

# Robert Gordon Campbell



From stopper to scorer!

The football tale of Robert Gordon (RG) Campbell is a rather interesting one. It's not often a player moves directly from one half of the Old Firm to the other. Then again, it's not often a bona-fide full-back (certainly in the early 20th Century) is transformed into a goalscoring machine by his manager.

Our Robert Campbell (not to be confused with the other Robert Campbell, born a year earlier, but who was also a full back with Rangers), was a native of Aberdeenshire, born in Ellon in 1883. He started his football career in earnest around 20 years later with the Glasgow junior side, Rutherglen Glencairn.

After a season at Southcroft Park, Campbell signed for Queen's Park and embraced amateurism, which at that time in Scotland had caused something of a divide with those who earned a living from the game. Campbell was working as a colliery agent and playing and training for Queen's in his spare time.

But as a defender of some note, the bigger clubs in the country were starting to sit up and take notice of this tough, but talented defender. In May, 1905, Rangers travelled to Hampden to play Queen's in a Glasgow League fixture. 3,000 looked on as the great Alec Smith was repelled time and again by Campbell. In the end, Rangers and Smith prevailed, but that 90 minutes added another admirer to the growing list. The following weekend, Third Lanark clinched the Glasgow League championship with victory over Queen's at Hampden, but in among the 2,000 crowd were a number of scouts, with eyes mostly focused on just one player. A couple of weeks later,

Campbell decided it was time to join the ranks of professionalism, and while campaigners who were desperate for the game to remain amateur lamented the loss of another trooper, the player himself had made the decision for the sake of his career. Most Scottish football commentators expected RG to have a one-way ticket to Ibrox, but he surprised everyone by rocking up at Celtic Park. This wasn't down to the player; this was the work of his parent club. Queen's Park had lost both RC Hamilton and RS McColl to Rangers, the latter landing at Ibrox via Newcastle, and they were adamant that Campbell wasn't about to follow suit, so refused the player permission to join Rangers - and promptly sold him to Celtic, as if to make some sort of twisted point.

Rangers were said to be furious with the way the Hampden club had handled the Campbell affair, especially as they'd been lacking a good quality back since the lamentable passing of the great Nicol Smith twelve months earlier.

On Campbell's move to Parkhead, one newspaper column reported, 'McLeod, if he shows last year's form, will certainly have first call for left back, and for the right position it will probably be found that the newcomer, RG Campbell, correctly considered the catch of the season, will be in high favour. In securing this player the Celts brought off a big coup, and if the ex-amateur develops as he did last season he will be in the running for international honours.'

RG Campbell played eleven times for Celtic – including a hurtful 5-3 loss to Rangers in a Charity Cup tie at Ibrox - before the unthinkable happened.

In January, 1906, Rangers announced that Celtic had given them permission to sign Campbell, and that the player would immediately be joining up at Ibrox. The Celtic directorate acknowledged Rangers' deficiencies in the right-back department and a meeting was arranged between the clubs. Celtic declared a surplus of defenders, Rangers admitted they quite fancied Campbell, and both parties shook on it: one club helping out another.

This sturdy player of good weight and height also possessed great tackling and kicking power, but he wasn't just an expert on the football field. In cricket circles, he enjoyed an excellent reputation. He played for Clydesdale CC, which had once within its ranks noted players in Archie Gibb and George Wilson, the latter also a right back of Campbell's build.

Rangers were grateful to their closest rivals, and Campbell knuckled down in training ahead of his debut against Port Glasgow at Ibrox. It was their first home game in a fortnight and the club treasurer was hoping for a boost at the gate. Rangers won the game 4-0, but the attendance was affected by the howling winds, which got up an hour or so before kick off and made play difficult for both teams. RG played very well, and while he lacked the galloping recovery power of the late Nicol Smith, he showed manager William Wilton that he would be an important member of the team.

He was in familiar company as fellow defenders Sinclair and Craig had also cut their teeth with Rutherglen Glencairn.

For the record, Robert Dalrymple notched a hat trick, thanks to some dazzling assistance from Jimmy Speirs, while RS McColl had the other. The home side's forward line of Speirs, Dalrymple, Hamilton, McColl and Smith would've been too strong for most teams, and little Port did well to keep it down to four.

At the start of the second half, the rain was coming down in waves, and there were calls from 'drookit' spectators asking the directorate to open the north stand - but they refused, despite doing so on previous occasions.

Next up for Campbell was a Scottish Cup tie in Barrhead against Arthurlie, and the home side were simply no match for the Ibrox giants. Speirs netted a hat trick as rampant Rangers won 7-1, and with Dalrymple claiming a double, it was always simply a case of how many. The crowd was a record one for Barrhead, with £150 taken at the gate.

Nearing the end of 1906, Rangers hosted Morton at the stadium in a benefit match for the Clyde strikers' distress fund, but the weather unfortunately broke down an hour or so before the scheduled start time and the upshot was that only a few hundred were present at the midweek match.

And that was a great pity, because the stay-at-home punters missed out on one of the most incredible individual performances ever by a Ranger. To fill a void in the central attacking role, Mr Wilton moved RG Campbell up front, and boy how he repaid his manager's bold move.

It was the first time Campbell had taken on a forward role, and by the time the referee had blown the half-time whistle, RG had bagged a hat trick. Two of the goals had come from the penalty spot, and had been dispatched with aplomb.

'More of the same,' cried Mr Wilton at the break, and that was exactly what he got! RG scored another three goals, while some debate surrounded a seventh 'goal', which was ruled out as the killjoy ref insisted he had already blown for time up as Campbell's shot had crossed the line.

Rangers won 6-0, with their makeshift striker bagging the lot, and there was some good-natured ribbing of the match official after the game as RG insisted his seventh goal should've counted.

Campbell had a short break at the end of the season, before changing his light blue shirt for his cricket whites and proved almost instantly that he was as versatile on the cricket pitch as he was on the football field.

He made exactly half of Clydesdale's total against West of Scotland, kept wickets splendidly, fielded smartly, and bowled a few overs. Campbell's main characteristics as a sportsman were keenness and enthusiasm. And he wasn't the lone footballer at Clydesdale as Maskrey, their professional, kept goal for Derby County.

When he returned for the new football season, Campbell became the club's new first-choice centre forward, and he didn't disappoint. In the next two seasons he scored 42 league goals, and only switched back to defence to accommodate the brilliant goal scorer Willie Reid.

While at Ibrox, Campbell won three league titles, three Glasgow Cups and three Glasgow Charity Cups.

He left Rangers in 1914 to sign for Kilmarnock, and moved from Rugby Park directly to Killie's big rivals, Ayr United, proving once more that he wasn't afraid to cross football's big divides.

After hanging up his boots, he became a director of Rangers, holding the position for sixteen years until his death from heart failure in May of 1942 at the age of just 59. RG Campbell had definitely made his mark on the Rangers.