

The Supporters

Players come and go, as witnessed by the large number used throughout The Journey, but fans are forever – especially Rangers fans.

For many decades, the Light Blue anthem of Follow Follow has been recited passionately on terracings and in stands from Aberdeen to Dumfries, and Barcelona to South Carolina; nothing gets the blue and white juices flowing like a group of Bears in full voice.

But the words of Follow Follow were never truer than when Rangers hit their darkest moments in 2012, and the club plunged into administration and then liquidation. While Sandy Jardine and Ally McCoist provided leadership from a high, the foot soldiers rallied round and formed lengthy queues outside the ticket office to buy season books.

This was life after the SPL, Rangers-style, and it was a quite magnificent show of unity, and one which is arguably unparalleled in the history of the Scottish game. But while the rest of Scottish football may have looked on with incredulity, no one within the confines of Ibrox stadium was in the least bit surprised, at least no one with blue blood coursing through their veins, for our supporters are undeniably faithful to a fault.

It reminded me of a trip abroad to see Rangers in the 1979/80 European Cup Winners Cup. We were in Dusseldorf, and having just seen off Fortuna after a tie-winning 0-0 draw, we were paired with Spanish giants Valencia in the third round. It was a cracking draw, but while neither my mate nor I could afford to go to Spain for the first leg, scheduled for just three weeks later, he made sure he was heading for the sunshine by pawning his mum's hi-fi unit and video recorder. And while I wouldn't advise any young Rangers fan to take the same course of action, it just showed what it meant to him to follow his team everywhere and anywhere.

Of course, it required a different level of passion to back the team for the 2012/13 campaign. While many thousands of fans continued with their unbroken support of Ally McCoist's side, the unbelievable sight of seeing Rangers frogmarched like a common criminal through the streets of Glasgow, due to the actions of certain individuals, resonated with many more thousands, and persuaded them to return to their club in their desperate hour of need.

With Charles Green on tea duty, staff at the ticket office were overworked as everyone connected with the club flicked two massive fingers at the rest of Scottish football. Those same supporters of away teams who had shared a ground with the Gers' fans were now falling over themselves to ensure Rangers were punished in a proper manner. "Sporting Integrity" was the buzz phrase as Scottish football went to work with Domestos to cleanse the game of the fallen Ibrox giants.

In their eyes, Rangers had committed a crime so huge they were to be banished to the great football pitch in the sky.

Fine them, deduct points from them, strip them of their titles, we'll sell out grounds without them. Hell hath no fury like a Scottish football supporter scorned. The Scottish game would be better off without Rangers. At that very moment, the vast majority of the Ibrox support vowed never to forgive or forget. The hatred and bitterness towards Rangers sent shockwaves around the world and back.

Now, four years on, we can re-visit the land of sporting integrity with the benefit of hindsight and see it exactly for what it was; a sham that had only one purpose, and that was to put the boot into Rangers. I can see no other explanation. Sure, Rangers had to be punished for their indiscretions, but the sentence passed by the kangaroo court was akin to someone being sentenced to death for stealing a bag of Maltesers out of Asda.

And it was our supporters who bore the brunt of the hatred towards the club. While 'businessman after businessman' arrived in the boardroom in the aftermath of admin and liquidation, promising the earth and delivering zilch, it was the supporters who suffered, with each different suit bringing another stinging right hook to the stomach.

All we craved was stability, and all we got was another spiv. Thankfully, the start of the 2015/16 season brought that stability, and Rangers-minded people into the boardroom.

It's difficult to be pragmatic while talking Rangers post-admin. The pain caused by the Craig Whyte-Charles Green-Mike Ashley era is still raw, but surely the Mark Warburton 'revolution' was for the fans, and everything they'd been forced to endure throughout the period which will forever be known, rather kindly, as The Journey.

Mark Warburton gave the supporters back their swagger. The football was exhilarating at times, the players were a step up and the pride had returned to the badge: a badge which had been kissed all too easily in the past. Warburton got the job done quickly and effectively. The supporters who had Follow Followed to friendly soccer outposts such as Elgin, Brechin, Stranraer, Annan and Berwick were suddenly smiling again.

Sure, it might be difficult to get used to sitting in relative comfort at away grounds in the 2016/17 season (instead of balancing on grassy slopes), but for many supporters, visiting the smaller towns in Scotland is now something they wouldn't have changed for the world. They've done their time and now they just want to watch Rangers challenging for the major honours again – and that's not too much to ask, is it?