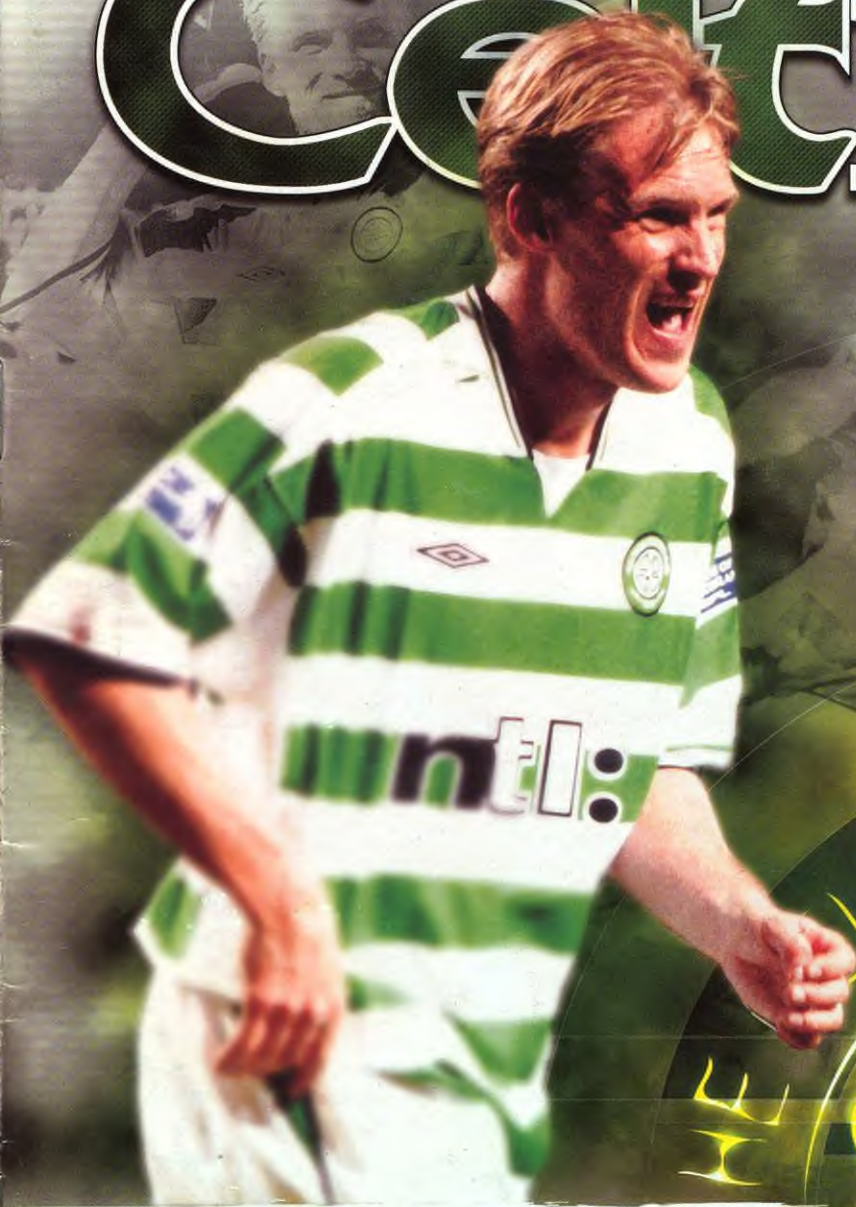


# Celtic



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v FULHAM

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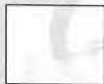
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www.celticfc.net

# martino'neill



## Countdown to new season's in full flow

**THE summer has been short and sweet. It's hard to imagine that the SPL kicks-off next Saturday with St Johnstone visiting Celtic Park.**

This season's preparations have been good – or at least I think so. The trip to Ireland was excellent and all our objectives were achieved. Our hosts Cork City and Shelbourne looked after us magnificently and I wish both of them the very best of luck in their forthcoming campaign, although I'm not sure who I'll be cheering on when they play each other!

Six of the players and myself attended the Association of Irish Celtic Supporters' Clubs annual dinner on the Saturday evening in Dublin and it was a lively and entertaining affair indeed. The fans were in fine form and I just hope it's still the same if we come back again a year from now.

After Dublin we travelled to the outskirts of London for a week's training before we played Queens Park Rangers at Loftus Road last Saturday. Again it was a very useful

work-out for us and we ran out comfortable winners on a very hot summer afternoon.

The highlight of the day was the incredible Celtic support who travelled to the game to add both colour and volume to the proceedings. A big thank you to all who made it to Cork, Dublin and London to cheer us on, and by the time you have read these notes we will also have played Porto in Paris.

Tonight's opponents, Fulham, have just had one of the greatest seasons in their history, winning the First Division by a distance. Fortunes for the club have certainly changed since Mohamed Al Fayed became the owner-come-chairman.

Jean Tigana in his first year in charge as manager has fashioned the Craven Cottage team into an excellent unit with ex-Celtic hero John Collins playing an influential role all season. This is the type of game we need at this stage of our pre-season while I'm sure Fulham will probably feel it's a fair test for them also as they look

to life in the Premiership.

I'm sure they will do splendidly next year. It looks like they've the wherewithal to put things right should they find the going tough. The players themselves will feel ready and their own particular brand of football will be a treat to watch.

Meanwhile, it will be fantastic to play at Celtic Park this evening. It has been a short summer break, but it will be good to play in front of you before we get back to business in a couple of weeks.

Your support is invaluable and I'm sure the players are all looking forward to playing here tonight as they prepare for the fresh campaign.

We have lost Alan Stubbs and Ramon Vega from last season's defence so naturally I am looking to add to our squad for the assault on the League Championship. I am hoping one or two new faces will be here in time for the opening match but nothing can be taken for granted.

Getting good players at reasonable prices still remains one of the most difficult arts in football.

*Incredible Celtic fans in London brought colour and volume to the match*

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tonight's squads

# CELTIC | FULHAM



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JONATHAN GOULD	STEVE FINNAN
TOM BOYD	RUFUS BREVETT
STEPHANE MAHE	ANDY MELVILLE
JACKIE McNAMARA	CHRIS COLEMAN
JOOS VALGAEREN	KIT SYMONS
HENRIK LARSSON	PAUL TROLLOPE
ALAN THOMPSON	LEE CLARK
CHRIS SUTTON	JOHN COLLINS
EYAL BERKOVIC	MARCUS HAHNEMANN
MORTEN WIEGHORST	BARRY HAYLES
TOMMY JOHNSON	KIERAN McANESPIE
PAUL LAMBERT	BJARNE GOLDBAEK
BOBBY PETTA	LOUIS SAHA
OLIVIER TEBILY	LUIS BOA MORTE
DIDIER AGATHE	SEAN DAVIS
NEIL LENNON	ALAIN GOMA
DIMITRE KHARINE	KEVIN BETSY
COLIN HEALY	ZAT KNIGHT
LUBOMIR MORAVCIK	LUKE CORNWALL
PAUL SHIELDS	GLYN THOMPSON
MARK BURCHILL	EDDIE LEWIS
SIMON LYNCH	CALUM WILLOCK
JOHN CONVERY	ELVIS HAMMOND
MARK FOTHERINGHAM	MARK HUDSON
JOHAN MJALLBY	ANDREJS STOLCERS
JAMIE SMITH	
STEPHEN CRAINEY	
JOHN KENNEDY	
SHAUN MALONEY	
MICK DOYLE	
MARK BURCHILL	

ntl:



PHOENIX HONDA

Referee: JOHN ROWBOTHAM  
Assistant Referees: JIM DUNNE  
DEREK MASON





**FAST MOVER**

Johan Mjallby, signed by Dr Jo Venglos in 1998, wants to reach the World Cup with Sweden and also to retain the SPL title with Celtic

# the **ROCK**

How Celts' defender Johan Mjallby became an unstoppable force. Interview: Alison McConnell

**WITH a World Cup looming at the end of this season there will be no winter respite this year for any of the SPL clubs, but despite the fact that the next 12 months are going to be hectic for any player involved at domestic as well as international level, you won't hear any complaints from Johan Mjallby.**

The Swede has recovered from a summer operation on a troublesome groin problem, and although he enjoyed one of his best ever seasons in a Celtic shirt last term he is adamant the best is yet to come from him.

Signed by Dr Jo Venglos, Mjallby is already playing under his third Celtic manager but after a couple of seasons in the SPL the defender showed just how capable a performer he is with a plethora of effective performances at the heart of the Hoops back three last season, and there were even times last year when he sported the captain's armband in the absence of Paul Lambert and Tom Boyd.

Mjallby said: "The most important thing for me this season is to improve as a player. The gaffer gave me a lot of confidence last year and I'm delighted I finally played well for Celtic.

"It was great to go

back into a well-organised defence, that wasn't the case beforehand, so I was pleased. I'm best suited to playing in defence, especially in Scotland.

"It was a big blow for us to lose Ramon Vega and Alan Stubbs because they are very good footballers, but that is just football. In an ideal world you always want everyone to stay together, especially in defence, because it's important to know one another.

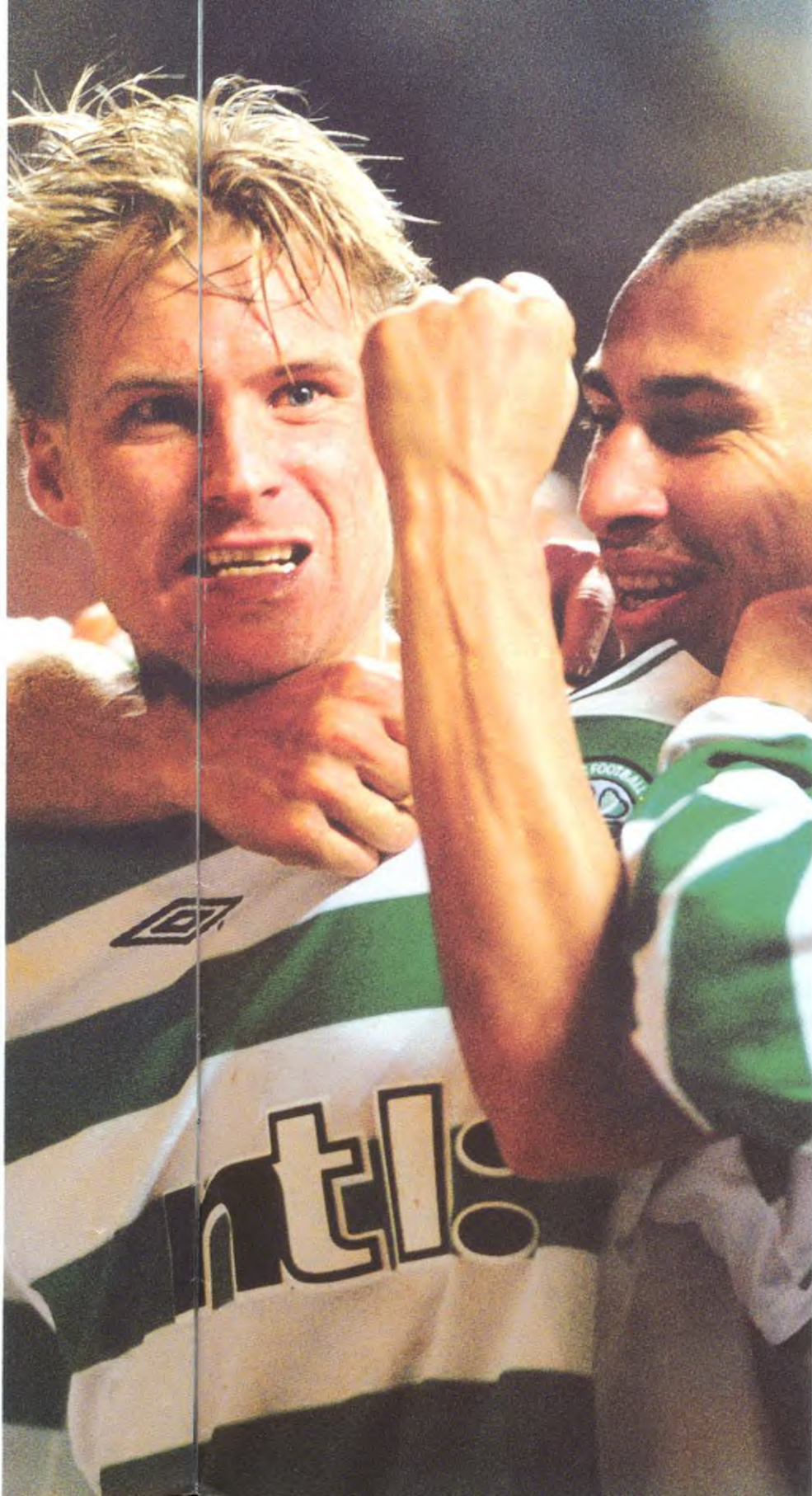
"Hopefully the gaffer will bring in a couple of new faces, and I know that if he picks someone then he's going to be good.

"As a team it's going to be hard to repeat last season, but the main thing is retaining the league. It's always important for us to qualify for the Champions League, but that's going to be very difficult.

"If we can get into the group stages then anything can happen, and if we manage to win our qualifier it will give us a lot of confidence.

"It's a bit tiring just now because of pre-season training but we're working hard just now to get fit for the league and our campaign in Europe, and it doesn't bother me that there won't be as many breaks this year.

"If we do well then I don't think any player in the team will feel tired. It's when you aren't doing so well that you want to have a



break and take the chance to regroup a little. "Usually we have a few days off over the winter, but it's not much of a big break.

"At international level, Sweden are two points ahead of Turkey, but we have a crucial game against them in September.

"If we can even get a draw in Turkey then it will start looking really good for us. The World Cup is the dream. It would be fantastic to be involved in it. When you are a footballer you always want to be on the big stage, and the World Cup is one of them."

It promises to be a thrilling season ahead, but tonight is the first time the Hoops will have played at home since the penultimate match of the Treble-winning campaign.

Fans will no doubt be desperate to catch a look at the team before business starts against St Johnstone, and Mjallby is looking forward to running out into a packed stadium.

He said: "I always look forward to games at home. We obviously had a great season last year, and we lost only one home match - against Dundee - but that was at the end of the campaign when the league was won.

"You always want to do the best you can, especially at home, and it will be important for us to do well at Celtic Park this season. It's a dream for every footballer to play in front of 60,000 fans every other week.

"The fans are really important to us and it is always good to hear them backing the



**SWEDEN DREAMS**

Johan Mjallby will never forget the glory of last term when Celtic lifted the SPL title, the Scottish Cup and the League Cup



*Now we have won the Treble I want to do it all again this season!*

team. It must affect the other sides as well when they come to Celtic Park and they know we have 60,000 supporters behind us."

Premiership new boys Fulham are the opposition tonight, with old Bhoys John Collins returning to his former patch.

Mohamed Al Fayed's team certainly caught the eye in London last season and it will be an interesting meeting this evening. Certainly, Mjallby is keen for the clash to get underway.

The stopper said: "I can't say I know too much about Fulham, but I saw them on television a few times last season and I was really impressed by them. They play nice, attractive football and a good passing game.

"You always want to play good clubs, and they are in the Premiership now so it will be

a great test for us, which is what you want."

Last season's swashbuckling antics have already faded into the past, with the months ahead nothing more than a blank canvas. Martin O'Neill's Celtic side seemed to break record after record last season, and it's interesting to note that no club has ever won back-to-back Scottish Trebles before.

Whether or not O'Neill's side can add another fresh insert into the books is yet to be seen, but Mjallby would certainly settle for a repeat performance.

Johan said: "It didn't really sink in for me until a couple of days after the Scottish Cup final. That was a great feeling, the realisation that we had completed the Treble, and now I want to do it all again!"

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