

# William Wilton and the Seven Gers



Davie Crawford

Davie Crawford was absent the day his club were celebrating becoming Scottish League champions for the second year in succession.

Mind you, so was Matt Dickie, Nick Smith, Bobby Neill, Jacky Robertson, Bob Hamilton and the great Alec Smith.

While Rangers were thumping Edinburgh side St Bernard's 4-1 in the final league game of the 1899/00 season, the Magnificent Seven were turning it on for Scotland against Wales at Aberdeen in February, 1900, in the first of that season's home international matches.

That's right, Rangers went ahead with their league match despite SEVEN of their top boys being absent with leave.

Manager William Wilton was no fool, though, as the league trophy was already in the bag. Some might term the game against Saints a 'dead rubber,' but there is no such thing as a meaningless league match when you're Glasgow Rangers.

Scotland beat Wales 5-2 with Hamilton and Alec Smith on the scoresheet. Jack Bell played for Scotland that day, and should've been a Ranger before Celtic nicked him. RS McColl would soon become a noted Ranger. It was almost nine!

Hamilton was arguably the man of the match, partnering club mate Smith up front. The goal he scored would these days be termed 'straight out of the top drawer,' such was

the artistry the serial goal-getter showed in its execution. One journalist described it as 'positively bewildering!'

As for the others, Neill tackled brilliantly, Nick Smith was as solid as a rock, and Robertson was equal to the speed and force in front of him.

Matt Dickie was a giant, in terms of stature rather than feet and inches. He repelled everything the Welsh threw at him, and had his concentration been up to the mark he would surely have secured that vital clean sheet!

That leaves Crawford, often referred to in his near 10 years at Rangers as a 'utility player,' or a 'handy reserve,' which both seem a little condescending to a man who was an excellent defender and a reliable and talented right back.

Scotland chose to play him at left back against Wales, and while it was a duty he performed many times for his club side, he was clearly happier on the other side of the pitch.

He was neat and tidy in possession, but was forced to rely on Nick Smith to bail him out a couple of times. What bad fortune to be a Ranger at the same time as arguably their greatest ever right back!

And so to Ibrox, 150 miles down the road from the scene of the international. Howden, McKinlay, Drummond, Gibson, Dunlop, Mitchell, Graham, Wilkie, McPherson, Hyslop and Campbell had the task of maintaining the honour of the champions. Quite a few were less than household names, but they were certainly capable and knew exactly what it meant to don the famous light blue jersey.

That season, Rangers had lost just a single league game - to their greatest rivals - and now little St Bernard's had an opportunity to lower their colours.

3,000 spectators watched a cagey first half, with only a John McPherson goal separating the teams at the break. Could the 'unthinkable' happen?

Not on your life. Campbell, Gibson and Wilkie made sure of that. Saints' consolation, a penalty kick, ensured Howden would miss out on the clean sheet.

By the end of the afternoon, Rangers had won the league by seven points from Celtic, winning 15 of their 18 games, and drawing twice. St Bernard's managed to avoid the wooden spoon, leading bottom dogs Clyde by eight points when all was said and done. It was a purple period for Wilton's great Rangers team, and they would go on to win the next two titles to make it four-in-a-row.

When the Magnificent Seven made it home from Aberdeen, they weren't in the slightest bit surprised that their club mates had made another little piece of history, for after all, they were all part of what would become the greatest club in the world. They were in it together.