



SCOTTISH CUP SEMI-FINAL
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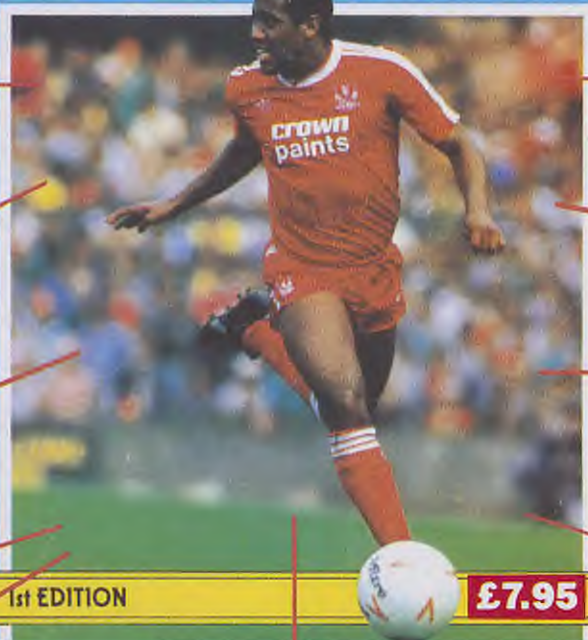
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SCENE SETTER

WHILE they can be counted on to produce their annual quota of nail-biting drama, it has to be said that Scottish Cup semi-finals are rarely the stuff of which a football purist's dreams are made.

So high are the stakes, and so great the tension generated at this stage of the competition, that classic encounters are few and far between.

Indeed, few managers I have spoken to on the subject can recall a truly great semi-final in terms of flowing play and non-stop entertainment.

Dundee manager Gordon Wallace, who was Dundee United's coach at the time, points to the five-goal thriller served up by these Tayside rivals at Tynecastle two years ago, when United won 3-2, as a notable exception.

But he told me: "It's not difficult to understand why so many semi-finals, no matter the tournament, turn out to be dour affairs. The problem is that, in this situation, when a team is so near and yet so far from glory, the result becomes more important than the performance. And, of course, nobody remembers beaten semi-finalists."

The Wallace analysis is spot on, but Hearts fans will tell you that some semi-final defeats are very difficult to forget.

They are still trying to erase the memory of what happened to their team last year.

A goal up and with only three minutes of play remaining, Hearts



were looking set for a place in the final when a mistake enabled Celtic to equalise. And with the Edinburgh side still in a state of shock, Celtic scored an injury-time winner.

While Celtic were to be commended for refusing to give up hope, it really was a case of Hearts committing semi-final suicide. And to make matters worse, it was the second year in succession that they had fallen at this hurdle.


Such are the pressures exerted on players in semi-finals that the difference between winning and losing very often comes down to a mistake.

And former Rangers and Scotland centre forward Willie Thornton, scorer of so many headed goals,

By **KEN ROBERTSON**
(*Sunday Express*)

*Contd. on
page 4 & 5*

It' **THE Sun** **rivalled**



recalls that it was an error which enabled him to become the toast of Hampden 41 years ago.

Watched by a record semi-final crowd of 143,570 — almost TWICE the current capacity of the famous old ground — Thornton pounced when Hibs goalkeeper George Farn dropped a cross from Willie Waddell to score the only goal of the game.

"It was just about my distance, a couple of yards, for putting the ball in the net with my foot," says Willie with a chuckle.

Talking of records, it is clear that semi-final goals were not always so hard to come by — especially in the last century. Dumbarton ran riot in 1882 to thrash Cartvale 11-2. And six years later, Cambuslang walloped Abercorn 10-1 in a replay. Not much evidence of organised defending in these matches!

What we have now, of course, is a totally different game. Players are fitter and faster, and their tactical know-how would have bewildered the heroes of yesteryear.

Happily, the romance of the Scottish Cup has remained intact. But the tournament now offers financial rewards beyond the wildest dreams of the men who launched it more than 100 years ago.

In addition to gate receipts and television fees, there is a splendid S.F.A. bonus system which ensures that every participating club gets a

slice of the cake.

The extra prize for winning the trophy, or perhaps doing no better than finish runners-up, is a place in the European Cup Winners' Cup. And that, as Rangers will testify, can mean a cash bonanza the following season.

The Ibrox club have appeared in three Cup Winners' Cup finals, suffering two disappointments before triumphing over Moscow Dynamo in Barcelona in 1972.

The only other Scottish team who have managed to follow their example is Aberdeen, who conquered Real Madrid in the 1983 final in Gothenburg. But hopefully, it will not be too long before a hat-trick is completed.

Meanwhile, there is no lack of romance about this year's Scottish Cup semi-final pairings.

The fact that a part-time First Division club, St. Johnstone, fought their way into the last four has taken care of that.

After all, it was only last season that the Perth side rose from the Second Division!

It was 21 years ago that Saints made their last appearance in a semi-final, falling to Dunfermline in a Tynecastle replay.

And, by happy coincidence, manager Alex Totten's club will shortly be handed the key to the door of a brand new stadium.

But this is by no means the only

intriguing aspect of their Scottish Cup campaign.

The Celtic Park clash with Rangers brought them face to face with one of their former stars — Scotland striker Ally McCoist.

And then there is the fact that, not so very long ago, Totten was Jock Wallace's lieutenant at Ibrox... and being groomed for the post of team manager!

Totten deserves great credit for the manner in which he has restored St. Johnstone's fortunes.

His efforts have enabled Saints to bid farewell to Muirton Park with a bit of style.

And reaching the semi-finals, where receipts are pooled, guarantees that he will have a sizeable sum to spend on strengthening his side for next season.

Amazingly, the last semi-final Rangers figured in was six years ago, and it is eight years since they lifted the trophy for the 24th time.

Small wonder, then, that few members of the current Ibrox squad have winners' medals from this competition. Neale Cooper picked up four with Aberdeen, and Ian Ferguson earned one with St. Mirren. But only Davie Cooper did the trick in a Rangers jersey.

Holders Celtic face a Premier Division club, Hibs, in today's televised semi-final at Hampden, and many people expect them to succeed.

And not just because they have won two of their three league meetings with the Edinburgh side this season.

The fact that Celtic have lifted the Scottish Cup 28 times shows how much they love getting their hands on this trophy!

Hibs have won the Scottish Cup only twice — in 1887 and 1902. And their last appearance in a semi-final was three years ago when they lost to eventual winners Aberdeen.

But Celtic did not find it easy to dispose of their fourth round challenge last season, when a replay was required.

With two ex-Parkhead players in their squad — Alan Sneddon and George McCluskey — Hibs will know exactly what they are up against at Hampden.

But will that be enough against the team that dealt the other big Edinburgh club, Hearts, such a stunning blow last season?

Two of Edinburgh's FIFA-listed referees are in charge of this weekend's big games. The Celtic Park tie was the first semi-final for Andrew Waddell, a 38 year old former pathologist who is now a business manager in a scientific laboratory.

It's a third semi-final for George Smith, the man in the middle at Hampden. But, of course, this 45 year old civil servant has also be in charge of finals.

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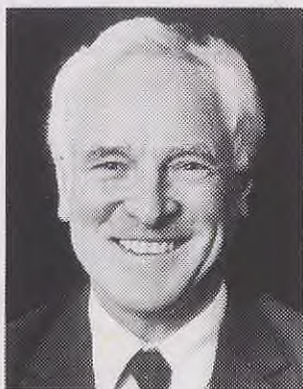
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AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM THE SPONSORS



Stanley C Mitchell

Few of us would doubt the high levels of fitness and health needed by the professional footballers taking part in today's Cup match.

As spectators, we don't necessarily need to have similar reserves of stamina, or to be a "Mr Superfit" ourselves.

But it still makes very good sense to be reasonably fit, and to look after your health. In other words, to make the most of your life and to "be all you can be", it's better to be fit, and to be sensible about personal health.

And it's never too late — or too early — to start thinking about your health. This is just one of the reasons why the Scottish Health Education Group is sponsoring a national soccer sevens competition for children of primary school age, as well as maintaining their role as sponsors of the Scottish Cup.

Strike a balance between what you eat and the amount of exercise you take. Too much of the wrong kind of food and not enough of the right kind of exercise is almost guaranteed to result in low physical fitness and poor general health.

Be sensible about your drinking — for too many pints — too often — are simply bad news. Remember, your local can offer plenty of low alcohol beers and lagers. Things are changing.

Give smoking a miss — because smoking and fitness just don't mix, as any professional footballer will tell you.

In sponsoring the Scottish Cup, the Scottish Health Education Group emphasises that good health is a great goal.

Why don't you make this your goal too?

Stanley C Mitchell

Director of the Scottish Health Education Group

THE BOSS

By BRIAN SCOTT (*Daily Mail*)

WHEN BILLY McNeill quotes the scoreline Celtic 6, Hibs 1, he is not threatening his Easter Road rival, Alex Miller, with a humiliating defeat at Hampden this afternoon.

Rather, he is revelling in the memory of one of his greatest Scottish Cup experiences — Celtic's victory in the Final of 1972.

McNeill, with seven winners' medals in his collection, has more reason than anybody to reflect with fondness on a tournament which has always been a favourite of Celtic's.

But that Final with Hibs 17 years ago was of special significance to the then Parkhead centre-half in that it was he, with an early goal, who set Celtic up for their record score.

Not since Renton beat Cambuslang in 1888 had any side won the Scottish Cup by such an impressive score and, needless to say, none has done so since.



Billy McNeill . . . "first success is always the sweetest."



Alex Miller . . . "hopefully we can produce the goods to reach the final."

For the record, Celtic's most distinguished player lifted his fifth winners medal on that unforgettable occasion — his first having come seven years earlier when Dunfermline were the losers, by 3-2.

"The first success is always the sweetest," he said, "and, for that reason, the victory of 1965 remains the brightest and most vivid in my memory. But the lovely thing about the Scottish Cup is that the shine of success never wears off — even as a manager.

"Last year's triumph, against Dundee United in our Centenary Year, was just as enjoyable, especially since it allowed us to complete the double of Cup and League Championship."

A bitter contrast, he went on, is the feeling of losing a semi-final and it goes without saying that he would rather avoid that

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