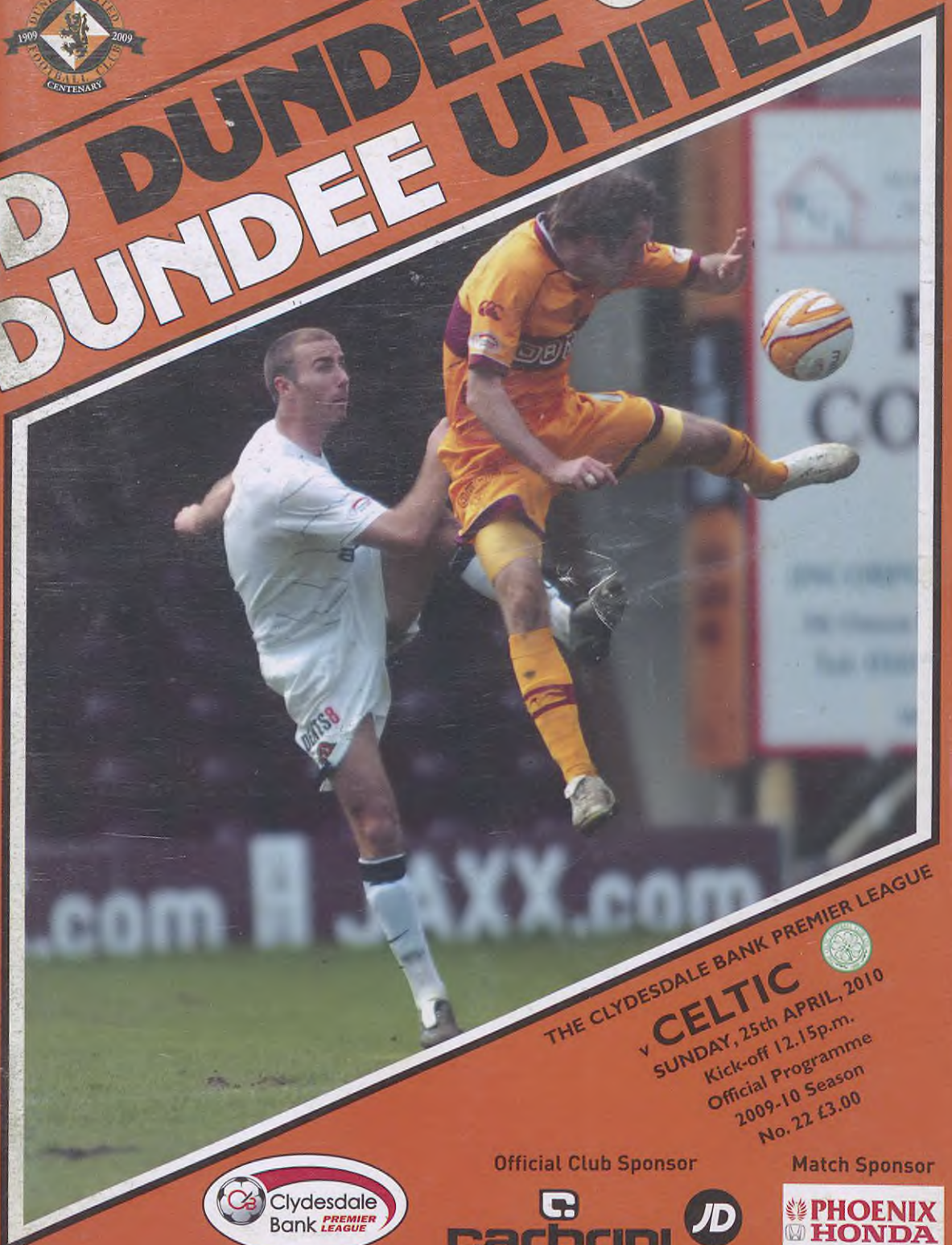




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THE COURIER

EVENING TELEGRAPH AND POST

THE SUNDAY POST

PETER HOUSTON

All along I have said that only when we achieved something tangible would I regard this as being a successful season. But that came to pass with last week's victory at Motherwell earning us entry to the Europa League.

However, there is no way that I can claim all the credit, because I have only been building on the very solid foundations laid by Craig Levein.

Three-and-a-half years ago, Craig called me and asked me to come to United with him. Back then they were bottom of the league and the late Eddie Thompson was afraid they were about to get relegated.

Qualifying for Europe is the result of a lot of hard work since then and no one should forget what Craig put in place so this could happen. Likewise, there's been a huge effort by the players, the coaching staff and everyone else connected with the club, so it has been a real team effort.

This, however, is only the first step in a season in which there is so much left to play for. We've got a cup final to look forward to and winning that would be the real icing on the cake. We've also still to mathematically make sure of third, though, I honestly can't see us being caught now.

Beyond that, there is still a lot of progress this team can make and we'll keep working hard to achieve it.

For our last home game against Rangers, they worked ever so hard. Having made six changes, I asked the guys who have been waiting for a chance to give us a shift. And they could be proud of themselves, leaving me a pleasant selection headache.

But that has been typical of the boys because they give you everything every week.

After all their efforts, it would have been thoroughly undeserved had we lost to Rangers. Not for a moment am I making out a case that we deserved to win, but I thought we fully merited a point.

We followed that up with a terrific win at Motherwell last Sunday to put finishing within touching distance. That is a huge achievement, but it's a big honour to take the team into Europe as well.



Both teams take a lot of credit for managing to serve up a thriller, considering the condition of the Fir Park pitch.

Once again Jon Daly showed what an asset he is. He has been in superb scoring form - and for him to score another couple of goals - was great for him and great for the side.

Yet again, it was a real team effort. No matter how much the coaching staff and myself try and organise them and work on set-plays and tell them how to do this, that and the next thing - they've got to show a commitment, desire and attitude as well as play good football.

That we have in abundance. And the dressing-room is a fantastic place to be just now with the confidence that accompanies a long unbeaten run. We're winning games and everyone is trying to stake a claim for a cup final place. But we've still four league games left and want to win as many of them as possible to finish as high as we can.

And Celtic, this afternoon's opponents, are the side we have in our sights. Pulling back seven points is a big ask. In any event, we still need a point to ensure that we finish third, but irrespective of that, as usual we will be going all out to continue our excellent recent run which should make for terrific entertainment against a side that under Neil Lennon has won its last four SPL games.

Peter Houston

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AROUND TANNADICE



Scott warming up for his return before last week's match at Fir Park

SCOTT ROBERTSON'S RAPID RETURN

Having announced that Scott Robertson's season was over in our last programme, it is a pleasure to be proved wrong with the midfielder having made a surprise return to action at Fir Park last Sunday. Coming off the bench, he played the last few minutes at Motherwell last Sunday – his first appearance since the 3-0 defeat by Rangers at Tannadice in December.

But the Scotland man doesn't really consider that he'll play more than the odd cameo role between now and the end of the campaign.

He is just relieved to be training and playing pain free and that is something he hasn't enjoyed for more than a year! He revealed, "It's 16 months all told since I was last feeling this good."

"Although I've played during that period, I've never been right."

Root of the problem has been a mystery groin complaint. He explained, "This injury started in January last year and it's been niggling away ever since."

"I've tried to come back from it several times and failed.

"Whilst I have been fine after one game, afterwards it has just deteriorated.

"Initially, I had pain on one side of the groin, but as I tried to play through it the same thing started on the other side too.

"Problem is that in my view, it has never been properly diagnosed!

"I've been told it's four or five different things.

"I've had an operation, then injections, then another operation. Then it was painkilling jags and being told to play through it.

"Having tried everything without a cure being found, and I started really nipping the heads of our medical people at the club to find a way to sort it out.

"I spoke to loads of fellow players and physios from other clubs myself and somewhere in the midst of this I came across the idea of going to the National Sports Rehabilitation Centre at Lillieshall, where they told me the next thing to try was a strengthening and rehabilitation programme because it might be I just had a basic weakness in that area.

"After a month of that, I feel so much better and confident.

"I've been training pain free and came through the wee run out on Sunday fine.

"The 10 minutes against Motherwell was a start. Now I just want to get a couple of games in so I can be sure I am finally over this and can look ahead to pre-season training.

"Mentally it's been tough and I need to be sure in my own mind that I'm finally over the injury before I can look forward.

"I'm not thinking about the cup final. Apart from anything else I don't think I would merit a place in the squad.

"The boys who've got us there should be the ones being considered.

"Just to be back training every day is bonus enough for me."

Despite his lengthy absences, the esteem in which he is held is about to be recognised shortly by the club opening talks with him over a new deal even although his current contract has over twelve months to run.

CLYDESDALE BANK PREMIER LEAGUE MANAGER OF THE MONTH AWARD FOR MARCH

Manager Peter Houston has been named Clydesdale Bank Premier League Manager of the Month for March. Since taking over in January, Peter Houston has led Dundee United to third place in the SPL, with the team finishing March only five points behind second placed Celtic.



Last month saw the team win three games and draw one, beating Hearts, Motherwell and Hibs, all teams close to them in the league, scoring ten SPL goals.

United achieved these results in a month in which they also had a couple of hard Scottish Cup games against Rangers.

A panel of Scottish football experts chose the award winners from a shortlist which included the top three fans' nominations from Clydesdale Bank's football website, www.cbfootball.co.uk.

Football fans can vote for their Manager, Player and Young Player of the Month during the last week of each month, at www.cbfootball.co.uk.

Each month one fan will be selected to win a prize.

THE LEVEIN LOUNGE

Scotland Manager Craig Levein performed the official opening ceremony for the new members' lounge at Tannadice before the last home game against Rangers.

The Scotland boss took part in a short question and answer session with Ronnie Dare, before unveiling a plaque naming the lounge named after him.

Vice Chair Cath Thompson then presented the Scotland boss with a rare bottle of Dundee United Centenary whisky.

The Commercial Department has been inundated with requests for membership of the lounge, and all of the forms have currently been issued. If anyone has not heard back from the Club regarding an application, they have been placed on a waiting list.

All outstanding application forms should be returned to Tannadice as soon as possible. Should any spaces then become available in the lounge, we will revisit the waiting list.



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AROUND TANNADICE

THE SHED GO MARCHING ON

After eight years of in-depth research the series of books, which has become known as 'The Tannadice Trilogy' by Steve Gracie, is now complete. These three books provide the most detailed account ever of the history of Dundee United from its foundation as Dundee Hibernian in 1909 up to the end of season 2008-09.



The first book, **A PASSION FOR SURVIVAL**, covers the years 1909 to 1945, chronicling the early years of the Club from the humble beginnings of Dundee Hibernian in 1909 through the troubled 1920s and 1930s, and the years of two World Wars.

THE RISE OF THE TERRORS - 1945-1979 carries on the story through the late 1940s and 1950s. Events were then to take a turn for the better with the arrival of Jerry Kerr and then Jim McLean as United achieved stability in the top flight and regular European football.

This third book, **THE SHED GO MARCHING ON** picks up in 1979 and relates the story from the first League Cup final win, through the

1982-83 Championship season, the Scottish Cup success of 1994 and the rapid change in football and its effects on Dundee United in the most recent decade. The highs and lows are all there.

The Tannadice Trilogy is published by **Arabest Publishing**, and joining the first two books, the third volume will be available through the usual outlets next week.

On Saturday 1st May, Steve will be at Waterstone's Booksellers, Commercial Street, Dundee from noon until around 1.30 pm, and he will be joined by United goal scoring hero Kenny Cameron and possibly one or two other former players.

Steve has been a Dundee United fan since childhood and is well known to Arabs through his involvement in various capacities with the club. After a career in the finance industry, which took him all over Scotland he retired through ill health in 2001, returning to Dundee to live. He began working for Dundee United in 2003 and is currently a match day ambassador with the Commercial Department.

PASSPORTS AT THE READY

Volcanoes permitting, the club are back in Europe, so Arabs will be wiping the dust off their passports. Last week's win at Fir Park ensured that the worst we could finish is fourth to guarantee a Europa League spot. And that is the first time that we have qualified for Europe courtesy of our league position since 1997 when, under Tommy McLean, we finished third.

Of course, a Champions League spot is not off the agenda, though today's visitors Celtic would no doubt have something to say about that!

More realistically, our first European venture for five years will give us our first appearance in the Europa League.

At the moment, we are set to enter at the third qualifying round, the first leg of which takes place on July 29 with the return a week later on August 5.

If, however, we beat Ross County in the Active Nation Scottish Cup Final, we'll be involved in the play-offs for the group stages. These are scheduled for August 19 with the return on August 26.

UNIQUE YOUTH PARTNERSHIP

The Club has widened its recruitment network through a partnership with Amsocschools - a Fife based football school. Amsocschools provide coaching for over 500 children per week from age 3 - 13 and have grown rapidly over the last 4 years establishing an excellent reputation.

The partnership allows Dundee United the first opportunity to sign Amsocschools most promising youngsters and has also led to Amsocschools coaches assisting with the under 8's and under 9's at the restructured Dundee United Academy.

The new partnership was announced prior to the Rangers game with three signings from Amsocschools, Jonathan Cartwright (Cupar), Scott Reekie (Pittenweem) and James Collins (Methil).

United fought off interest from other SPL clubs over a similar partnership with Amsocschools such is their growing reputation for producing young footballers. "We are delighted to be in partnership with Dundee United. The Club has an excellent curriculum for further developing our young players and we are confident Tannadice is the best place for them to progress after the restructuring of their youth system. "Like ourselves, the United youth system is not result based, but concentrates on the technical development of the individual player as they strive for a career in professional football," said founder Austin MacPhee.

Meanwhile Junior Academy Manager Ian Cathro commented, "In Amsocschools we have found not only an organisation who put fun into football, but also provide a real development path for their young players. The coaches value the individual progress of each child and we are delighted to be in partnership with them."



Pictured above - left to right - are Austin MacPhee, Gary Reilly (AMSS coach), Ian Cathro with Scott, James and Johnathan in front.