

A Season to be Cheerful

Read an extract:

Rangers stretched their unbeaten run to 17 with perhaps their most pleasing victory of a magnificent run. The Light Blues went into the Old Firm game at Parkhead on the back of an energy-sapping European Cup tie against Leeds United, but still had too much in the tank for their cross-city rivals.

And once again Andy Goram was an inspiration between the sticks. Outstanding saves from Dariusz Wdowczyk, Stuart Slater and Gary Gillespie earned him the man-of-the-match award, although it was a Kinning Park lad, steeped in the traditions of Rangers, who scored the only goal of the game.

On the half hour, a slip by Mike Galloway allowed Dale Gordon space on the right hand side of the box. His chip to the far post was headed back across goal by Ally McCoist for the onrushing Ian Durrant, and he made no mistake in firing past Pat Bonner.

The win kept Rangers four points clear at the top of the table, but saw Celtic move from second to fourth, with Hearts regaining their place as main challengers. However, gaffer Walter Smith blasted claims that Rangers had already disappeared over the horizon with the league championship trophy. He said, 'I don't listen to that kind of talk and no one at Rangers will listen to it either. If you don't have respect for your opponents you will lose games. We have the greatest of respect for every side we face.'

Durrant's Old Firm winner – his second of the season against Celtic – rounded off arguably his most successful period in a Rangers jersey. The 25-year-old was at the heart of the Skol Cup final win over Aberdeen, as well as back-to-back wins over Leeds United, while the Old Firm win was the icing on the cake. And his influential role was officially recognised when he was named Scottish Brewers Player of the Month for October. Durrant said, 'The only word to describe the last four weeks is frantic. It has definitely been the most intense and most successful period of football I've ever been involved in, and I'm sure the rest of the players feel the same way too. I just wish it was always like that. 'The spirit among our squad has never been a problem, but we're doing well just now and everyone is very perky, but I just hope we can go through the rest of the season feeling the same way. There is a bit of tiredness among the boys just now

and a few are playing with knocks, but every match we play is a big one and that is enough to carry us through. And at this stage of the season we're beginning to feel the benefit of a good pre-season programme.' Durrant added, 'Scoring the winner against Celtic was a bonus. It's especially pleasing to come away from Parkhead on top after a very hard week. Old Firm games are always the same, but we were full of confidence going into this one and we all worked very hard. Losing Goughie and Bomber through injury meant we had to put Stuart McCall at right-back and big Mark Hateley in the middle and they did a great job.'

Meanwhile, Rangers' victory over Leeds put the club back among the elite of European football, and the prestige value they were set to receive from Champions League involvement was just as important as the cash boost which would come from the glamour games against Marseille, CSKA Moscow and Bruges. That was the view of Campbell Ogilvie, who was speaking enthusiastically about the new league set-up on his return from the Euro draw in Geneva. He said, 'I've been at many European draws and meetings and this is the first time we have been viewed alongside the elite on the continent. For us to have reached this stage is a major target achieved.'

It was Rangers who first proposed to UEFA that a league system be introduced for the last eight in the competition in mid-1989, and following the success of the 1991/92 competition, UEFA attracted a record sponsorship cash haul of £35 million for the 1992/93 group stages. The eight qualifiers were set to receive a share of 54 percent of the cash, with Rangers involvement set to earn at least £4 million. The remainder of the cash would be invested in improving the game from the bottom up.

From season 1992/93, UEFA were taking complete control of the league to form its own unique and individual identity. No longer would participating clubs be allowed to wear shirt advertising when they played in the Champions League. Only manufacturers logos would be permitted, and the Champions League logo would be displayed on the shirt sleeve, while all trackside advertising would be under the control of UEFA. Matchday programmes would be completely redesigned to reflect the identity of the Champions League, and UEFA also held control over television rights, which they had sold to 23 companies, including ITV, in almost every country on the continent. The governing body had even commissioned a Champions League anthem to be recorded by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and played before every game. However, clubs would still keep their own catering and

ticket revenues.

Ogilvie added, 'The whole concept has been very professionally organised. UEFA have invested a lot of money in getting the promotion of the league right and the public will clearly see this.' He also insisted there would be no rift with Rangers' sponsors Scottish and Newcastle Breweries as the tournament banned the use of the McEwan's Lager logo on the club jersey. He added, 'We talked about this with our sponsors 18 months ago and they have been kept fully aware of developments. They understand our position.'

Every Rangers game would be shown live on TV throughout Scotland, and perhaps even Britain. But with so much off the-field activity, Ogilvie was quick to point out that the football itself would remain the most important factor. He said, 'First and foremost we are a football club serving a football public. And there is no better way to serve our supporters than the matches we have to look forward to. Our aim is to be the best, so we want to play against the best and the Champions League will allow us to do just that.'

On the pitch, European Cup hero Dale Gordon praised his teammates in the aftermath of the win over Leeds – and took it a step further by insisting Rangers were good enough to win the English Premier League. The £1.2 million signing from Norwich made his prediction after helping steer Rangers past the English champions. He stressed that victory in both legs would send his fellow countrymen home to think again on the standard of his team and Scottish football.

He added, 'People are blinkered down south because they don't see the Scottish game on a weekly basis. With us winning four in a row and taking control in the league, all they see is Rangers, Rangers, Rangers, but they don't see how big and how good a club we actually are.'

'I'm sure a lot of the English who came up for the first tie were given the shock of their lives, not just in terms of the football we play, but also to see what our facilities are like. They are without doubt the best in Britain. And I believe that if we were in the English Premier League we would be good enough to win it! From what I've seen on satellite television and from what I know of my own personal experiences down south, there aren't any teams that would challenge us.'

There isn't anything better than Rangers. After the Leeds games, the English can only have the greatest respect for

us and I'm sure when we go on in the competition the only team to watch, from their point of view, will be ours.