low turnout. Ronnie McDevitt, Tartan Army foot soldier and author of four books focussed on the Scotland national team, including *A Life in The Tartan Army*, summed all of this up by saying: ‘The World Cup in Italy had disappointed a lot of Scotland fans, and although the Sweden game had been memorable, there was still disbelief and a feeling the staff and players had let us down over the Costa Rica fiasco. No one saw that coming and it left supporters feeling angry, and a lot were considering calling time on the national side after yet another failure to reach round two. The build-up had also been less than inspiring, and a win over Argentina was soon forgotten about following home defeats to Egypt and East Germany, and an awful, lacklustre draw with Poland in Glasgow.

‘This apathy was reflected in the attendance for the Romania game at Hampden, our first match since Italy. However, this figure deserves greater inspection as it is often overlooked that the match was shown live on BBC One. BBC Scotland’s agreement for exclusive rights to cover the European qualifiers were a package of highlights for all the home games and live screenings of the away fixtures. They also managed to secure permission to show one of the home games of the broadcaster’s choice live and the opener was selected. It was in fact the first time a European

Championship qualifier at home had been allowed live coverage by the SFA.'

Fellow foot soldier Kevin Donnelly added in a third factor behind the low attendance – that the SFA admitted putting the ticket prices too high. He said: 'I know Marjorie Nimmo, who used to run the Travel Club, and she said it was all to do with the pricing for that game. She said they got the pricing totally wrong. I was working in London at the time, so I went to very few games, but you've got to remember there were no cheap flights; you couldn't go up on a Wednesday afternoon and back down on a Thursday morning and only take one day's leave.'

All of that was very much secondary to Roxburgh's problems as his concern was putting out a side capable of beating the Romanians to collect maximum points. His cause wasn't helped by the loss of experienced pros Roy Aitken (who captained the side in Italy), Maurice Johnston and Jim Bett who, for various reasons, were no longer available for selection. Bett and Johnston had retired from international football, whilst Aitken, although he didn't formally retire, told Roxburgh that he wanted to take a step back to focus on the remainder of his club career, where he was at Newcastle United at the time, and spending time with his family. Johnston and Aitken would both come out of their hiatus at some point

later in the campaign, whereas Bett never played for his country again.

A surprise inclusion in the squad was Jim Leighton, who was selected along with Andy Goram and Campbell Money as one of the three goalkeepers Roxburgh picked in his 21-man squad. It was particularly surprising given that he was now well out of the picture at Manchester United after being dropped for the 1990 FA Cup Final replay against Crystal Palace. In addition, he was heavily criticised for his role in Brazil's late winner in Turin by fumbling Alemao's shot back into a dangerous area where, after a scramble involving Alex McLeish, Careca and himself, Muller tapped in the goal that sent Scotland home before the postcards – again!

This would be the only time that Leighton would be called up during Scotland's European Championship adventure, and he didn't even make the substitutes' bench. Throughout our quest to reach the Euros, Leighton went on to have mixed spells at Reading, Arsenal and Dundee, and wasn't even considered for a call-up for any further internationals during this period. It was only when he joined Hibernian in 1993 that he regained his form consistently enough to earn a Scotland recall, long after Euro '92 was over.

Filling Leighton's position between the sticks was an easy one. Andy Goram had been deputy to

Leighton since the 1986 World Cup in Mexico – now it was his chance to show that he could handle the pressure of being the Scotland number one. Even though his club side, Hibernian, were struggling in the Scottish Premier Division that season, Roxburgh had enough trust that the man nicknamed ‘the Goalie’ was good enough to make the step up and showcase his goalkeeping abilities on the international stage. Not only did Goram make the position his own but his performances for club and country earned him a move to Rangers the following summer to take over from then-England number one Chris Woods, who’d gone to Sheffield Wednesday.

In front of Goram, there was a space needing to be filled alongside Alex McLeish at centre-back, caused by injuries to Richard Gough, Dave McPherson and Craig Levein, along with the retirement of Willie Miller, who never recovered from the serious knee injury sustained against Norway. Brian Irvine had stepped into Miller’s shoes at Aberdeen and won many plaudits for his performances. Now he was asked to do the same for his country by forming a partnership with McLeish in the centre of defence.

Irvine must’ve thought he was living in a fairy tale in 1990, first scoring the winning penalty for Aberdeen in the Scottish Cup Final and now being picked to play for his country in a crucial qualifying

match at Hampden. In an interview conducted for Scottish Football Forums Podcast in April 2020, Irvine reflected on the honour of being picked for Scotland and playing a small part in this story with his performance. He said: 'I was always a football supporter who got a chance to be a professional footballer player, so winning the Scottish Cup and the League Cup as well is about as joyful as can be. Beyond that level with Scotland, it's a new level; everyone dreams about playing for their country, and when I got the opportunity to play for Scotland it was "pinch me" stuff. And in such an important game, because it was the opening game of the European Championship qualifiers against Romania, who were a good team, and we got a good win. I was just picked to play alongside Alex McLeish and Stewart McKimmie with the Aberdeen connection, and that helped me settle into the game, and thankfully we managed to get a win against Romania and eventually qualified for Sweden. I didn't play in any other games, but I remember Andy Roxburgh always saying on a television programme once, thanking me for coming into the squad and playing my part, and I'm glad that I played a small part in the '92 success of Scotland qualifying for Sweden.'

With Stewart McKimmie and Maurice Malpas in both full-back positions, the back four was made up

entirely of players from the New Firm clubs. A fourth Aberdeen player, Robert Connor, also came in for a surprise start to line up in a midfield that contained Gary McAllister, captain for the night Paul McStay, and Murdo MacLeod, who, like Irvine, was not selected for the initial squad but was drafted in as a result of McCall's injury. Whilst there was no natural width in that midfield, it wasn't short in creativity and would be an indicator of how Scotland would look to play throughout the course of their Euro '92 adventure.

Although the midfield had a creative look to it, the players across the middle of the park were all too aware of their defensive responsibilities as well, particularly with Gheorghe Hagi to try and contain. Connor was in awe of Hagi's abilities, revealing in an interview with Scottish Football Forums Podcast in October 2020 that he considered Hagi the toughest opponent in his career. He said: 'The Romania game was memorable for two things. One being that we won the game, the other being was that I played directly against the best player I've ever seen live, which was Gheorghe Hagi. Unfortunately, he was playing directly against me so I got a really good view of him, not that I got that close to him! The guy was fantastic and he was probably, at that time, one of the top three best players in the world. They also had another top player, Lacatus, and a few other really good players

at Romania, who were a right good side at that time, but playing against Hagi tells you something about just how far away these players are from just a normal player like me. This guy was different class, just seeing things that nobody else could see, and [it was] just a kind of education watching this guy play. Having said that, it was great to win the game.'

Up front, Ally McCoist was partnered by debutant John Robertson. It was a long-awaited debut for Robbo, who had been scoring goals for fun at Hearts for a few seasons but was often overlooked due to the form of Johnston and the performances of others playing in England and abroad, like Gordon Durie, Alan McNally, Robert Fleck and Brian McClair. Despite having no caps, he was set to go to the World Cup, before injury deprived him of the chance to go to Italy. However, a combination of a good start to the season, Johnston's retirement and injuries to McClair and McNally provided Robertson with his chance to prove to Roxburgh and his assistant Craig Brown that he could carry that goal threat on to the international scene and justify why they were keen to take him to Italia '90 in the first place.

Robertson had been given extra motivation going into the game thanks to an unwanted phone call from his club chairman, Wallace Mercer, to Andy Roxburgh. Unhappy that his striker criticised

his decision to sack Alex MacDonald as Hearts manager, Mercer phoned Roxburgh demanding that Robertson be sent home from the squad. Luckily, as Robertson revealed in his autobiography *Robbo: My Autobiography*, Mercer's intervention had the opposite effect as Roxburgh decided to start him.

He said: 'He said: "The morning of the Romanian match saw us take a leisurely walk by the famous Troon Golf Course and, as we headed back for lunch, I was told to go and see Andy Roxburgh. He informed me he had received a call from Wallace Mercer asking me to be sent back to Edinburgh immediately as, given my comments on the gaffers sacking, I was obviously in no fit state to play mentally. Andy looked at me and said "John, up until this morning, I wasn't sure if I was going to play you or not but, given your admiration for Alex and then hearing that Wallace wants you back now, I have a feeling that with that fire in your belly you will do well tonight, so I am starting you up front with Ally." I assured him I was ready to give everything and after lunch the team was named and I was to get my first cap at Hampden.'

Scotland team: Goram, McKimmie,
Malpas, McAllister (Nevin 73), McLeish,
Irvine, Robertson, McStay, McCoist,
MacLeod, Connor (Boyd 59)

So a Scotland side dealing with apathy, the embarrassment of a low crowd and huge disruption to its regular starting XI took to the field on a rainy night at Hampden to face the top seeds in the group. That apathy looked as though it would continue as the Romanians began brightly and took the lead after just 13 minutes when Rodion Camataru tapped home from close range after Dan Petrescu's mishit shot.

But Scotland galvanised and could've been level when Malpas played the ball to McCoist down the left-hand channel. The striker cut past a defender on to his right foot, but he dragged his effort past goalkeeper Silviu Lung's right-hand post. As Scotland strived to get back into the game, the visitors remained a threat on the counter-attack and could easily have doubled their advantage when Camataru's cross looped over McLeish's head into the path of Marius Lacatus, but his first-time volley lacked conviction and went straight into the grateful arms of Andy Goram.

After surviving that scare, the hosts then got themselves back on level terms after 37 minutes. McKimmie ran with the ball into the area and teed up McAllister on the edge of the box. He then clipped the ball high into the penalty area for McCoist to outjump his marker and nod it down for Robertson to prod home from around six yards. It was the dream debut for Robbo to mark it with a goal. More importantly,

it gave Scotland the boost they needed going into the half-time break.

Recalling that moment in his autobiography and what it meant in terms of the context of the game, Robbo said: 'Stewart McKimmie floated in a cross from the left, Coisty went up for it and he managed to outjump the centre-half. I did as I was taught, gambled on him winning it and got the sole of my boot ahead of Popescu to stab it home. We were level and I had scored on my debut. This seemed to knock the stuffing out of the Romanians and we picked up in the second half and got about them as the small crowd suddenly sensed we had a real chance.'

Into the second half, and Romania began as brightly as they started the first by taking the game to the Scots. They looked as though they were about to take the lead when Lacatus's pass found Petrescu inside the penalty area. He managed to sidestep McLeish and was about to pull the trigger when Irvine came across to bail out his centre-back partner with a terrific slide tackle and the ball trickled harmlessly into Goram's hands. The Goalie's services were required a few minutes later, when Hagi hit a free kick from the left-hand corner of the penalty area, but he was equal to Hagi's powerful shot to push the ball away to safety.

From there, Scotland began to assert themselves on the top-seeded side and very nearly took the lead

past the hour mark. Robertson's cross from the left-hand side was brilliantly controlled by McCoist. He then faked to shoot, stepped inside Michael Klein, but his left-foot shot was brilliantly saved by the left foot of Lung and wide of the post. Following the resultant corner, McCoist crossed the ball back into the area for an unmarked Gary McAllister, but his first-time volley was weak and easily gathered by the Romanian goalkeeper and captain. McAllister would make Lung work harder with his next effort, a low shot from an indirect free kick set up by Murdo MacLeod. The big keeper had to get down low to parry the shot, then get up quickly as McCoist pounced on the rebound, but he was flagged for offside.

Sensing that his side had the Romanians on the ropes at this point, Roxburgh made use of the two substitutions he was allowed in that era as Scotland chased the winner to gain the crucial two points. He brought on Motherwell captain and utility man Tom Boyd, another player drafted in due to the withdrawal of an injured player (in this case, Steve Nicol) for his international debut, and Everton winger Pat Nevin, gambling that their pace would pin the Romanians back. It paid off on 75 minutes as Boyd went on a sauntering run down the left-hand side. He then played the ball back to Robertson where he and McStay worked it to Murdo MacLeod on the right.

MacLeod hit the ball across the face of goal, where Ally McCoist got in front of his marker to knock home from a couple of yards. Scotland saw out the last quarter of an hour to hold on for victory.

It may only have been the first game, but this was a crucial win for the Scots against the group favourites. All the apathy clamoured at the men's national team before the game was almost forgotten about. Now there was hope that Scotland could do something in this group. Even if he was playing it down, there's no doubt that the pre-match negativity was playing on Andy Roxburgh's mind, and for him to still put a team out on the park capable of defeating a pot one team says a lot about his managerial skills that often didn't get the credit they deserved.

Reflecting on the event, Roxburgh said: 'When you're restarting after a finals like that, I think there's always an element of people thinking, "Let's wait and see what happens." After the World Cup, there was a kind of lull, if you like, and it was up to us and to the team to build up the expectations again. At the time, Romania wasn't viewed as a big draw. I think had we been playing Germany in the opening qualifying round, you'd maybe have a big crowd. Then into the bargain, in the build-up to that opening game, we had a whole lot of injuries. We had a series of injury problems, so I think the whole combination of

elements came together. It wasn't a great turnout from a Scottish perspective, but our attitude was [that] we had to prove ourselves again; that's what you've always got to do in football is prove yourself again, so our job there was to make sure we got off to a good start and, fortunately, despite all the injury problems, we did get off to a good start.'

From a player's perspective, it would've been a culture shock seeing Hampden at less than half capacity as they walked out onto the pitch to see more empty spaces in the terracing than Saltire and Lion Rampant flags. Maurice Malpas had played in many big occasions for club and country at the national stadium, so he was as surprised as any by the low turnout, but he and the team had to put that to one side to get the result.

Malpas said: 'It was a bit of a shock because I was used to playing in front of a full house just about every game I played. It's just one of those things. You've got to adapt as a player and get on with it. We had to make sure we picked up some points at home, and that was the case.'

A little over a month later, it was the turn of pot-four side Switzerland to come to Hampden. Despite their pot four status, the Swiss were no mugs and definitely one of the strongest sides from this section. They also possessed a promising side, with

the talents of Alain Sutter in midfield and a lethal strike force in Adrian Knup, Stephane Chapuisat and Kubilay Turkylmaz, and they laid down their intentions with a 2-0 home win over Bulgaria in the opening game.

Four changes were made to the Scotland side from the one that defeated Romania. Dave McPherson returned to the starting line-up in place of Brian Irvine, Stuart McCall replaced the injured McStay, and Boyd was rewarded for his impact against the Romanians with a first start for his country, replacing Robert Connor.

Although named in this squad, Irvine and Connor would not be used again in this campaign, whilst their club team-mate Alex McLeish was given the captain's armband for this game.

The fourth change saw Steve Nicol come in for the injured Malpas at left-back. Nicol was omitted from the original squad as Roxburgh stood against what was deemed, according to the *Glasgow Herald*, a cavalier attitude by Nicol's club side Liverpool, which resulted in Nicol withdrawing from the Romania game without a medical certificate. The standoff was ended when Roxburgh received a letter of apology from the Liverpool chief executive, Peter Robinson, and Nicol answered his country's call for this crucial game. Liverpool manager and Scotland legend Kenny

Dalglish was also quoted as saying that this oversight would not happen again.

Scotland team: Goram, McKimmie, Nicol,
McCall, McPherson, McLeish, Robertson,
McAllister (Collins 79), McCoist,
MacLeod, Boyd (Durie 68)

It was a much-improved attendance inside the national stadium as 27,740 fans came along to see if the Scots could build on that opening victory. They had a golden opportunity midway through the first half when McCoist was cleaned out by goalkeeper Philipp Walker as the striker attempted to go round him. Referee Esa Antero Palso had no hesitation in pointing to the spot, and there were few protestations from the Swiss. Hampden was then stunned as McCoist pulled his penalty wide of the post, and the visitors breathed a sigh of relief.

The deadlock was finally broken on 34 minutes after referee Palso spotted a handball in the penalty area by Swiss defender Andre Egli, which their manager, Uwe Stielike, hotly contested. Unnerved by the delays caused by the Swiss protests, John Robertson stepped up to send Walker the wrong way and put Scotland ahead with his second goal in as many games for his country.

Seven minutes into the second half, and the lead was doubled when McCall headed a loose ball forward into the path of Gary McAllister, who then set himself to unleash a right-footed half-volley towards goal. Although Walker got a hand to it, the shot was too powerful to keep out and McAllister, who was now establishing himself in the Scotland side, scored his first international goal. It was a memorable moment for the midfielder, who was now really making a name for himself after joining Leeds United in the summer, where he would go on to win a league title prior to the Euro '92 finals.

McCall, though, has little recollection of his role in the goal, so much so that he'd actually forgotten that it was he who headed the ball through for McAllister to lash home. When 'recalling' that moment, he said, 'Somebody said to me, "Did you play in that game?" And I went, "I know I remember missing the first one, but I'm sure I played in both games against Switzerland." Then I clicked on it and watched the goal, had to rewind it and thought, "Was that me?" Because I had forgot it was me who headed it through. I can remember most things but I genuinely did! A memorable assist, which I forgot about. But I remember Gaz Mac smashing it across and smashing it in.'

You would've thought that Scotland were on easy street, but as most Scots fans know, that term doesn't

exist. The Swiss got back into the game on 65 minutes, when Turkyilmaz was adjudged to have been pulled down by McLeish. It looked soft, but the Finnish official chose to give the third penalty kick of the evening, and Knup successfully despatched it into the bottom right-hand corner, despite Goram's best efforts to keep it out. The complexion of the game changed as Scotland dropped deeper, in hope of defending their now-slender lead, while the Swiss chased the equaliser they craved, and they should've had one with just a few minutes left. Alain Sutter crossed from the right-hand side, Knup flicked it on to an unmarked Turkyilmaz, who'd ghosted in unnoticed at the back post and somehow, from around four yards, scooped the ball over the bar.

The Swiss' misery was compounded with two minutes to go when they were reduced to ten men after Egli body-checked Gordon Durie, who was attempting to run past him. Scotland managed to hang on and take the two points. Stielike had to be held back by his assistants to prevent him running up to referee Palso. The Tartan Army weren't caring as they went home delighted with what turned out to be a crucial victory. McCall had better recollections on what the win meant to us by saying, 'That set us up. That was two out of two and put us in a strong position. It was a big, big win and I think we needed

a good start to galvanise everyone, and thankfully we got the two wins to put us in a healthy position to start with.'

Two home games, two wins and top of Group 2 – not bad for a team that was supposedly in crisis. With bigger challenges on the horizon, it was vital that Scotland started to shake off the hangover from Italia '90 by claiming maximum points from two of our main challengers for that solitary qualifying spot.

The road to Sweden had begun!