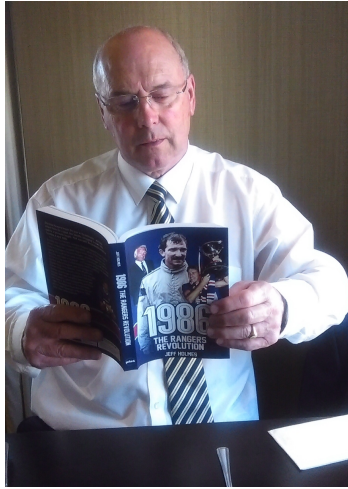


Alex Totten

On the year that was 1986



Alex Totten has been in football more years than he cares to remember, and in every capacity going.

His playing career took him from Anfield – where he spent three youthful years under the watchful eye of legendary Liverpool manager, Bill Shankly – to the likes of Dundee, Dunfermline Athletic and hometown club Falkirk.

He has also managed the Bairns, St Johnstone – where he took the Perth side from the bottom division to the top – and Kilmarnock, but the three years he spent at Ibrox as assistant to Jock Wallace will forever remain the pinnacle of a 50-year footballing odyssey.

In fact, the day he received the telephone call from big Jock asking him to become his number two is still etched indelibly in his mind, so much so that he can still reel off the date his phone rang – oh, and the time!

He recalled: “It was the 11th of November, 1983 – at 8am – and Jock asked me to be at Ibrox at 4pm on the Friday. Till then, he asked me to keep it quiet, although I had to tell my dad – who was a massive Rangers fan. He had taken me to Ibrox when I was a kid and I simply loved going there to see all the famous names play. “The Friday couldn’t come quick enough, but when it did, I went there with a whole range of emotions: joy, trepidation, pride etc. The first person I met was Stan the commissionaire, and he said to me, ‘Hello Mr Totten, Mr Wallace is waiting at the top of the marble staircase.’

“I walked into the Blue Room and there was Jock. He had such an aura about him and he said to me, ‘Great to see you son, you’re now a Ranger. Come and meet the directors,’ and there was Willie Waddell, Rae Simpson etc, and that’s when and how it started. I will never forget it.

“But walking through the front door and up the marble staircase was a nerve-wracking experience. It wasn’t like working at any other football ground. To be honest, it wasn’t really like working at a football club at all. That entrance and staircase just scream history and tradition, and make the hairs on your neck stand to attention every time you walk up them.”

Totten thought so much of the imposing Ibrox entrance that he would park his car inside the stadium and then walk back out the gates at the Broomloan Road end and stroll along Edmiston Drive and in the front door just to remind himself every morning of the wonderful job he had.

1986 was the third and final calendar year of Totten’s tenure at Ibrox and even though all good things have to come to an end at some point, he was gutted when he was finally shown the door.

But like everything Alex Totten has done in his life, he accepted the decision with grace and dignity.

He said: “Obviously the board felt Jock and I weren’t as successful as they had hoped we would be. David Holmes came in as the new chief executive and he wanted a complete change. When big Jock got the sack, I was asked to take charge of the team for the league match at Clydebank, which I did.

“The following Monday, though, I was invited in to see David Holmes, and I was relieved of my duties there and then along with Stan Anderson and John Hagart. Obviously Graeme Souness had wanted a clean sweep of the backroom, which I had a fair idea might happen.

“I had known David Holmes from my days at Brockville, as he was a Falkirk man, but he told me that he couldn’t let sentiment get in the way of what was a tough decision for him. I fully understood and accepted the decision because I didn’t know Souness from Adam. I had never met him before and, at the end of the day, I was big Jock’s man.

“Naturally I was really disappointed at the club’s decision, because when I had initially gone to Ibrox, Jock told me he wanted to try and run the club along the same paternal lines as Liverpool. They’d had the likes of Bill Shankly, Bob Paisley, Joe Fagan and Kenny Dalglish in charge and these guys had all learned from the previous incumbent. They had always enjoyed great continuity, and it was something that was brought up every time the topic of conversation turned to the success Liverpool FC had achieved.

“Jock would always say to me that when he stepped up to be general manager, I would take over as team manager, but sadly that never materialised. He even told my dad the same thing one

day while we were all sitting in the manager's office, and you could see the pride welling up in dad's eyes. It was a great shame it didn't happen because to have been manager of Glasgow Rangers would have been such an honour. Having said that, the time I spent at the club was fantastic and it was still a tremendous experience."

There is one nagging little matter that has remained at the back of Totten's mind though. The question is this: That had the board managed to find millions of pounds for Wallace to spend, instead of Graeme Souness, could things have been different?

He said: "I would say so, without a doubt, because big Jock had managed at a good level in England and knew the scene and the players down there very well. Everybody knew him from his time at Leicester City and he had made an awful lot of excellent contacts.

"During the three years I was with Jock at Ibrox he spent somewhere in the region of £600,000, whereas when Souness came along, he spent £16million in the same period, so the club had changed beyond belief by then.

"When I was at Ibrox, all the players were on the same basic wage, and it didn't matter if you were Ally McCoist, Davie Cooper or whoever, but the first two big signings Souness made were the England centre-half and goalkeeper, Terry Butcher and Chris Woods, so the scale of the changes were there for all to see. The wages policy also changed, which no doubt made it far easier to attract the big names.

"It would have been interesting to see how Jock and I would have fared with the cash that was made available to Souness. It's

something I wonder about from time to time.”

But the decision to bring in the Scotland midfielder as player/manager is credited with not only changing the face of Rangers Football Club as we knew it, but also the course of Scottish football forever. Totten agrees with that sentiment. He said: “I think that move changed our game, without a doubt. When Souness came in he had to make sure Rangers were going to be a big success, and to do that he had to sign quality players, and pay top dollar for the privilege. Then, of course, the other teams had to try and play catch-up, and this is one of the problems with Scottish football, as many clubs were spending money they didn’t have just to compete with Rangers. I think that was one of the drawbacks and you can even see signs of it in our game to this day.”

Totten reckons the off-field problems Rangers faced in 2012 can perhaps be traced back as far as 1986, to the free-spending days of Souness and those who followed. He said: “I think there is probably a connection there, but the overriding emotion for me when Rangers were sent down to the bottom league was one of great sadness. The situation at my old club was so sad to see. They are a great institution and the fans have been so loyal over the years. The supporters really have backed Rangers to the hilt in their hour of need, which is good to see, but I don’t think the problems have fully been erased.

“Let’s be honest, Rangers are one of the biggest clubs in the world, not just this country, so to see what happened to them was tough to take. The fans deserve a really good Rangers side competing at the top level and I’m sure if you asked Celtic supporters, many would say the very same thing. They missed Rangers while they were out of the top flight, not just for the

money but also the rivalry the clubs enjoy. You also have to play in a competitive league, because the last thing you want is to be continually walking away with the league championship. We all thrive on competition. It's so important in football."

He added: "I've been back to Ibrox many times and I never lose that awe-inspiring feeling I get every time I walk through the front door. There is definitely something endearing and magical about it.

"Regardless of how it all finished for me, I wouldn't have changed it for the world. Not for a minute. When I was managing Falkirk, I had a chance to go to Motherwell as full-time boss, with a five-year contract, and I would have been my own man, but I chose to go to Rangers to be second-in-command to big Jock, and it was one of the best decisions I made in my career. I thoroughly enjoyed my time at Rangers. It was a great experience and I got to work with a great bunch of lads. I also got to see a lot of the world, although possibly the greatest experience was learning from Jock Wallace. That was invaluable and we formed a tremendous bond that remained right up until the great man passed away.

"Rangers are a massive club and I loved every single minute of my time there, but I would like to think that in many ways Jock and I were a success, winning the League Cup twice against Celtic and Dundee United. At a club like Rangers, though, you are always going to be measured by the trophies you bring in.

"The first game after Jock left was against Clydebank, and it was a match that didn't so much dent my professional pride as completely knock it for six. We lost 2-1 at Kilbowie, which was the Bankies' first ever league win over Rangers.

“After the match, I was furious and remember saying to the players, ‘Managers and coaches are the people in football who get the sack, but players can’t escape responsibility either’. I felt sorry for our fans. As far as I was concerned, I was looking for a lot more from a Rangers team than I got. Players should always have pride in their own display, no matter the circumstances, but no one else can give them that other than themselves. If Graeme Souness had someone watching – which I’m sure he did – then they should have wanted to show how much it meant to play for Rangers.

“But not many people in the game can look back on their time in football and say they managed to play or work for Glasgow Rangers. I can, and it’s something I will always be very proud of. My last act as an employee of Rangers was to scribble a good luck note to the man who was taking over my office, Walter Smith. Walter and I were good friends and I wanted to wish him all the best. There were certainly no hard feelings on my part.”