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I was delighted to see the players get some much-needed match action under their belts on Monday night when the Scottish Cup tie against Forfar Athletic went ahead.

Given the break in competitive action stretching back over three weeks, I was very pleased with the way the players approached the game and I thought we dominated the tie and scored three quality goals. With a pitch which was becoming slippery as the game progressed, I was just pleased to get to the end of the game with a win and no further injuries.

We could not have a much bigger contrast between the low key cup tie watched at Station Park by 1,500 people and this afternoon's occasion – a busy McDiarmid Park plus a worldwide Sky TV audience for the visit of Celtic.

The Glasgow side were the last SPL side to be scheduled to visit Perth and I would like to think we have progressed as a side since we met them in our first away game at Parkhead back in August. That was a game I felt we played well enough in but defended naively as a team and were made to suffer.

This afternoon will tell if we have learned from what we have experienced since then and a win would be a great way to start what is going to be a very busy period. However, participation in three top level tournaments is what football is all about and I have no doubt that I have the squad of players at my disposal that will allow us to approach these games with confidence.

Please get behind the players this afternoon.



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MURRAY RELISHING HIGH PROFILE GAMES

Saints midfielder Murray Davidson is looking forward to this afternoon's match against Celtic and as well as signalling a much needed return to SPL action for the game-starved team, the former Livingston player is hoping it will signal a run of personal form which could herald international recognition before the season is out.

Along with Livvy colleague Dave Mackay, Murray was the first summer signing made by Derek McInnes following the club's elevation to the SPL and he has been a regular in the engine room of the team through the first half of the campaign, catching the eye of plenty of onlookers with his style. It's a five months that Murray is satisfied with.

"When I joined Saints my first aim was just to get myself into the team and I think that is the only realistic target you should have when you join a new club. In that respect I'm delighted I have been involved so much, I'm fairly pleased with my form and I just want to stay in the team for as long as I can."

Murray's first taste of SPL action came in the opening day of the season when we drew 2-2 with Motherwell at McDiarmid Park and he flags that game up as his most memorable so far.

"That was my SPL debut and it was enjoyable to be involved in what was

a very entertaining game. There was a good crowd and great atmosphere at the stadium and to grab a goal for myself was a bonus. It would have been nice to have won the game but it was memorable nonetheless."

Murray's form throughout autumn impressed many, not just those with Saints leanings but further a field as well and indeed international recognition beckoned for the Edinburgh-born 21 year old. However, disappointment was to follow.

Murray explains, "A few people were mentioning the possibility of a Scotland Under 21 cap but to be honest that was right at the back of mind because I was only interested in doing well for Saints.

"However, I did actually get the call up for the away game in Azerbaijan in November only for injury to intervene. I picked up a groin strain in a game and came into the stadium on the Monday morning to have it assessed - I was due to join up with the Scotland squad that night.

"Unfortunately, physio Nick and the Club Doctor felt it was too much of a risk and I had to pull out of the squad. It was a common sense decision but a hard thing to take.

Continued on page 7



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I spoke to Billy Stark and he was very supportive and it is good to know that I am at least on his radar. Azerbaijan would have been an awful long trip and there was a chance I might not have been able to do myself justice but it was a great honour to be asked into the squad and I obviously want to play at that level but hopefully other opportunities will come up."

Turning to this afternoon's match against Celtic, Murray is relishing the chance to come up against the Glasgow side.

"Opposition in Scotland doesn't come bigger than Celtic or Rangers and a game like this, which is being shown across the world on television, is a great platform for us. No disrespect to the teams in the First

Division but twelve months ago myself with Livingston and the rest of the lads with Saints were playing at that lower level in front of modest crowds and very limited coverage so to be involved in games like today's is great.

"However, things like the size of the crowd and the fact that it is on television go out of your mind once the game starts and it is all about doing our best for Saints. We should have got something from the game when Rangers came to Perth in October so we know what we have to do.

"We were beaten 5-2 by Celtic in the second game of the season and we let ourselves down a bit that day but we've been learning week by week and it seems like we

have waited a long time to come up against them again."

Murray will be backed by his family who travel up from the Borders for each home game and a number of away games and he's aware plenty of other friends will be tuning in to the game.

"I've got plenty of mates who support one side or other of the Old Firm so no doubt I'll have plenty of them keeping an eye on proceedings today and I can expect a bit of stick whatever the result!

"We just have to treat it as another game, concentrate on the things that we do well and if we can do that then I am confident that we can enjoy the afternoon."

IN PERTH TODAY CELTIC



Celtic make their first trip of the campaign to McDiarmid Park this afternoon.

Whilst the Hoops record of 38 points from nineteen matches is more than satisfactory, they already find themselves nine points behind great rivals Rangers in the race for the title. Last Saturday's dropped points at home to Falkirk followed another draw in the Old Firm match at the start of the month and away defeats to Hearts and Dundee United in recent months have proved costly.

With that in mind and also the fact that he is passionate about the way he wants his sides to play, it was always to be expected that summer appointment Tony Mowbray would look to reshape his squad and whilst he has added several new faces since taking charge, January looks as if it could be more notable for the departures from Celtic Park. Former manager Gordon Strachan has already swooped to land Chris Killen, Willo Flood and Barry Robson with the former Southampton boss also failing in a bid to lure Gary Caldwell to Middlesbrough, the Scotland international instead opting for a crack at the Premier League with Wigan Athletic. Others to be linked with moves away from the Celtic Park include captain Stephen McManus, top scorer Scott McDonald and fans' favourite Aiden McGeady, although the latter could well command a fee nearing eight figures.

The Bhoys' Active Nation Scottish Cup campaign got off to a winning start on Tuesday night, when a goal from Miall McGinn secured a narrow victory over Morton in front of the biggest Cappielow crowd since the Hoops last visited Greenock in March 1999. Next up for Tony Mowbray's men is a trip to Stenhousemuir, as they bid to lift the trophy for a record-breaking 35th time.

Celtic's early record at McDiarmid Park made for surprising reading, with Saints emerging victorious on more occasions than their illustrious opponents in the first thirteen meetings at the new ground but since that last Saints victory in April 1999, Celtic are unbeaten both in Perth and in Glasgow, docking up twelve victories from thirteen encounters.

THE SQUAD 09/10

Goalkeepers

Between the sticks for Celtic this afternoon will be Artur Boruc, who was initially signed on a year-long loan deal in the summer of 2005. After displacing David Marshall as number one, his switch from Legia Warsaw was made permanent and in January 2008, he signed a new deal that will keep him at Celtic Park until next summer. Having now made more than 200 appearances for the club, the Polish international has also won 44 caps for his country and turned in a series of outstanding displays in the Euro 2008 tournament. He's kept six clean sheets so far this season.

A minor knee operation kept Boruc out of action during November and opened the door for his fellow countryman Lukasz Zaluska, who was also a teammate of Boruc's at Legia Warsaw. Having made his competitive debut against Falkirk in the Co-operative Insurance Cup in September – keeping a clean sheet in the process – the former Dundee United stopper went on to make a further eight appearances in the absence of Boruc. Capped once against South Africa, he signed a pre-contract agreement with the Hoops last January, having impressed in the SPL with Dundee United following his switch from Korona Kielce in the summer of 2007.

Providing cover in the goalkeeping department is USA U23 international Dominic Cervi who, after impressing whilst on trial, finally put pen to paper on a deal last summer, following a prolonged chase by the Glasgow club. The University of Tulsa graduate rejected the chance to sign a contract with MLS after being selected by Chicago Fire and is viewed as one for the future at Celtic Park.

Defence

A fixture in the side this season has been the consistent Andreas Hinkel, who Celtic recruited from Spanish side Sevilla in January 2008, for a fee of around £1.9 million. Capped 17 times by

Germany, the attacking right back had previously played for VfB Stuttgart and came up against Celtic in the memorable 2002/03 UEFA Cup campaign. The impressive form shown by Hinkel has restricted the opportunities of Mark Wilson, who moved to Celtic Park four years ago in a £500,000 switch from Dundee United. Although he featured in three of the club's UEFA Europa League matches, he hasn't appeared in the SPL since October. Also vying for a spot on the right of the defence is Paul Caddis, who last month agreed a new one-year contract extension with the Bhoys. A product of the club's youth system, he spent the latter part of last season on loan at Dundee United but is yet to start an SPL match under Tony Mowbray. Born in Irvine, Caddis' younger brother Liam joined Saints on a full-time basis in the summer.

Slotting in at left back in the past couple of matches has been Englishman Lee Naylor, replacing summer signing Danny Fox, who has been struggling with a groin injury over the past week or so. Brought north in August 2006, Naylor came through the ranks at Wolves and made 334 appearances for the Molineux club. An impressive debut season in the green and white hoops was capped for the former England U21 international when he was named as one of the four nominees for the SPFA Player for the Year Award. An undisclosed fee secured the services of 23-year-old Fox in the summer, a player who like Naylor has represented England at U21 level. In October of last year though, the former Coventry City player was called up to the Scotland squad for the friendly with Japan, a switch he was eligible to make because of his Scottish grandfather. Unfortunately for the Cheshire-born defender, a hamstring injury robbed him of the opportunity to make his debut but his chance came a month later when he featured against Wales in Cardiff. Whilst a trainee with Everton, Fox enjoyed a spell on loan at Stranraer and his form last season at Coventry led him to be named in the PFA Championship Team of the Season.

On Tuesday night in Greenock, Glenn Loovens and Darren O'Dea teamed up in the heart of

the Celtic defence, with Loovens recovering from a stomach problem that had kept him out of last weekend's draw with Falkirk. The former Netherlands U21 defender started his career at Feyenoord and had loan spells at Excelsior and De Graafschap before another temporary switch to Cardiff City in 2005 resulted in a more permanent move the following year. Two impressive years in Wales, capped with an FA Cup final appearance, heightened interest in the Dutch defender and he sealed a move to Celtic Park in the summer of 2008, knocking back reported interest from rivals Rangers in the process. A product of the club's youth system, O'Dea has recently returned from a loan spell with Reading, which was finalised at the same time as the 22-year-old penned a new three-year deal in September, the same month that saw him win his first cap for the Republic of Ireland. As well as featuring in several of the club's big UEFA Champions League matches, he scored the opening goal in the Hoops Co-operative Insurance Cup final win over Rangers last March.

Loovens' return on Tuesday night came in place of captain Stephen McManus, who missed the match with a calf injury sustained during the clash with Falkirk last Saturday. His departure after only thirty minutes saw manager Tony Mowbray forced to hand a debut to 18-year-old Josh Thompson, a summer signing from Stockport County. The teenager, who made a handful of appearances for the League One side last season, had been on trial at Manchester United and was a player Mowbray had been tracking whilst he was still in charge of West Brom. McManus has now made more than 200 appearances since joining Celtic in 1997 and in November, won his 22nd Scotland cap against Wales.

One further option open to Mowbray this afternoon is handing a debut to his most recent recruit, Dutch defender Jos Hooveld, who completed his £2 million move from Aik a few weeks ago. Voted Sweden's player of the year last season, he was part of the Aik side that completed a domestic double and has signed a three-and-a-half year deal with Celtic. With the Swedish season finishing a few months ago, a lack of match sharpness could deny him an appearance this afternoon but if he is selected, it won't be the first time he has faced Saints, who were Livingston's opponents in a bounce match that the 26-year-old featured in whilst on trial at the West Lothian club in 2005.

Midfield

Manager Tony Mowbray will have to do without four of his midfield options this afternoon. An ankle injury sustained on his debut against Falkirk last weekend means that recent arrival Ki Sung Yeung will sit out the rest of January, joining Scott Brown and Shaun Maloney on the sidelines. In addition, Landry N'Guemo is on international duty with Cameroon at the African Cup of Nations in Angola. Signed on an initial year-long from Nancy, Mowbray had tried to sign the midfielder for WBA last season and the 24-year-old shrugged off reported interest from English clubs again in the summer to link up with former teammate Marc-Antoine Fortune at Celtic Park.

Scotland international pair Brown and Maloney have been missing since the end of November, with Brown requiring a second operation on a

troublesome ankle injury and Maloney ruled out because of tendonitis in his heel. It was in May 2007 that Celtic completed the signing of Brown from Hibs, for a fee in the region of £4.4 million, a record between Scottish clubs. Named the PFA Scotland Player of the Year last season, his return to action will be a welcome boost not only to Tony Mowbray but also new national team manager Craig Levein, who is sure to be keen to see the dynamic midfielder add to his 19 Scotland caps. Maloney is now in his second spell at Celtic Park after spending a year in the Premier League with Aston Villa under former manager Martin O'Neill. He scored a double when the sides last met in August and like Scott Brown, will be looking to add to his 17 Scotland appearances in future months.

Ki isn't alone in adding an Asian influence to the Celtic midfield, with Chinese national team captain Zheng Zhi added to the squad on transfer deadline day in August and Japanese international Koki Mizuno now in his second year at Celtic Park. South Korean Ki signed a long-term contract with the club last month after leaving FC Seoul in his homeland. Recently named Asian young player of the year, the 20-year-old featured in all of South Korea's qualification games en route to reaching next year's World Cup finals in South Africa and has scored four goals in eighteen appearances for his country. Joining Ki in the centre of the park last weekend, the versatile Zheng had left Charlton Athletic in June following their relegation to League One. The 29-year-old, who weighed in with nine goals last season, had become the first Chinese player to represent the London side, who he'd joined from Shandong Luneng following a successful loan spell in the 2006/07 season. Whilst Zheng and Ki both look to have a big part to play under Tony Mowbray, Mizuno has found himself on the fringe of things this season, making only a couple of appearances and both of those from the bench. Signed from J-League side JEF United, the wide midfielder is comfortable on either flank.

The Asian impact on the Celtic squad is matched by that of Irish trio Niall McGinn, Paddy McCourt and Aiden McGeady, the latter the club's prized asset. Despite being born in Glasgow and coming through the ranks at Celtic Park, 23-year-old McGeady has now amassed more than thirty caps for the Republic of Ireland since making his debut in June 2004 against Jamaica. Winner of both the SPFA Player of the Year and Young Player of the Year awards at the end of the 2007/08 campaign, he's now won seven major honours in Celtic's colours, most recently the 2009 Co-operative Insurance Cup, in which he scored from the penalty spot in the 2-0 victory over Rangers in the final. With admiring glances being aimed in McGeady's direction from the Premier League down south, Celtic could face a fight to hold on to their fans' favourite.

Northern Irish duo McGinn and McCourt are, like McGeady, capable of playing on either flank and McGinn scored the only goal in Tuesday night's Active Nation Scottish Cup victory over Morton. Both are formerly of Derry City, with McCourt committing to the Hoops for three years in June 2008 and McGinn signing a similar deal just over a year ago, in a move that netted the Candy-stripes a fee in the region of £200,000. Named the Eircom League Young Player of the Year shortly before his departure,

Tuesday night's strike was his third of the season. McCourt's move to Celtic Park offered the 26-year-old at second crack at football on this side of the Irish Sea, having spent time with Rochdale at the start of his career. He returned to Ireland with Shamrock Rovers before his move to hometown club Derry City.

One player who has started to cement his place in the team in recent weeks is Spaniard Marc Crosas, a defensive midfielder with an impressive range of passing. Celtic saw off competition from the likes of Sevilla and Sampdoria to secure his signature at the start of last season in a deal that could see the club pay Barcelona £1.5 million depending on appearances. Having featured for the Catalans during their pre-season trip to Scotland a couple of years ago he also spent time on loan at Lyon before arriving at Celtic Park. Although yet to find the net this season, his stunning volley against St Mirren last February earned him the Goal of the Season award at the Clydesdale Bank Premier League Awards ceremony at the end of the last campaign.

Attack

A recent hernia operation rules Celtic's top scorer Scott McDonald out of today's clash, meaning that manager Tony Mowbray will likely go with £5 million pairing of Georgios Samaras and Marc-Antoine Fortune in attack. A summer signing from Nancy, Fortune had spent time on loan with Mowbray at WBA last season, netting five goals during a six-month loan at The Hawthorns. He bettered that total by one for Nancy and has also turned out for Lille, Brest and Dutch side Utrecht amongst others. He got his first goals in Celtic colours against Saints in August and followed that up with the winning goal against Motherwell at the start of last month. Samaras initially joined Celtic on loan after falling out of favour at Manchester City but after making a valuable contribution as the Hoops clinched the title in 2007/08, that deal was made permanent. A Greek international, he's now made more than thirty appearances for his country, scoring five goals in the process. He's in a rich vein of form domestically at the moment, with six goals in his last seven SPL appearances.

McDonald moved to Celtic Park in the summer of 2007 and scored 31 goals in his first season with the club. He was a player well known to Celtic fans as a late double he struck against them in the colours of Motherwell on the final day of the 2004/05 season handed the SPL title to Rangers. He had joined the Steelmen in January 2004 and scored a debut goal against Saints in a comfortable Scottish Cup victory that month. He currently lies third in the SPL all-time scorers list and is closing in on 100 goals at this level.

Likely to appear on the bench this afternoon is Paul McGowan, another player who has found the back of the net previously against Saints. On loan at Morton during the 2006/07, McGowan's double, including a late winner, sent Saints packing from the Challenge Cup that season. A loan spell at Hamilton last season yielded only a single strike and earlier this term, the 22-year-old grabbed his first goal for Celtic when he netted a late equaliser against Rapid Vienna in the Bhoys final UEFA Europa League match.

SQUAD LIST 09/10

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Artur Boruc
Position: Goalkeeper
Date of Birth: 20/02/1980
Birthplace: Siedlce, Poland
Former Club: Legia Warszawa | 16. Joni Foskeld
Position: Defender
Date of Birth: 23/04/1983
Birthplace: Zeyen, Netherlands
Former Club: Ajax |
| 2. Andreas Hinkel
Position: Defender
Date of Birth: 26/03/1982
Birthplace: Badenslag, Germany
Former Club: Sevilla | 17. Marc Crosas
Position: Midfielder
Date of Birth: 09/01/1980
Birthplace: Gernika, Spain
Former Club: Barcelona |
| 3. Lee Naylor
Position: Defender
Date of Birth: 15/02/1980
Birthplace: Bournemouth
Former Club: Wolverhampton Wanderers | 18. Ji Song Yang
Position: Midfielder
Date of Birth: 24/01/1989
Birthplace: Gwangju, South Korea
Former Club: FC Seoul |
| 4. Stephen McManus
Position: Defender
Date of Birth: 10/09/1982
Birthplace: Lanark
Former Club: Celtic Youth | 20. Patrick McCourt
Position: Midfielder
Date of Birth: 16/12/1983
Birthplace: Londonderry
Former Club: Derry City |
| 6. Lendy M'Galema
Position: Midfielder
Date of Birth: 28/11/1985
Birthplace: Yaounde, Cameroon
Former Club: Nancy (Loan) | 22. Glenn Loovens
Position: Defender
Date of Birth: 22/10/1983
Birthplace: Doornik, Netherlands
Former Club: Cardiff City |
| 7. Scott McDonald
Position: Forward
Date of Birth: 21/08/1983
Birthplace: Dundee, Australia
Former Club: Motherwell | 24. Lukasz Zaluska
Position: Goalkeeper
Date of Birth: 25/06/1982
Birthplace: Wyszkiel, Mazowiec, Poland
Former Club: Dundee United |
| 8. Scott Brown
Position: Midfielder
Date of Birth: 25/06/1985
Birthplace: Dunfermline
Former Club: Hibernian | 27. Zheng Zhi
Position: Midfielder
Date of Birth: 20/08/1980
Birthplace: Shenyang, China
Former Club: Chongqing Athletic |
| 9. Georgios Samaras
Position: Forward
Date of Birth: 21/02/1985
Birthplace: Heraklion, Greece
Former Club: Manchester City | 29. Koki Mizuno
Position: Midfielder
Date of Birth: 06/09/1988
Birthplace: Shizuoka, Japan
Former Club: JEF United |
| 10. Marc-Antoine Fortune
Position: Forward
Date of Birth: 02/07/1981
Birthplace: Cayenne, French Guiana
Former Club: Nancy | 30. Josh Thompson
Position: Defender
Date of Birth: 06/02/1991
Birthplace: Bolton
Former Club: Stockport County |
| 11. Danny Fox
Position: Defender
Date of Birth: 29/05/1986
Birthplace: Winedale
Former Club: Coventry City | 46. Aiden McGeady
Position: Midfielder
Date of Birth: 04/04/1986
Birthplace: Glasgow
Former Club: Celtic Youth |
| 12. Mark Wilson
Position: Defender
Date of Birth: 05/06/1984
Birthplace: Glasgow
Former Club: Dundee United | 47. Dominic Cerni
Position: Goalkeeper
Date of Birth: 09/07/1986
Birthplace: Norman, USA
Former Club: Michigan Bucks |
| 13. Shaun Maloney
Position: Midfielder
Date of Birth: 24/01/1983
Birthplace: Miri, Malaysia
Former Club: Aston Villa | 48. Darren O'Neil
Position: Defender
Date of Birth: 04/02/1987
Birthplace: Dublin
Former Club: Celtic Youth |
| 14. Niall McGinn
Position: Midfielder
Date of Birth: 20/10/1987
Birthplace: Dunsparren
Former Club: Derry City | 57. Paul Gaddy
Position: Defender
Date of Birth: 07/04/1988
Birthplace: Irvine
Former Club: Celtic Youth |
| 15. Milan Mraz
Position: Defender
Date of Birth: 21/02/1990
Birthplace: Pribram, Czech Republic
Former Club: FK Pribram | 55. Paul McGowan
Position: Forward
Date of Birth: 07/10/1987
Birthplace: Edinburgh
Former Club: Celtic Youth |