# Willie Moles: Fortunate or unfortunate?



Picked up a few new additions to my Rangers programme collection lately (I collect home programmes between 1947 and 1969), and I was pleased to learn a new name - that of a young centre half called Willie Moles.

And as is usually the case, I had to find out more about him.

Turns out he signed for Rangers in 1956, when he was just 20, joining from junior side Kilsyth Rangers - and Moles was a highly-prized capture. The stopper had just won the Scottish Junior Cup with the Duncansfield Park side, beating Duntocher Hibs in the final at Hampden Park in front of 30,000 spectators.

When he signed for Rangers, legendary defender George Young was just coming to the end of an incredible career, and the club were on the lookout for a long-term replacement. When big Corky was unavailable, new signing Harold Davis would fill in.

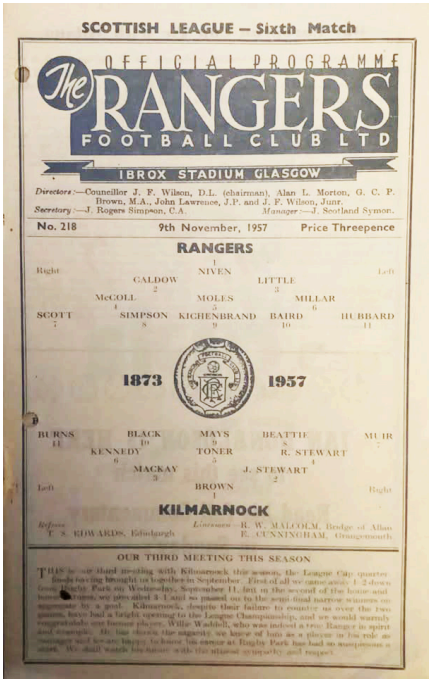
But seven days before Christmas, 1956, Willie Moles was the most nervous young man inside Ibrox as he was told to prepare for his debut - against a British Army side which boasted many superstars of the game, including Manchester United duo Bobby Charlton and Duncan Edwards. It's reported that Moles 'more than held his own' against players of such high calibre, although the Army spoiled his big day by winning 3-1.

There was slightly better fortune in his next game as a friendly encounter with the Scotland under-23 side at Ibrox ended honours even.

But Rangers manager Scot Symon had seen enough of Willie to 'call him up' again the following season and he played in three league games in a row,

against Hearts, Queen's Park and Kilmarnock, the last of which would be his final appearance in light blue.

Rangers had won the league the previous two seasons, but were facing a genuine threat from a talented Hearts side which featured the 'terrible trio' of Conn, Bauld and Wardhaugh. In Moles' debut league match, against Hearts at Ibrox, the visitors won 3-2. In his next game, a 4-2 win kept the restless natives on the right side of happy.



SCOTTISH LEAGUE – Sixth Match

OFFICIAL PROGRAMME

The RANGERS FOOTBALL CLUB LTD

IBROX STADIUM GLASGOW

*Directors*:—Councillor J. F. Wilson, D.L. (chairman), Alan L. Morton, G. C. P. Brown, M.A., John Lawrence, J.P. and J. F. Wilson, Junr.
*Secretary*:—J. Rogers Simpson, C.A. *Manager*:—J. Scotland Symon.

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**RANGERS**

1 NIVEN
Right — Left
2 CALDOW — 3 LITTLE
4 McCOLL — 5 MOLES — 6 MILLAR
7 SCOTT — 8 SIMPSON — 9 KICHENBRAND — 10 BAIRD — 11 HUBBARD

1873 1957

BURNS 11 — BLACK 10 — MAYS 9 — BEATTIE 8 — MUIR 7
KENNEDY 6 — TONER 5 — R. STEWART 4
MACKAY 3 — J. STEWART 2
Left — BROWN 1 — Right

**KILMARNOCK**

*Referee* T. S. EDWARDS, Edinburgh *Linesmen*—R. W. MALCOLM, Bridge of Allan, E. CUNNINGHAM, Grangemouth

OUR THIRD MEETING THIS SEASON

THIS is our third meeting with Kilmarnock this season, the League Cup quarter-finals having brought us together in September. First of all we came away 1-2 down from Rugby Park on Wednesday, September 11, but in the second of the home-and-home ties we provided 4-1 and so passed on to the semi-final narrow winners on aggregate by a goal. Kilmarnock, despite their failure to counter us over the two games, have had a bright opening to the League Championship, and we would warmly congratulate our former player, Willie Waddell, who was indeed a true Ranger in spirit and example. He has shown the ingenuity we knew of him as a player in his role as manager and we are happy to know his career at Rugby Park has had no suspension of mind. We shall watch his future with the interest, sympathy and respect.

But when Killie arrived at Ibrox on league business, some viewed it as a must-win game - and it was only November - such was Hearts' brilliant form. The match against the Rugby Park side was a classic, but only for the neutral, or those of an Ayrshire persuasion, as Killie won 4-3.

Rangers appeared to be a team in transition, which was perhaps no place for a rookie centre-half, and following this latest defeat, Symon swooped to sign 32-year old defender Willie Telfer from St Mirren. £10,000 exchanged hands, and Rangers had an old head at the heart of their defence.

Two earlier Glasgow Cup matches against Partick Thistle, and a couple of League Cup ties against Kilmarnock, added up to nine appearances altogether for Moles.

Symon, meanwhile, was still insistent that he had faith in his young pivot, although it emerged that during the ding-dong league match against Kilmarnock at Ibrox, Moles had suffered a serious head knock.

He was a young player who could play with the ball at his feet, but in those days central defenders spent a lot of time heading the ball, which was far heavier than those we use today.

Anyway, during the league game against Killie, Moles was helped off the park after the head knock and received lengthy treatment.

He would later say, ‘It was a heavy ball and I thought I had a mild concussion but Rangers wanted to find out if there was more to it. So they arranged for me to see a consultant - but he diagnosed me with MS (Multiple Sclerosis), which was the fashionable thing to do at the time.

‘At the time my own doctor and the Rangers doctor didn’t agree with the hospital consultant, to the extent that Rangers were prepared to send me to Mexico for treatment - but it didn’t come to that.

‘In the end Rangers couldn’t take any chances with me so they let me go. I played a few games for Montrose and Third Lanark but my heart wasn’t it. That was reserved for Rangers.

‘The good thing was the Army didn’t take me for my National Service because of the MS.’

It was many years later that Willie returned to hospital.

He said, ‘I had quite a few tests done and they eventually told me that I didn’t have MS. It took a while to sink in but we celebrated the diagnosis.

‘I think it just proves that footballers should get a second or third opinion as that ended my football career. That said, there was also a positive side to it. You hear of so many ex-players being diagnosed with dementia, and they are linking it to heading the ball so much.

‘I thought I had a mild concussion. I had a sore head and it lasted for a while. I hadn’t even thought of MS until the doctors brought it up.

‘I never stopped heading the ball back then. I was quite happy in the air, but knowing what we know now, probably yes, the heavy ball was doing some damage.

‘The balls then used to absorb the water and everything. Sometimes they weren’t even round!
‘Looking back, perhaps I was one of the lucky ones.’

*Hearts would go on and win the league that season in record-breaking fashion. They finished 13 points clear of second-placed Rangers, scoring 132 goals in

their 34 matches.