

Ralph Brand



When Rangers striking legends and goals are mentioned in the same breath, the topic of conversation inevitably turns to players such as Ally McCoist and Derek Johnstone – two of the greatest goalscorers in the history of Glasgow Rangers. But there is another man lurking not too far behind – and he was up there with McCoist and Johnstone, and perhaps an even better finisher and all-round player than both.

Ralph Brand is one of the greatest goalscorers ever to wear the light blue of The Rangers. 206 goals in 317 games is a phenomenal record and, inevitably, he was on target in two of the three games on Rangers 1962 tour of Russia. And while we're at it, eight goals in eight internationals for Scotland tells its own story!

In fact, while the players were preparing for the tour in Copenhagen, Brand was at his Edinburgh home with his wife and children, doing what he liked best – being a family man. He had asked for permission to miss the Danish getaway and manager Scot Symon had absolutely no hesitation in granting his request.

Many thought him crazy to pass up the chance of visiting the Danish capital, but he knew exactly what he wanted and, at the time, he said: "When the trip was fixed I was asked to go, but I asked to be left out. I felt I would prefer to stay at home with the family. Anyway, I've got some gardening to do!

"This season, I've played, I think, just one short of 70 games, which is more than enough. I know I feel as though I've worked hard, and I'm now looking forward to a rest."

Born in the capital in 1936, Brand was signed for Rangers by the late, great Bill Struth in 1952, after impressing the boss with a terrific display for Scotland Schoolboys against their English counterparts at Wembley. It would be a further two years before he made his debut for Rangers but, when he did, the inevitable goals – which would become a part of his DNA – followed.

Like his teammates in 1962, Brand – who had formed one of the most lethal partnerships in Rangers' history with the great Jimmy Millar – was enthusiastic about the trip to Communist Russia.

He recalled: "We were so excited about going to a new place, especially one where many before us hadn't ventured. Everyone had heard all about Russia, but few had been, and we were desperate to experience that for ourselves.

"They were a very strong race but there were aspects of the country that were opening up to non-Russians, and there was contact of sorts with other countries. I suppose when you actually think about it, it wasn't that long since the Second World War had ended, and then the Cold War had started, so going to Russia was a completely new experience for people of our generation."

Modest Brand scored against both Locomotiv and Kiev, and was one of the main reasons Rangers would remain undefeated on the tour.

He said: "When Bill Struth signed me, Rangers were *the* club to play for. There were a number of clubs in for me from south of the border – big clubs too – but the only team I ever wanted to play for was Glasgow Rangers, and that's a fact.

"And that was down to an uncle of mine, who came from Glasgow. He would come through to Edinburgh to visit the family and would inevitably bring through a Rangers scarf or tammy, or other bits and pieces. I was only a young lad and I loved when he came through for a visit. Rangers were ingrained in me from a very early age and I knew there and then who I would play for if I ever made it as a footballer.

"Being signed by a man with the pedigree of Bill Struth was mind blowing. I was one lucky young man and I never forgot that. For me, it was a dream come true to play for my boyhood idols and I cherished every moment that I wore the light blue strip."

Brand played his last match for Rangers in April, 1965, when he scored the only goal in a 1–0 win over Third Lanark in the last League game of the season. He was sold to Manchester City in August that year for £30,000, but two years later he moved to Sunderland before finishing his career at Raith Rovers. He retired in 1970 and became a taxi driver in Edinburgh.

He still looks back on his time at Rangers with great fondness, though, even if he doesn't watch much football these days. "It's not the same now. There aren't any players like Willie Henderson or Jimmy Johnstone to really entertain the supporters, and that's a great shame. I used to love watching wingers keep the ball and dribble. They were the real source of entertainment."