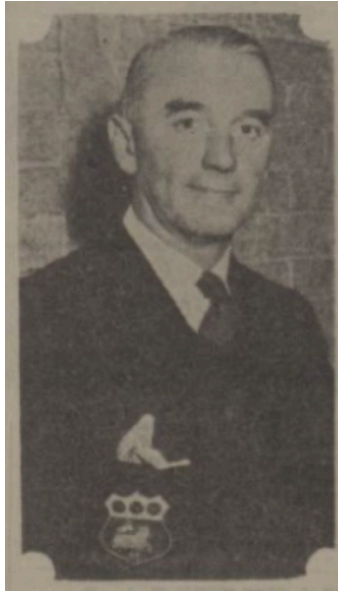


# The reluctant keeper



Which former Rangers manager also played in goals for the team on a couple of occasions?

Quite a nice trivia question.

It's well known that Jock Wallace was a goalkeeper of some merit, but to my knowledge he never kept goal for Rangers in a competitive fixture.

The guy in question was picked to play in goals in a league game after the regular keeper was (conflicting reports here) unable to get away from war work/was injured, and the second choice goalkeeper was definitely unable to get away from work!

The player in question was Scot Symon and the season was 1941/42. Symon, a supremely talented half back, played over forty times for Rangers that season as they won the league title, the Southern League Cup, the Glasgow Cup, the Glasgow Charity Cup and the Summer Cup.

That's right, pretty much the quadruple - beat that Celtic!

They were the best team in Scotland by a country mile and Scot Symon was a vital piece of that well-oiled machine.

That season, Rangers won ten out of their first eleven league games, with their only loss an astonishing 8-1 thrashing by Hibs at Easter Road - a game that Symon missed.

But with just four league games remaining, and the title all but in the bag, Rangers prepared for a short trip across the city to Shawfield, and a meeting with Clyde, Rangers manager Bill Struth's old team.

A few weeks beforehand, Clyde had turned up at Ibrox and 'escaped' with a goalless draw. Mr Struth hadn't been best pleased after that game and let his players know. So this time there would be no slacking.

But on the eve of the game, which was played on a Monday evening, it became known that Jerry Dawson would be unavailable. A big miss, of course, but not to worry as in George Jenkins, Struth had a more-than-able back-up keeper. George was told he would be in goals at Shawfield, but on the morning of the game he sent a telegram to Mr Struth saying he couldn't get away for the game as he had to work late!

Imagine these days, Michael Beale getting a text from Alfredo on the morning of a big game to say he couldn't make it to Tynecastle that night as he had a shift fitting tyres at Kwik Fit!

Anyway, Struth had a decision to make, and he knew that Symon quite often fancied a wee shot in goals during kickabouts at training. 'Let's see how he might perform in a proper game,' thought the Rangers manager.

When the Rangers team was posted in the pavilion at Shawfield the Clyde men were said to be furious. 'How dare they?' 'Who do they think they are?' 'We will show them what we do to folk who disrespect the Clyde!'

As the teams lined up for the game, and Symon was wearing Dawson's famous yellow sweater, one of the Clyde supporters in the 12,000 crowd shouted, 'Farcical! Give them what they deserve Clyde.'

So, how did that work out? Well, Rangers won the game 8-2, but the talk of the steamie afterwards wasn't the hat trick bagged by the great Alec Venters, or a Willie Waddell piledriver, nor even Tiger Shaw's superbly taken penalty kick. No, it was a stunning save by Symon, when he pushed a goal bound Wallace effort round the post with his fingertips.

It was the Light Blues who'd had the last laugh, and by the end of the game it's said the home supporters gave Symon a resounding cheer. Rangers hadn't disrespected anyone, and there was even talk in the away dressing room afterwards of Dawson struggling to get the yellow sweater back!

So, that was it for Symon's alternative career as a goalkeeper? Well, not quite, for two years later, Rangers played Hibs in the final of the Southern League Cup

at Hampden. Symon played every minute of every game that season. He was such a valuable member of Rangers' middle order.

In the semi final he had been outstanding as the Ibrox men swatted aside Celtic in a match that drew 90,000 to Hampden's famous slopes. Rangers won 4-2. There were 63,000 spectators inside the national stadium for the final, and Mr Struth knew that Hibs would be a tough nut to crack. Of course, he was right. The game was finely poised in the early stages, although that all changed when the clock reached the twenty-minute mark.

Rushing out to meet a bouncing ball, Jerry Dawson was beaten to it by Hibs forward Bogan, and he crashed awkwardly into the centre forward. Both players were badly hurt, although following a lengthy period of treatment, Bogan was able to carry on.

It was a different story with Dawson, though. He was stretchered off the field, with most supporters believing it to be a recurrence of a previous leg injury. If only, as it turned out to be a fractured tibia (shinbone). It was tough luck on Jerry.

With no substitutions permitted in those days, Scot Symon had no hesitation in taking over the yellow jersey, and proceeded to play out the remaining seventy minutes like a true veteran keeper. He was superb.

At one end, big Jimmy Smith - one of the greatest goalscorers in Rangers' esteemed history - went close on a couple of occasions, while at the other end, Symon was inspired, keeping at bay Hibs' most dangerous marksman, the once-popular Ranger, Jimmy Caskie.

Throughout the second half, as Hibs took advantage of their extra man, Symon was called upon to clutch, punch and clear in the approved Dawson fashion. With around sixty seconds remaining, Bogan was sent clear of the Rangers defence with a calculated, raking pass. He was one on one with Symon. Beat the makeshift keeper and the cup was heading to Edinburgh, and it would break Rangers' monopoly on the League Cup. Symon remained within his area, drawing Bogan towards him. The Hibs player shot, and Symon brilliantly deflected it past his post.

But in that single moment, Symon had just cruelly LOST his side the League Cup.

In the 1940s, the cup was decided on goals scored. If it finished goalless - as this game did - it was decided on corners. If an equal number of corners had been accrued, then it would go to extra time, but with Symon turning that last-gasp shot round the post, it meant that Hibs had won the cup 6-5 on corners.

What a cruel way in which to lose a major trophy, especially as Symon had performed so heroically against all the odds for well over an hour. It would be the last time he was asked to play between the sticks.