

The great Bobby Shearer



The passport from a provincial club to Ibrox for a player has often been a starring role in a fighting display against Rangers.

But the prelude to Bobby Shearer's transfer from Hamilton Accies in December, 1955, was hardly in keeping with 'tradition.'

Bobby, in fact, moved soon after Accies had been on the end of an 8-0 hammering from Rangers in a League Cup quarter final tie.

As it happened, however, Rangers had had their eye on this dour, red-headed full back long before that travesty. And Bobby knew it, thanks to a tip off from a Member of Parliament he met in London!

He remembered, 'Accies were down in London for the big Wembley game in '55 when a Hamilton MP, Tom Fraser, came along to our hotel to meet some of the directors. 'With him was a Glasgow MP called Jimmy McInnes who was a red-hot Rangers fan. He pulled me aside and said,

'It won't be long before you are at Ibrox.

I said, 'How do you know this?' And he just told me not to ask questions. Just to wait and see if he was right. And so he was.

'So, despite that 8-0 defeat I obviously hadn't done too badly. But Alan Morton, the Rangers director, told me some time after I moved to Ibrox that Rangers had made up their minds about me after a game at Airdrie.'

Bobby's first game for Rangers was a reserve match against Dunfermline. And it was before it he was given his first lesson on the Ibrox tradition - by Willie Waddell, no less.

'I had a habit of always wearing the collar of my shirt turned up,' says Bobby. 'So when I stripped for the Dunfermline game I flipped up my collar as usual. Then Willie Waddell, who was captain that day, came over to me and said, "Bobby, we always have our collars turned down at Ibrox," So I turned it down.'

Lesson learned and Bobby went on to become a very pillar of Ibrox tradition himself. Which is what Rangers is all about.

Says Bobby, 'Playing for Rangers is something special. But on this point of tradition I never found that it was the manager, Scot Symon, who maintained it. He didn't have to. The players took the responsibility. Guys like Willie Waddell, Sammy Cox.

'As time went on and I became engrossed in the atmosphere, and also became captain of the club, I found myself doing what they did. Pointing out to younger players what they should and shouldn't do.'

Bobby Shearer became Rangers captain in 1958 and shared the honour with Eric Caldow until he left the club in 1965. He was a good captain, cast in the same mould as his predecessors, a player who inspired by example. 'I think I had the respect of the players,' says Bobby. 'And that was probably because I spoke the same language and, dare I say, could understand people.'

'There were all sorts of contrasting personalities in the side. I had to understand them all and be able to coax them in different ways on the pitch.'

'For example, take Ian McMillan. He was a player who played in flashes. But his flashes were brilliant ones. If he was out of the game for a spell I would say to him, "C'mon Ian, let's have a wee bit from you." And Ian would oblige.'

'But if I'd said the same thing to Jim Baxter, he would have replied with something like, "Who are you talking to?" Or "Away and raffle yourself!"'

'So the approach with him had to be different. I would say to Jim, "C'mon you big so-and-so, what about doing something?" And that would get his back up to best effect.'

The highlight of Bobby's career at Ibrox was undoubtedly the completion of the treble in season 63/64. But he has plenty of other vivid memories, some pleasant, some unpleasant, some funny, and others not so funny.

One of the most outstanding, perhaps, falls into the unpleasant category. It is of a European Cup Winners Cup match against Seville in season 60/61.

'It was the return match in Spain after we had won 4-0 at Ibrox,' says Bobby, 'the roughest game I ever played in. I came off the park with a deep scratch right down my chest which became poisoned, other players had been bitten, and everybody kicked or punched.'

'The Seville boys just lost the place. But they chose the wrong team to play it tough with. We had a few men in our team who could handle themselves.'

Another outstanding memory is a funny one. It concerns Davie Wilson in an Old Firm game at Parkhead.

'It might have been Davie's first Old Firm game,' says Bobby, 'I really can't remember. But anyway we were on our way to Parkhead when Scot Symon came to me and said, "I'm playing young Davie Wilson on the left wing. Go and have a word with him."

'So I sat beside Davie and told him not to worry about Sean Fallon who was his opponent. And Davie said, "why should I worry, I'll show HIM a thing or two!"

'Well, the game duly got underway and we found ourselves in the lead. Davie got the ball and streaked down the wing with Fallon hot in pursuit. Suddenly Davie screeched to a halt and with his arms outstretched for balance, one of the hands accidentally hit Sean on the face and started a nosebleed.

'One thing followed another as the game progressed and with Celtic fighting to get back on level terms they moved Sean Fallon upfield. But they couldn't pull it off. We won, and when we all clambered into the bath we were in good spirits.

'Then I remember Davie, so I slid over to him and asked how he found the game and Sean Fallon. And Davie replied with a serious look on his face, "Him? Once I'd forced him to move with a punch on the nose it was no bother!"

Bobby Shearer moved on to Queen of the South when he quit Ibrox. But although he made many friends in his eight-month term in Dumfries his heart just wasn't in it to the same extent.

Even now, his heart is still at Ibrox. And even though he has had a lot on his plate in recent years, what with managing Hamilton Accies, running his building concern, he has still found time to slip into Ibrox for matches.

'Slip into Ibrox,' indeed, because he hasn't wanted to stick his nose in anywhere, Bobby has regularly paid his way through the turnstiles!