

The Ranger who kept his promise.

Jimmy Forshaw

Forshaw's promise to himself...

There's a story which might just have slipped under the Rangers radar, and it's one of incredible human endurance, bravery and a love of our great club. In fact, the return to Ibrox of Jimmy Forshaw might just qualify as a war romance. The Govan man joined Rangers in the summer of 1938 from crack juvenile side, Partick Dolphins. He was immediately loaned out to juniors, Glasgow Perthshire, to gain experience, and he shone so brightly during his loan spell with the Shire that he was called up to the Rangers reserve side after just a single season at Keppoch Park.

He returned to Ibrox with a spring in his step and a real sense of purpose. He was soon a regular on the right wing for the Ibrox second team and rapidly becoming a big favourite of the Rangers support.

As the end of the season approached, Rangers qualified for the final of the Glasgow Merchants' Charity Cup after edging Queen's Park 2-1 in a thrilling semi final at Ibrox. 19-year-old Forshaw was named in the side as a replacement for the injured Davie Kinnear. Willie Waddell would be moved to the outside-left berth to accommodate Forshaw. Bob McPhail, Willie Thornton and Alec Venters would make up the star-studded forward line. Forshaw didn't sleep particularly well that night. But on the morning of the game, Kinnear declared himself fit. Forshaw didn't play in the big game, which was a bitter blow for the youngster.

At that time, a young Willie Waddell had taken over the first team number seven jersey from Bobby Main and would prove difficult to shift, but Forshaw was made of stern stuff.

Waddell would remain at Ibrox for 17 years and play over 600 games - but he was also prone to muscular injuries and in March, 1940 spent two months on the treatment table at the stadium.

When the team was announced for the next game, Ian McPherson was handed the number seven jersey. He was a good player but had a quiet game. Andy Matthews was next in line. He too managed just a single game on the wing. Forshaw, who had been knocking it out the park in the reserves, was next up. The game? Celtic v Rangers. Two huge league points up for grabs, but Forshaw handled the big occasion like a veteran and Rangers won 2-1.

The 20-year-old retained his place in the team for the next league match against Ayr United at Ibrox. McPherson, back in the team at inside right, teamed up to good effect with Forshaw, and scored twice in a 3-1 win.

Next up was another league game for the leaders; a tricky away match against Queen's Park, but Jimmy Smith and Alec Venters were on target in a 3-2 victory, and again the man who made a big impression was Forshaw. Three league games in succession and at Glasgow's big three grounds: Ibrox, Hampden and Celtic Park. And he was on the winning side in all three. The six points accrued would go a long way to helping Rangers secure yet another title.

It looked to all intents and purposes that the young winger had a bright future at Ibrox. But the outbreak of war led to many young footballers answering the call-to-arms and Forshaw was one of them. Immediately after his training he was sent to North Africa, where he was involved in prolonged and heavy fighting. When his unit was attacked one morning, the young Glaswegian took several shots to the body and legs. His wounds were severe and he spent many months in hospital. During his stay, a senior army doctor paid him a visit. He sat on the edge of Forshaw's bed and said, 'we need to have a conversation.' What he told him left the young footballer devastated. Put simply, the doctor told him he would never play football again. Forshaw was distraught. He knew he was in a bad way but hadn't been prepared for such a hammer blow. Halfway through the conversation, Forshaw's mind began to drift. Sure, the doc's words had floored him, but he was such a determined young man that he promised himself that day that he would prove the medic wrong. Now, whether he actually believed the promise he had just made to himself, or whether he was using it as a mechanism to prevent an emotional breakdown, it fired him up. And thanks to present-day surgery, and the player's own burning desire to once more kick a ball in earnest, he made such progress that a comeback eventually became remotely possible.

Forshaw continued to work hard. The road was long but he had all the time in the world. He was soon fit enough to travel back to Glasgow from Africa and once on home soil he continued with his recovery programme. And five years after receiving not only career-ending, but life-threatening injuries, he was passed fit by a hospital doctor.

And so to Saturday, March 31, 1945. One thousand fans were at Ibrox for a North-Eastern League match between Rangers and Falkirk. When the announcer read out the teams, the Rangers' number seven received the biggest cheer of the day. 'Jimmy Forshaw!'

Forshaw had made a deal with himself five years earlier, and he'd kept it. Rangers hadn't handed over a jersey out of sympathy. The player had earned it, and when he ran out of the Ibrox tunnel he must have felt every inch the winner that he was.

He worked hard and set up a goal in a 3-2 win. In terms of prestige and potential silverware, the game may have meant little, but to Forshaw and the fans aware of his back story, it meant everything. This brave young Govan man had battled against all odds to once again take his place on a football field. He had achieved the impossible and Bill Struth and reserve team manager George Brown had helped him keep his promise to himself.

At the beginning of the 1945/46 season, Rangers released the popular inside-forward but he was immediately snapped up by Dumbarton. He scored a hat-trick in one of his first games, an 8-0 win over Arbroath in a League Cup tie at Gayfield.

But his time at Boghead was limited. He played a single season for the Sons before calling time on his career. He had won his personal battle with adversity but it transpired that the bullets he had taken in North Africa had really caused some lasting damage. He was quoted as saying, 'I was never good enough to play for Rangers after my injuries. I knew that, but gave it my best shot.'

In his youth he had been heavily involved in the Boys Brigade, while he took up lawn bowls after finishing with football and was rated an excellent player.

Up until the time of his death, in 2015, he was the oldest living Rangers player at the age of 95.

He was also a gentleman.