

# Victory Cup Success



Torry Gillick

There was no better way to celebrate Victory in Europe than with victory in Scotland. Just after the end of the Second World War, the football authorities proposed a one-off competition called the Victory Cup.

It was staged at the end of the 1945/46 season, just as domestic competitions were starting to get back to normal.

It would be competed for by all Scottish professional clubs. A qualifying competition was held and both East Stirling and Inverness Clachnacuddin qualified via that route. The format was home and away games for the first round and then a single knock-out tie from there on in. Both the semi-finals and final would be played at neutral venues. The 1945/46 campaign had been a long one - although unofficial as far as domestic league and cup was concerned - and organisers of the Victory Cup were hoping there would still be an appetite for their competition.

In the first round, Rangers were drawn against Stenhousemuir, and won both legs 4-1 to progress to the second round, where they were drawn to play Airdrie at Broomfield. It was a potential 'banana skin' tie, but Bill Struth's men had little problem claiming a place in the last eight with a 4-0 win.

In the quarter finals, Falkirk awaited at Brockville, and the Light Blues found a determined Bairns' eleven who were desperate to go all the way in the tournament, and only a determined display forced a replay at Ibrox, and Rangers atoned for the 1-1 draw at Brockville with a comfortable 2-0 win at home.

In the other semi-final, Hibs, taken to a replay after a 1-1 draw at Firhill against Partick Thistle, comfortably eased past the Jags at Easter Road with a 2-0 score line. The semi-final draw paired Hibs with Clyde, a contest which would take place at Tynecastle Park, while the old foes, Rangers and Celtic would do battle at the national stadium, Hampden Park. And that was when the action really did turn red hot.

Football in June is about as seasonal as strawberries at Christmas, but that's exactly what the public got as the semi-finals got underway - Rangers v Celtic on June 1st. The experts predicted a 100,000 crowd at Hampden Park for the big game. They would be short by some 35,000, but the punters certainly weren't short-changed.

Rangers had no injuries going into the game, while the Celts had a couple of players out, and their goalkeeper, Willie Miller, injured a wrist at work the day before the game. Reports suggested it was broken, but they were said to be exaggerated.

Miller was indeed fit to play, and, it is claimed, pulled off the greatest save ever witnessed in a football match in Scotland. It was the biggest thrill in a thrilling game which finished goalless.

Midway through the first half, Willie Thornton picked up the ball around 25 yards out. He sized up his chances and thumped the ball. He knew the moment the ball left his boot that it was on target and destined for the back of the net. The goalkeeper looked beaten to the world, but with amazing agility and magnificent judgment he leapt almost the breadth of the goal to make one-handed contact with the leather at the junction of the crossbar and his right-hand post, to turn the ball out for a corner kick. It was a sublime piece of goalkeeping.

The game in general, while having plenty of incident, was described as a 'gentlemanly affair,' with both sets of players perhaps browned-off at having to continue the season ten months after the first game.

The pace wasn't so quick, but there was still no end of skill on display. There were many goal incidents, more than one ordinarily gets in 90 minutes, and as these were at both ends the uncertainty of the final score prevailed to the last whistle and therefore maintained interest to the end.

Waddell and Gillick were probably two of the Light Blues to get pass marks. Rangers, over the piece, provided the most studied football, and this was evidenced more so in the forward areas, but a draw was probably a fair result.

The teams would have to do it all again few days later, but this gave Rangers a potential problem. Willie Thornton was due to head back to his army unit on the continent, even though his demob date was edging ever closer. But after a quick word with his commanding officer, he arrived back at Ibrox with a smile on his face and a seven-day extension of leave in his pocket. He was a big player for Rangers.

The replay took place on Wednesday, June 6th, and if the first game was a 'gentlemanly affair,' then this game was the absolute antithesis. It was bedlam! Rangers won the toss and naturally chose to shoot with the strong breeze, but it was

Celtic who were first to show, and for the first 10 minutes it was the Parkhead side who looked the likelier to score.

But in the 12th minute, a mis-kick in the Celtic defence led to the quick-thinking Torry Gillick playing a beautiful ball through to Willie Waddell and the winger took unerring aim before firing in the type of drive that no goalkeeper - not even Miller - could save. 1-0 Rangers.

It was a setback for Celtic but they battled on regardless. Just before the interval, Gillick missed a golden chance to put the Gers two up, and the teams crossed over with Rangers holding the narrowest of leads. It was in the second half that all hell broke loose.

Celtic were dealt a cruel blow when Gallagher aggravated a first-half injury and was stretchered off, his night over. Birrell then pulled a muscle and was shunted out to pasture on the left wing. Celtic were effectively now a nine-man team.

And their evening was just about to go from bad to worse when Thornton was pulled down inside the box on 65 minutes and referee, Dale, awarded a penalty. That was the cue for a night of shame as Celtic lost the plot.

Mr Dale was immediately surrounded by a group of Celtic players, protesting his decision. One of the Celtic players was booked.

Rangers centre-half, George Young stepped forward to take the kick, but a couple of Celtic players stood in front of him, preventing him from taking the kick. Paterson, the Celtic forward, was the main offender, and was ordered off.

This didn't act as a deterrent to the remainder of his teammates and Mallon, the left-back, then stood in front of Young. Referee Dale sent him off too.

Encouraged by shouts from sections of their support, it looked like other players were about to walk off of their own free will.

All this time, feelings were running high in the stands and on the terracing, but after play had been held up for four minutes, the calmest person on the park remained George Young, and he stepped up to place the spot kick beyond Miller - and Rangers were 2-0 up.

The game had only re-started a matter of moments when a Celtic fan ran on to the park and made straight for the referee - and attempted to hit him on the head with a bottle. Mr Dale managed to dodge the object, but the thug threw the bottle at him, and it missed him narrowly.

Three policemen rushed onto the park and immediately apprehended the culprit. In the meantime, more irate Celtic supporters had ran onto the park and the police were having trouble dealing with the troublemakers.

By this time, Hampden was in an uproar, and on the East Terracing, several fights had broken out, while hundreds, afraid of being caught up in the mayhem, attempted to force their way to the top of the high embankment, which caused the utmost confusion. Suddenly a large number of police reinforcements appeared from under the South Stand, and their impressive appearance almost at once had a sobering effect on the hotheads, many of whom, however, kept shouting on the Celtic team to leave the field. The game was again restarted and carried through to a farcical finish. It was the first time two players from the same team had been ordered off in an Old Firm match. As ugly as the scene was, it's believed it could've been a lot worse had the police reinforcements not arrived when they did. By that time, though, thousands of decent fans had already left the ground.

Former Rangers great, Davie Meiklejohn, was at the ground as a reporter for the Daily Record, and said: "It was a tragic end to a game that had all the makings of a real Old Firm thriller. But after the penalty was awarded, there is no adjective available to condemn sufficiently the crowd scenes that followed.

"Whether it was a penalty or not is beside the point, I know what it is to be on the field when such a decision is given against you and you disagree. It is a galling experience, and you feel like throwing discretion to the wind, but that does not condone the attitude of some of the Celtic players.

"I was sorry to see wiser counsels did not prevail, and the game resumed in the entertaining fashion it had been up till then. Paterson and Mallon were ordered to the pavilion and the game became a farce. I thoroughly detest writing this, but it has got to be told."

45,000 attended the match and of the five arrests made for fans invading the pitch, four were jailed for the offences.

The Rangers team that night was: Brown, Cox, Shaw, Watkins, Young, Symon, Waddell, Gillick, Thornton, Duncanson and Caskie.

Police set a crowd limit of 135,000 for the Hampden final against Hibs, and it was hoped that Willie Thornton could shake off the thigh injury he'd received while being brought down for the controversial penalty in the semi-final replay.

Other than that, Rangers had a clean bill of health and were looking forward to the showpiece event.

On the eve of the big match, the SFA announced that they were to hold an investigation into the disgraceful scenes witnessed at the Hampden semi-final replay, and ordered Celtic to send a representative to a meeting of the committee.

And while one club was being pilloried for their part in the disturbances, the other received great praise. Convenor Gibson, of the Rangers Association, received a letter from the Chief Constable of Glasgow, which said, 'May I say I appreciate what your association is endeavouring to do in keeping the game clean and in attracting a sport-loving public to the football grounds to the exclusion of the hooligan element.'

The punishment for Celtic was swift and severe, as the following statement, from SFA Secretary, George Graham, said, 'G. Paterson and J. Mallon have been suspended from 10th August till 10th November. J. Lynch suspended from 10th August till 10th September. Celtic fined £50 and ordered to put up warning notices about misbehaviour by their spectators for six months commencing 10th August.'

The Referees' Committee of the SFA, who conducted the inquiry, sat for two and a half hours, and took evidence from the referee, his two linesmen, and Celtic manager Jimmy McGrory.

Anyway, to the final, and Rangers claimed another trophy to add to the growing collection of silverware in the Ibrox boardroom. When the referee blew the final whistle at Hampden even the Hibs players applauded the victorious and talented Rangers stars.

There were handshakes all round from the vanquished to the victors. Then, from opposite corners of the field ran the brothers Shaw to meet and grasp each other round the shoulders. Nothing theatrical in it at all as we Scots don't do these things. It was just brotherly affection giving way to the excitement of the moment and expressing a job well done.

And there was no one at Hampden would or could have denied these fellows their moments. It was a game to satisfy the most fastidious. Conditions were ideal, no, make that perfect, and from the start the players, realising there could be no excuses, set out to make this closing game of the season one to be remembered - and they succeeded. As a team, Rangers were in one of the best moods they had been in for quite a while. They were on top most of the 90 minutes, and but for that fighting spirit of the Hibs, which never sagged and never allowed the Light Blues completely to sit on them the game might have fizzled out into a one-sided contest. That was the Hibs' crowning glory and a trait to be admired.

Gillick and Waddell started the fireworks by ripping open the left hand side of the Hibs defence. Symon carried on the good work by blunting the services of Smith. That was Rangers' winning card. What few chances Gordon did get, he showed us the threat was there, but unfortunately for Hibs they were few and far between.

Having accomplished that part of his job, Symon went on to become the complete half-back, the master tactician dictating his policy.

Then we had Thornton and Duncanson carrying on the personality stuff up front. Surely Thornton has one of the quickest-thinking brains in football. Willie is one of those seldom-seen lads who seems never to care a cuss whether he scores or not as long as he lays it on for a colleague.

Meiklejohn said: "Take that second goal for Rangers. I must tell you about that goal. It was a peach in its execution and finish. The ball was centred for the start of the second half. A touch from Gillick back to Symon, forward to Duncanson and forward again to Thornton, then the touch of the master. Thornton back-heeled it into the empty space, and up came Duncanson to bang it into the net.

“A piece of quick thinking by the Rangers centre if ever there was one.

“To add to Hibs’ worry was the return to form of Duncanson. When he is ‘on it,’ this fellow can be a pain in the neck to any defence. His ‘ever up’ tactics are so disconcerting and a menace all the time. He was certainly back to the standard that gained him international honours.

“There was Cox, of course, stylish and workmanlike in everything he did, with the rest of the side doing their bit if not catching the eye the same as the names I have recorded.”

Until Duncanson scored the third goal late on, plucky Hibs kept on plugging away in the hope of getting an equaliser, but it was all in vain. But while Gillick’s opener had set the tone for a masterful Rangers performance, Duncanson’s third simply made certain that the trophy - the old Southern League Cup - would remain forever at the home of the victors, quite ironically, as Rangers had won the tournament four times out of five. Almost 90,000 watched the big game, and just moments before big Duncanson’s clinching goal, Waddell had scored an absolute beauty. He hit the perfect shot from 20 yards and it rose from the ground all the way to the goalmouth, where it exploded into the back of the net. That was it. Although the Rangers fans in the big crowd were incandescent with rage when referee, Martin disallowed the effort. For a moment or two there was only confusion. It had been a perfectly good goal, one of the best ever witnessed on Hampden’s lush turf, but it was chalked off, and Waddell had stood uncomprehendingly before walking away scratching his head in puzzlement. There was no rushing of protesting players towards the whistler, whose decision was accepted without murmur. It was good to see, especially after the semi-final replay shenanigans.

The afternoon had started with the rousing sounds of the pipe bands of the 51st and 52nd Divisions, whose professionalism and spectacle were enjoyed by all present, and it ended with the sweet music played by the resident band at the Rangers’ Association’s Victory Cup gathering in the evening, a function attended by all the players and directors, including Chairman, James Bowie, and legendary winger, Alan Morton, and a ‘guid’ night was had by all.