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THE ARAB



V **CELTIC**

ISSUE NO. 10

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OPENING SHOT

At this time of year, with all that the festive season entails, football is sometimes in danger of taking a backseat, but that is far from being the case today as we welcome Celtic for a Christmas cracker.

Having succeeded Neil Lennon last summer, after a slightly stuttering start - not that it included our last meeting when they meted out a 6-1 on us on the second Saturday of the season unfortunately - Norwegian Ronnie Deila's first visit to Tannadice is as manager of the league leaders.

Last weekend, Celtic secured their eighth consecutive league win and established a six-point lead at the top of the Premiership with a comfortable 4-1 success over St Mirren. So that alone will give Arabs an inside into the task facing their heroes for this Sunday lunch showdown.

By way of contrast, the mood in our camp was somewhat muted after last week's defeat by Aberdeen - the first at home this season. However, given the task that lies ahead, the prospect of facing a rampant Celtic can only be motivate the players who will be desperate to put last week's result and performance behind them. All of which should ensure that another large crowd is well entertained. The best Christmas present Arabs could wish for is three points this afternoon.

At least the festive fixture scheduling has been kind to those of Tangerine

persuasion, because after facing the champions today, two Tayside derbies are coming up next. Next Saturday, we head to Perth to meet a St Johnstone side in a decent run of form. Then on New Year's Day, Dundee walk across the road for a 'City of Discovery' derby which has generated such interest, tickets were sold out more than two weeks before the fixture is due to take place.

Until then the Club wishes everyone a very Merry Christmas.



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TO SAY THE LEAST LAST WEEK'S DEFEAT TO ABERDEEN WAS HIGHLY DISAPPOINTING. IT WASN'T JUST LOSING OUR HOME UNBEATEN HOME RECORD, BUT THE MANNER OF IT.

I was disappointed in a lot of things to be honest. First and foremost were the two goals we lost. Both fell very much in the preventable category. The first was a free header that Rado spilled straight into Rooney's path. Then we had a chance to go level though Chris Erskine, but the keeper did well to deny him. The second goal gives us a mountain to climb. In the second half, there wasn't much in it, other than an effort from Ryan Dow in the box.

GAFFER



I have to concede Aberdeen were better than us on the day. I wouldn't say we were outplayed, but if you give them opportunities, they'll take them and that got their tails and confidence up. For our part, several of our players were not up to scratch and we paid the price for that, which was very frustrating. Aberdeen are clearly a good side when they are in front as they showed. We lost confidence and discipline, and rode our luck with the one that hit the post, but we felt if we could get one goal it would get the fans behind us, but that, unfortunately, wasn't to be.

As we welcome Celtic this afternoon, we certainly can't afford a repeat of giving away goals as we did last week. Particularly galling was that they didn't have to work hard for them. Fortunately, probably with the exception of the game at Celtic Park, that isn't something of which we have been too guilty of this season. Back in August there, we lost three goals in a

30 minute spell which killed us, so we will have to be fully switched on and do our job properly, especially when defending set pieces.

By the same token we can cause them problems as we certainly did in that first game. Indeed, Gary McKay-Steven had a chance to put us in front early on and their keeper also had a few good saves. However, if you want to compete with the best, it is very important that you keep clean sheets and that means keeping it tight at the back.

As we look to bounce back from last week, we'll have to sharpen up at both ends, because apart from our defensive frailties, we didn't create as many chances as we have been doing of late. Provided we do that hopefully we can send you home happy to enjoy what I trust will be a very Merry Christmas.



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CELTIC

Celtic's first home match of the season and subsequent crushing of Dundee United at Parkhead was meant to herald the arrival of Ronny Deila (pictured) and a sparkling brand of football. It proved, initially at least, to be a premature assessment.



It had been a stop-start beginning to the season, due in part to the use of the stadium in the Commonwealth Games, and the Club's decision to postpone a league match against Partick Thistle to pursue a friendly fixture.

The Champions League campaign was one to forget, initially humbled by Legia Warsaw, and only reinstated when the Poles mistakenly fielded an ineligible player. Having been given the most fortunate of reprieves, the Glasgow Giants were handed what seemed a favourable draw against Maribor. However, having taken a positive 1-1 draw in the first leg, they succumbed to a disappointing 0-1 loss at home. The Europa League has reaped greater rewards, progression to the next round, and a clash with Inter Milan.

Deila's resting of key personnel before or in the immediate aftermath of European ties, and subsequent dropped points, suggested a man still coming to terms with both the domestic competition and strength of his squad. Nine domestic wins in a row suggest he is mastering the task!

That the opening few months should involve a steep learning curve for the thirty-nine year old Norwegian, experiencing his first taste of British football, is hardly surprising. He has openly acknowledged the need to at times

compromise his ideals on open attacking football to get results, at a football club where the expectation is to win everything.

The defeats in the Champions League seemed to prompt a realisation from management and possibly from the higher echelons at the club, that the Celtic squad was in need of replenishment. Up to that point, recruitments had been minimal, the most significant Craig Gordon's arrival on a free as a replacement for Fraser Forster. The outstanding Scottish goalkeeper of his generation, even accounting for his recent injury history, as a gamble it represented a no brainer.

Substantial reinforcements duly arrived, the stand-out deal at the time being the recruiting of Stefan Scepovic from Real Sociedad for 2.3 million. Deila has openly bemoaned the fact that while the club may be able to afford the transfer fees to attract the calibre of player desired, the real problem stems in the wages they can offer, and he looks set to raid the Scandinavian market, with Norwegian wonderkid Martin Odegaard being linked with a move to Celtic Park.

Instead, it is the loan market the manager has so far utilised most. Aleksandar Tonev arrived from Aston Villa, while Jason Denayer and John Guidetti both headed north from Manchester City and have made key impacts. Guidetti, in particular, has established himself as the main striker, and is fast becoming the most popular Swede at Parkhead since Henrik Larsson, so much so that already the likes of Marseille are taking note, meaning that if Celtic want to prise the Swede away from City before his contract expires in the summer, they may have to part with around £3 million.

It's no coincidence that Scotland's recent revival has been built heavily on the Celtic midfield pairing of Scott Brown and Charlie Mulgrew. Both players were outstanding in the recent win over the Republic of Ireland. Brown in his role as skipper, was particularly withering in his assessment of his teammates, stressing the onus on the individual to stand-up and be counted, following the home defeat to Hamilton Accies.

The results since have seen Celtic make significant headway to the summit of the league table, in the process becoming less reliant on Kris Commons. Indeed, from being the main man early in the season, Commons has become increasingly marginalised in recent weeks, with the club and midfielder at loggerheads over the length of a contract extension.

Stand-out result on their way to the top of the table, was the comeback victory at Pittodrie, achieved in the last minute, which ironically came in spite of the dismissal of skipper Brown, and led to the manager describing the result as orgasmic.

With Europe now on the back-burner, this has traditionally been the time in recent seasons where Celtic have kicked on domestically. With a six-point lead at the top of the table, a League Cup semi-final to look forward to against Rangers, and Scottish Cup tie at Dens, optimism is rising of a possible treble.

The Bhoys will look to strengthen their domestic position between now and the clash with Inter, whereupon they will be scrutinised again closely for signs of progress.

Such are the demands and expectations at Celtic.



TACTICS



Given the resources available to Ronny Deila, the list of options available to the Celtic coach is limitless, to such an extent that Celtic have been able to absorb injuries to the likes of Derk Boerrigter and James Forrest, while more recently even Kris Commons has had a bit part to play. The manager seems to have settled on a 4-2-3-1 formation that provides plenty of flexibility.

The loss of Fraser Forster to Southampton for £10 million has been more than adequately compensated by the arrival of the proven and experienced Craig Gordon. The gamble thus far looks to have been an astute one, and despite the scoreline when the sides last clashed, the Celtic no. 1 showed his worth with a string of saves at crucial times. In the event of the Balerno born keeper's absence, former United keeper Lukasz Zaluska will line up between the sticks, having now amassed 28 appearances in his time with Celtic.

Virgil Van Dijk and Jason Deynar linked up at centre-half for the first time when the sides met at Parkhead in August, and have been the number one pairing ever since, barring injury. Both are comfortable in possession and with nine goals between them, clearly a threat in the opposition box.

Efe Ambrose has filled in recently during the absence of Deynar, and covered at right-back when the sides clashed earlier. Regular competition for the right-back slot comes from twenty-two year old Welsh international Adam Mathews or Mikael Lustig, who has only recently returned from an injury picked up on international duty. At left-back, the marauding Emilio Izaguirre has been the first pick for four seasons now.



Craig Gordon



Efe Ambrose



Charlie Mulgrew

Anchoring the midfield for both Scotland and Celtic, is Scott Brown and Charlie Mulgrew. Both know the club and Scottish football inside out. It seems hard to believe captain Brown has now been at the club for seven years. Other alternative deep lying midfielders include Nir Briton, Beram Kayal and Stefan Johansen who is the most likely candidate to deputise in the absence of Mulgrew today.

In the attacking midfield positions and forward areas, C oilt for choice. Young Callum McGregor was

particularly prominent in the early stages of the season, as was Kris Commons.

The wisdom of having spent last season on loan at Notts County, clearly paid dividends for McGregor. Commons, the outstanding playmaker in Scotland over the past few seasons, had an impressive start to the season, but has in recent weeks found himself on the bench, which just goes to show the strength available to today's visitors.

The one certainty in recent weeks has been that John Guidetti will lead the line, having pushed himself to the front of the

CONT'D P10

CELTIC

Starting Formation: **4-4-2**
(v St Mirren 14/12/14)

- 26 Craig Gordon
- 02 Adam Matthews
- 04 Efe Ambrose
- 05 Virgil van Dijk
- 03 Emilio Izaguirre
- 08 Scott Brown
- 06 Nir Briton 69'
- 49 James Forrest 45'
- 25 Stefan Johansen
- 10 Anthony Stokes
- 09 John Guidetti 59'

SUBSTITUTES

- 24 Lukasz Zaluska
- 12 Štefan Šćepović 59'
- 15 Kris Commons
- 28 Leigh Griffiths
- 41 Darnell Fisher
- 42 Callum McGregor 45'



4.4 Million

Record transfer fee between two Scottish clubs when Celtic bought Scott Brown from Hibernian in May 2007, surpassing the four million Rangers had paid for Duncan Ferguson from us fourteen years earlier! United of course used much of the money to renovate the East Stand, as well as sign Gordan Petric and Craig Brewster, both of whom played crucial parts in that season's Scottish Cup triumph over... Rangers.

'When you pull on that jersey you're not just playing for a football club, you're playing for a people and a cause.' –

TOMMY BURNS

147,365

Attendance at the 1937 Aberdeen v Celtic Scottish Cup Final, a world record gate for a national cup final. Happy days, however, dark days were just round the corner, and poignantly, many involved and watching that day would be involved in the Second World War which commenced just over two years later.

1988:

The first McDonald's restaurant in a Communist run country opens in Belgrade, Die Hard is amongst the highest grossing movies of the year, Microsoft releases Windows 2.1, the first episode of Fifteen to One airs on Channel 4, Phil Collins tops the Charts with Groovy Kind of Love, and Celtic win the double in their Centenary year beating Dundee United 2-1 in the Scottish Cup Final. Celtic lose only three league games all season, and only one at home - to Dundee United.

NEXT UP IN EUROPE:

Inter Milan, Parkhead, 19 February 2015. Manager – Roberto Mancini. Nickname: I Nerazzurri (the Black and Blues), Stadium – San Siro, Capacity 80,018. Star men: Fredy Guarin, Yann M'Vila, Nemanja Vidic. Trophies: Serie A titles 18, European Cup/Champions League 3, Uefa Cup 3. Previous meetings: 1967 European Cup 2-1 Celtic, 1972 European Cup Semi-Final 0-0, Inter win on penalties.

4 minutes remaining

of the Legia Warsaw – Celtic tie, when with the Poles leading 6-1 on aggregate, they committed the faux pas to end all faux pas, by sending on Bartosz Bereszynski.

They said, 'Today, the sport lost behind closed doors. We made a mistake, sorry, but the penalty is disproportionate. Stay with us. We fight on.' Uefa said, 'Legia have been sanctioned for fielding an ineligible player (article 18 of the UEFA Champions League regulations and article 21 of the Disciplinary Regulations). The match has been declared as forfeit meaning Legia Warszawa have lost the match 3-0!'

Fortress Tannadice

Celtic paid their first league visit to Tannadice in September 1925 and Willie Maley's team were expected to win with something to spare. But Jimmy Brownlie's men didn't lack confidence and a tremendous 35-yard strike from Jimmy Howieson proved the game's only goal. Remarkably, although United suffered a series of heavy defeats at Celtic Park in their four seasons in Division One between 1925 and 1932, the Celts never left Tannadice with two points during that period. There were 3-3 and 2-2 draws, United's other win (also 1-0) coming on Boxing Day 1931.
