

Celtic

V FALKIRK

**BELL'S SCOTTISH
LEAGUE
PREMIER DIVISION
SATURDAY, DEC 31
1994. KICK-OFF 3PM.**

INSIDE

**THE BIG MATCH
PICTURE REVIEW**

Plus++Plus++Plus



**STUART GRAY
PLAYER PROFILE**



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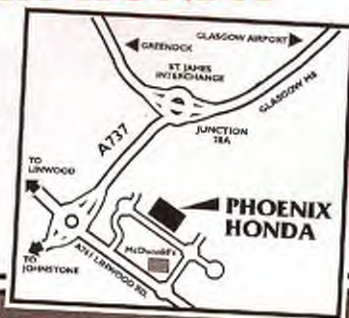
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BILLY STARK



★ **CELTIC'S assistant boss takes the opportunity to give his views on the weeks ahead for the club.**

I WOULD like to welcome everybody to Hampden for the final game of the year - and our first Hogmanay encounter in SIX years.

The last time we played on this day was back in 1988 and I remember it well as I scored twice in a 4-2 win over Hearts.

I would like to remember this one in years to come as well. Celtic fans have not had a lot to cheer about recently and it would be great to give them a performance against Falkirk that would send them home happy and see us end the year on a high.

It would also be satisfying to put one over on Falkirk. Their 2-0 win the last time they came to Hampden was, in some respects, our worst result in the league this season.

It was one of those days when Sod's Law seemed to come into operation, with everything going wrong.

So, I would love to make some amends for that day with a good, solid home win.

We would also be ending our run of 11 games without a victory. Our problems have been well documented and the fact that we're without a win in three months is obviously very worrying.

But although we earned that dubious record at Pittodrie on Boxing Day with the 0-0 draw against Aberdeen, we were happy with the performance that day.

We changed the side about a bit, bringing in Chris Hay and Brian McLaughlin who both did well.

The older players in the team reacted well to the freshness the younger lads brought and that can only be a good thing.

We were also pleased with Packie Bonner who looked the part in his first match this season.

We have had games where the performance was poor but no-one could say that about the Aberdeen match and we have to take heart from that.

‘ I want to give the fans something to cheer about and make them happy ;

It has been a very traumatic year for Celtic, and there have been highs and lows. Personally the Coca-Cola Cup final defeat was the biggest disappointment of my career.

Hopefully there will be no more like it and 1995 will be a good year for all concerned with the club.

We are all confident about the future and we know if we keep plugging away the right result will come.



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GRANT**



**BRIAN
McLAUGHLIN**



**PAUL
McSTAY**



**WILLIE
FALCONER**



**ANDY
WALKER**



**JOHN
COLLINS**



**STUART
GRAY**



**SIMON
DONNELLY**



**Referee:
LES MOTTRAM
(Forth)**



**Linesman:
C CLELLAND
(Blackburn)**



**Linesman:
J P McBRIDE
(Houston)**

STAND-BYS:
Celtic - Pat
Bonner (GK),
Gary Carberry,
Charlie
Nicholas
Falkirk - John
Burrige (GK), Ian
McCall, Greg
Shaw



MASCOT

**KRISTOPHER
THOMSON
(Dundee)**

**TONY
PARKS**



**DAVID
WEIR**



**JAMIE
McGOWAN**



**NEIL
OLIVER**



**JOE
McLAUGHLIN**



**SCOTT
McKENZIE**



**EDDIE
MAY**



**JOHN
CLARK**



**STEVE
FULTON**



**NEIL
HENDERSON**



**COLIN
McDONALD**



**BRIAN
RICE**



**COLIN
CRAMB**



+ TODAY'S VISITORS +



FALKIRK are currently enjoying one of their best seasons in the Premier Division.

The battling Bairns have provided a few shocks this term, scoring a rare Old Firm double – handing Rangers a Coca Cola Cup exit at Ibrox in August and following it up with a 2-0 defeat of Celtic here at Hampden. On a shoestring budget, manager Jim Jefferies has put together a capable and steady side which will be heading to the south side of Glasgow with three points in mind as a perfect end to the year.



★ **BIG JOHN ...**
Brian O'Neill and John Clark face up at Hampden earlier in the season. Clark has been a revelation since returning from Stoke City.

IN GOAL will be **BILLY LAMONT** if **TONY PARKS** isn't passed as fit. The second choice keeper, signed from Whitburn Juniors earlier this year, made his top team debut for the Bairns against Rangers in November.

He performed comfortably that day but was unable to stop Brian Laudrup's free-kick.

But he will surely be relishing the prospect of trying to stop one of John Collins's specialities.

DAVID WEIR looked to be on his way to Ibrox earlier this season but interest from the Govan club seems to have waned. The tall right-back is a former Celtic Boys Club player and he has shown the hoops what they let slip through the net with good performances in each of the last two encounters between the sides.

NEIL OLIVER can be played in a variety of positions but Falkirk have deployed him at centre-back with success this term. A steady player who is comfortable in the air.

JOE McLAUGHLIN is an experienced professional who was unfortunately sent-off against Hibs two weeks ago. The Falkirk defender holds the line well and has earned praise from many quarters this year.

JAMIE MCGOWAN was acquired from Dundee last season and plays as an overlapping full-back. Has enjoyed a run in the first team recently and will be looking to stay there in the new year.

JOHN HUGHES, or 'Yogi' as he is known to the Falkirk fans, broke his leg on the opening day of the season against Celtic and has only just started to play again.

His presence has definitely been missed at the back and the Falkirk fans will be delighted to see him take to the field.

IAN McCALL scored against Celtic on the opening day of the season.

The former Rangers star has had his ups and downs in the game, but is still a useful midfielder man to have in the team.

SCOTT MCKENZIE has been at Falkirk for over four years and has featured, on and off, in the middle of the park. A competent midfielder who has clearly relished the rise in form of the Brockville side this season.

JOHN CLARK'S signing from Stoke City was a great bit of business by manager Jefferies. His free-kick against Celtic the last time the two met was exceptional. And



+ TODAY'S VISITORS +

Bairns want to end year with a win

he has been that kind of player since he returned north of the border this year.

After an unhappy time at Stoke he is clearly enjoying his football and has played in a variety of positions for the Bairns.

STEVE FULTON is a familiar face to all Celtic fans. The midfielder star was once likened to Baggio.

While that may have been flattering he does have tremendous ball skills and passing ability. And, having developed a gritty side to compliment these attributes, he is one of the few match winning midfielders in the country.

However, his temper can get the better of him at times, and he missed the Bairns last visit to Hampden through suspension because of this.

EDDIE MAY is the kind of scoring midfielder that a team needs to take some of the responsibility off the forwards.

The former Hibs man has had a good season so far and is one of Falkirk's longest serving players.

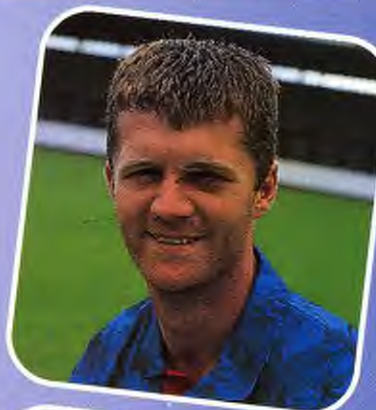
COLIN McDONALD is another former Hibs. The 20-year-old has made his mark on the first team this season and caused havoc to the defence of his old club two weeks ago when he netted the opener in the 2-2 draw.

BRIAN RICE was out of the side earlier this season through injury, but the veteran striker showed he's not lost his edge a fortnight ago with a slick penalty strike against Hibs.

NICKY HENDERSON's goal was the first of the two Falkirk strikes the last time they played Celtic and the impetus behind their 2-0 win.

A pacy forward who always gives defenders problems, he's one Mark McNally, Brian O'Neil and Co. will have to guard against today.

★ *Nell Oliver, top, is a versatile member of the Falkirk squad but has found himself a home in the centre of defence while Nicky Henderson is a rising star at Brockville and is a serious prospect for the future.*



+ Lowdown + Lowdown

TONY PARKS(Age 31)

Signed from Rotherham, 1992

JOHN HUGHES(Age 30)

Signed from Swansea, 1990

JOE McLAUGHLIN(Age 34)

Signed from Watford, 1992

EDDIE MAY(Age 27)

Signed from Brentford, 1991

DAVID WEIR(Age 34)

Signed from Celtic BC, 1992

NEIL OLIVER(Age 27)

Signed from Blackburn

IAN McCALL(Age 29)

Signed from Dundee, 1992

SCOTT McKENZIE(Age 24)

Signed from Musselburgh, 1990

TOMMY McQUEEN(Age 31)

Signed from West Ham, 1990

JAMIE McGOWAN(Age 23)

Signed from Dundee, 1993

BRIAN RICE(Age 31)

Signed from Notts Forest, 1991

JOHN CLARK(Age 29)

Signed from Stoke, 1994

NICKY HENDERSON(Age 24)

Signed from Cowdenbeath, 1991

COLIN CRAMB(Age 20)

Signed from Southampton, 1994

GREG SHAW(Age 24)

Signed from Ayr Utd, 1992

STEVE FULTON(Age 24)

Signed from Bolton, 1994



Young star is keen to impress

The big INTERVIEW STUART GRAY

“ I think I’m
ready to make
the step up to
the first team ”

BRING on the youngsters has been the cry from Celtic manager Tommy Burns in recent weeks...

And he doesn't get any argument from 20 year old Stuart Gray whose performances for the reserves this season have won him promotion to the senior squad in recent weeks.

The classy midfielder has no doubt he's ready for the big time - and believes there are a number of other young Celts in the same boat.

Stuart won only his second start for the top team in the 2-2 draw with Motherwell earlier this month which followed his appearance as substitute in the 1-1 draw with Hibs at Easter Road.

This marked the first occasion he has been involved in back to back games for the senior side and is exactly what the Harrogate-born Celt believes he needs at this stage of his career.

He states: "I think I've served a long enough apprenticeship and I'm ready to make the step-up to the first team.

Chance

"It was back in May 1993 that I made my debut in a 1-0 win at Aberdeen so my second start has been a long time coming.

"I'm confident in my own ability and first team football is what I need and I intend to prove that I can make my mark if I'm given the chance."

Gray believes the influx of reserves into the first team pool shouldn't be simply viewed as knee-jerk reaction to poor results but as a testament to the achievements of the second string in the past 18 months.

He said: "Obviously if the first team was winning every week the manager wouldn't be looking to change the side and bring in new faces.

"He's gambling but that shouldn't detract from the fact that all us guys in the reserves have worked hard to

Interview: ANDREW SMITH

earn an opportunity and deserve it when you think about how we've performed this season and last.

"Last season we won the Premier Reserve League and the Reserve League Cup and had a heck of a job to follow that this season.

"But we've lost only one game since August and I believe we can top last year's successes. We can't win more trophies but we can win them in more style.

"And I believe there are half a dozen players from the reserve squad who could do a job in the first team. It's great that Tommy Burns is being as true to his word and giving us a chance to show what we can do.

"In the reserves we've been playing a side made up with players almost exclusively in their early 20s and this is the right age to be breaking through.

"In the past few weeks it's been me, Brian McLaughlin and Garry Carberry who have featured in the first team but I hope others will follow.

"Of course Tommy can't play us all in the same team but I'm sure we can be blended in at various stages."

Stuart isn't simply playing for a place in the first team either, he's playing for his future with the mid-

fielder currently on month to month contracts.

He admits: "It's not an ideal situation and one I'd like to get sorted out. I hope that if I impress enough I'll get offered a long term deal that I can accept.

Happy with his form, the 20 year agrees with Celts' boss Burns assessment that he has added an edge to his game this year.

Stuart explains: "I've worked hard at my fitness and am feeling sharper than I have in years.

"In the past couple of seasons I struggled with a groin injury and it hampered me badly.

"But now I'm running freely and I think all the other areas of my game are benefiting.

Pressure

"I feel as if I've got more time to get the ball down and make passes and have enjoyed operating in the middle of the park in my appearances for the first team this season."

Burns has asked for fans to be patient with the youngsters he's attempting to blood into the side.

But Stuart accepts that the frustrations and disappointment of the supporters over recent events mean there'll be no honeymoon period for any youngsters drafted in to the side.

He said: "I don't think there's a lot of pressure on us with the manager just telling us to go out and express ourselves and enjoy our football.

"But if things don't go right the fans will understandably take it out on the 11 guys on the field in Celtic colours - I don't think it will matter to them whether players are turning out for their first or 101st game for the club.

"I can live with that."



