

When I awoke on the morning of my first training session for St Mirren, I did so with the realisation that I was the most expensive footballer in Scotland. And with that, comes a certain responsibility to prove to people that the club were right to shell out such a large sum of money.

That fee of £180,000 paid to Clydebank may not seem much these days, but it was a heck of a lot in the 1970s.

But the pressure I was feeling wasn't just connected to the size of the fee. Saints had just punted Frank McGarvey to Liverpool for £400,000 and I was purchased to fill his boots, and they were big boots to fill.

In reality, I had just a single season of senior football behind me and while I'd made the switch to Clydebank effortlessly, it was another substantial hike from First Division to Premier League.

Those 28 goals for Clydebank proved I could score in decent company, but time, and fate, would tell if I would succeed. If determination were the only ingredient needed I would have no problems adjusting to life in Scottish football's top flight. At the time, I wasn't aware that I was the most expensive player in Scotland until I read it in the papers. No one had mentioned it and I wasn't a 'stato' when it came to juggling facts and figures. It was a great feeling knowing that Saints had wanted me badly enough to up their initial offer of £100,000. I wanted to repay that faith.

It was just over a year since I'd been playing for Perthshire and it was an almighty step up from juniors to Premier League, but Clydebank had provided me with that vital stepping-stone. It certainly helped bed me into the seniors and was an important part of my football education. It may just have been a single season, but playing in the first division week in, week out worked wonders for my confidence.

Following the move to Saints, a couple of papers reported that I'd turned my back on Celtic, but they didn't know the truth. That aside, I was genuinely happy to be a St Mirren player. After speaking to Jim Clunie for a second time, I'd headed over to Love Street for talks with the chairman, William Todd. We quickly agreed terms. I wanted to be there, no question.

St Mirren were an established top four, or five, Premier League side and expectation levels at Love Street had grown. There were good players at the club and I knew it would be a battle just to get my hands on a jersey each Saturday.

At the time, manager Jim Clunie, who had previously worked as Lawrie McMenemy's assistant boss at Southampton, had just signed another striker, Dougie Somner, from Partick Thistle. Future teammates would also include Jackie Copland, Billy Stark, Billy Abercromby and Lex Richardson.

My remit at Saints was simple. The gaffer wanted me to go out there and score goals and I believe I did just that. I enjoyed playing alongside Dougie, he was a big lad, but could play a bit, and he also chipped in with plenty of goals, including more than 30 in our first season.

Dougie wasn't a party animal, like Frank McAvennie and me, but he was a great lad and we didn't hold it against him for heading straight home after training and passing up the opportunity to play snooker with the 'gang.' I formed a good partnership with the former Jag and we got on well, both on and off the park. He was a fantastic signing for Saints.

I was soon into my stride in Paisley and the step up in class was achieved easier than I'd first thought. If you can score goals early on the confidence boost is priceless and it takes some of the pressure off.

I always knew I had goals in me, but scoring in the Premier League was extremely fulfilling, especially with defenders such as Alex McLeish and Willie Miller at Aberdeen, and Paul Hegarty and Dave Narey of Dundee United on the beat. And that's not to mention the Old Firm and Edinburgh sides.

As time wore on, the gaffer would trust me with free-kicks. It was something I practiced a lot in training and, I'm afraid to say, is the reason behind some mischievous team-mates christening me Zico.

I took some beauties and managed to curl a few round the wall and into the top corner. I was beginning to believe I had Brazilian blood coursing through my veins, although the whole Zico thing was most definitely tongue in cheek, courtesy of Mr Abercromby, the quickest wit in all of Paisley. That's one quality that certainly wasn't missing from the Love Street dressing room, where the banter was free flowing.

One thing that I was enjoying was the increase in my standard of living. I was full-time at Saints and was being paid accordingly. I was on £220 a week and invested the signing-on fee wisely in bricks and mortar.