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See the action in style when Rangers take on Partick Thistle, on Saturday 17th April 2004, kick-off for this match is 3.00pm. Hospitality packages are available for this match. Call the sales team on 0870 600 1964 for further details

# Gers ready for action

**IT goes without saying that we are looking to redress the balance against our old rivals today by producing a victory and I feel my players are capable of delivering it.**

I think our form in the last couple of games has been very encouraging. We managed to score four goals on each occasion and I felt some of our play was very good.

A few weeks ago we made some comments regarding plans for the future and I would like to think I can stand by those comments.

We want to give the younger players as much experience as possible but we will only put them in if we feel they are capable.

That's why we used Chris Burke and Hamed Namouchi and also blooded Bajram Fetaj on Wednesday night. His appearance might have been a bit earlier than anticipated but he didn't look out of place.

We have used Alan Hutton in the last two matches. It was the ideal time to put him in - especially as the games were at Ibrox.

He's got height and the presence to handle playing against Celtic.

If he is plunged in then it's going to develop him

both mentally and physically.

You probably read about Alan getting a new contract in the *Rangers News* last Wednesday and he was a player we had earmarked to get tied up for quite a while.

It was coincidental he was in the first team at the time and I'm glad we got him tied up because after his goal he may have been looking to prolong the negotiations!

The good news is the squad is virtually injury-free, although Frank de Boer is doubtful.

We're not ruling Frank out but he went over on his ankle and it's never an easy one to come back from. Frank does have a reputation as a good healer and he has made progress so we will wait and see.

Henning Berg had some pain with an old Achilles problem but he feels he is ready and Craig Moore feels the same way so we have good defensive options.

I feel we are looking good up front and it was great to see goals against Dundee and Dunfermline

Peter Lovenkrands has played with more maturity. His linking play has been better and he's been getting inside more rather than restricting himself to the touchline.

If you look at Arsenal, for example, both Robert Pires and Freddie Ljungberg look for the ball in midfield and try to sniff out opportunities or chances.

They make themselves difficult

**"Hutton has the height and presence to handle playing against Celtic this afternoon"**





**POINTING  
THE WAY:**

Alex McLeish is hoping Rangers will build upon two great wins with victory over Celtic



to be picked up and I think Peter has done OK in that regard in the last couple of games.

Michael Mols was excellent on Tuesday. He and Ronald de Boer rolled back the years in the first half with their performances.

He has been a bit stop-start with his performances in the last six weeks or so and I felt he had lost his edge.

However, I think by missing a few games - including the cup-tie at Parkhead - and coming off the bench, it has whetted his appetite again and he is also working very hard.

I think his workrate has been tremendous all season. People have criticised him in front of goals, but I think his workrate is better than it has been for most of his Rangers career.

Ronald has had some work on his nose and he thinks it's even better than before so there is no living with him now!

However, if he can produce the form he did in the first half on Tuesday then I will look forward to seeing him action today.

The good thing is he, big Thommo and Michael Mols have all been looking hungry and

determined and that augurs well going into the game.

Having seen the players in the last two games I feel confident going into today's match. The expectation vibes from you the fans are strong and it would great if we could win today. I sincerely hope we can deliver.

Enjoy the game.



RANGERS v CELTIC  
SPL



RANGERS v CELTIC  
SPL

# Forward Thinking

Ronald de Boer gave a sparkling performance against Dunfermline midweek and would love a repeat performance against Celtic this afternoon



BY GRAEME MACPHERSON

**THEY** say form is temporary but class is permanent and Ronald de Boer's first-half performance against Dunfermline last Tuesday was the perfect illustration of that.

De Boer took the field with a black eye and a broken nose but by half-time it was the Pars who were feeling battered and bruised as Rangers stormed to a 4-1 lead.

After missing the bulk of the season with a niggling knee injury, de Boer was back to his imperious best on Tuesday night; spinning away from markers with ease, spraying passes around the pitch and scoring a sublime goal while making it look like flossing his teeth would have taken more effort.

This was more like the de Boer who played such a pivotal role in bringing the treble to Ibrox last season and, with today's match in mind, he was brought off as a precaution after a dazzling first-half performance.

With Rangers finally breaking into full stride after a stumbling couple of months, de Boer could be a key man this afternoon as the Light Blues aim to register their first victory over Celtic this season.

Traditionally, the former Ajax forward has revelled in the red-hot atmosphere of an Old Firm clash, with four goals to his name.

He scored Rangers' third in the famous 5-1 thumping at Ibrox in November 2000 and netted three times against Martin O'Neill's side last season.

Supporters often complain players don't share their passion for the club but de Boer's celebration after he scored at Celtic Park last October rendered that argument null and void. After drawing



**GIMME FIVE:** de Boer celebrates with the fans after his equaliser against Celtic last season



**GOLDEN BOOT:** Ronald de Boer celebrates his strike against Dunfermline

## "Tuesday night's win gave everyone a little boost ahead of today's game"

Rangers level with a well-taken header, the 33 year-old dashed towards the sizeable away support, slapping 'high fives' along the front row as if he had just scored the winning touchdown in the Superbowl.

Two months later he was on the scoresheet against Celtic again, sidefooting home Neil McCann's cross to send Rangers on their way to a 3-2 SPL win.

Remarkably, that was the last time Rangers recorded a league victory over their rivals but de Boer reckons the time has come to break that unwanted sequence. He said: "I think

Tuesday night's win gave everyone a little boost ahead of today's game.

"The team has played well in the last few weeks and it is good to see the younger boys coming in and getting their chance.

"It gives them some experience for next season and maybe some of them will get the chance to play today.

"It was nice to give the fans a good display on Tuesday and hopefully we can win for them this afternoon.

"Old Firm games are very special, I've played in other derby games

including Barcelona versus Real Madrid but this surpasses that.

"It's maybe not one of the biggest derby games international-wise but in terms of atmosphere and emotion it is certainly one of the biggest games in the world.

"You have to raise your game to the highest levels in these matches as they're a good team and we will need to do well to beat them.

"We are confident at the moment as the team is doing well. We can't change what has happened in the past.

"We can only try to play well and try to give the fans a nice end to the season."

Aside from his broken nose sustained against Dundee last weekend, de Boer admits he is feeling fit and injury-free for the first time in a while.

He added: "If I'm

feeling physically ok then there is a higher chance of a better performance.

"I was feeling good against Dundee but unfortunately broke my nose and had to come off.

"Against Dunfermline I felt good again and I think I showed that on the park.

"It was my decision to come off at half-time as it was 4-1 so there was no need to take the risk of hurting my nose and missing today's game."

Although this afternoon's fixture is largely meaningless in terms of the chase for the championship, de Boer is looking forward to locking horns with the old enemy again.

He said: "We will definitely be trying to beat them. When you are on the park you

## Fastfacts

Celtic first visited Ibrox on Scottish League business in May 1890. A crowd of 10,000 saw Gers go down 2-1 to their fledgling city rivals.

Between them, the Old Firm have scored over 16,000 league goals. Gers have netted well in advance of 8,100 while Celtic have just over 7,900.

The highest attendance for a league meeting of Rangers and Celtic was 118,567 at Ibrox in January 1939. In April 1969, a crowd of 132,874 watched the pair play in the Scottish Cup Final.

The Old Firm have been top flight ever-presents since league football began in Scotland in 1890. Rangers' lowest-ever league finish is 6th while Celtic's is 12th.

can feel the tension from the stands and what it means for the fans. That excites me as well.

"I have good memories of winning against them in the past and it would be great if we could do it again today.

"We haven't scored against Celtic this season and we know we need to do better today.

"Every goal is a good feeling but if it's against Celtic it's something special

"I would love to score but if we win I will be happy.

"This could be my last Old Firm game at Ibrox so I will be doing everything in my power to give the supporters something to shout about.

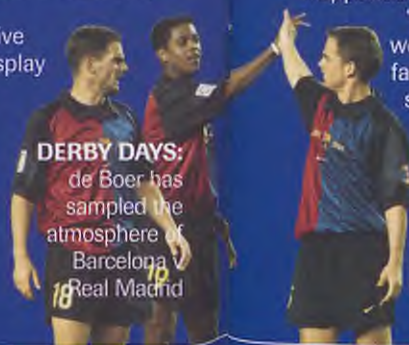
"We want to see smiles back on the faces of our fans."

## fastfact

Rangers' biggest victory in an official Old Firm league fixture was the 5-0 thrashing in September 1893. Their best Premier triumphs were the 5-1 wins of August 1988 and November 2000.

## fastfact

Despite recent results the Light Blues still hold the upper hand in Old Firm league encounters. Gers have won 105 matches to Celtic's 85 and there have been 80 draws.



**DERBY DAYS:** de Boer has sampled the atmosphere of Barcelona v Real Madrid



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## OLD FIRM FLASHBACK

# GERERS TO THE FOUR AS THEY CRUSH CELTS

### Dominant display secures famous Old Firm victory for Rangers

**CLOSE your eyes and hit the rewind button in your mind to March 26, 2000.**

It was a pleasant spring day and Rangers set about demolishing Celtic to set up a second successive SPL crown for Dick Advocaat.

It was as close to perfection as you can imagine as the Parkhead men were taken apart by a Rangers side at the peak of their powers under the Little General.

Celtic were not only beaten, they were outfought, outplayed and ultimately outclassed.

Rangers were certainly favourites going into the game, having won at Celtic Park 18 days earlier when Rod Wallace scored the only goal of the game.

However, Advocaat had injury problems going into the match with Craig Moore and Tony Vidmar out and Arthur Numan struggling.

Celtic, under the management of

**“Celtic were not only beaten, they were outfought, outplayed and outclassed”**

BY GRAEME MACPHERSON

Kenny Dalglish following the dismissal of John Barnes, had been making some considerable noise about the outcome.

Swedish defender Johan Mjallby had insisted that Celtic would show they were the better side.

He was not just made to eat his words. He had them shoved down his throat as Hammer Time ensued at Ibrox.

Jorg Albertz scored after five minutes, Andrei Kanchelskis raced to score a second four minutes before half time, the Hammer struck again near the end then Giovanni van Bronckhorst finished it all off with a curling left foot shot from the edge of the box.

Cue Simply the Vest as Giovanni raced to take the adoration of the ecstatic Rangers supporters with his shirt pulled over his head.

**HOW THE VEST WAS WON** van Bronckhorst celebrates his sublime strike, while right, Albertz puts Gers into the lead, Kanchelskis scores Rangers second and team-mates congratulate Albertz on his second of the afternoon

It was a memorable day and Albertz loved every minute of it.

Albertz said: “We read the papers before the game that Celtic thought they were better and they were going to beat us.

“But we really weren’t bothered as we did our talking on the park.

“I remember reading that stuff and saying ‘We will prove you wrong’ and we definitely did.

“They also had their press conference in a pub trying to hype things up which they thought would work for them.

“We went about things in a different way and the whole team was up for it because we knew how important it was to win.



## THE STATS

**Rangers 4 Celtic 0**

Scorers: Albertz (4, 84), Kanchelskis (41), van Bronckhorst (87)

Attendance: 50,039

**RANGERS:** Klos, Reyna, Wilson, Amoroso, Numan; Kanchelskis, Ferguson, van Bronckhorst, Albertz; Wallace (Tugay 85), Dodds (McCann 64). **Not used:** Charbonnier, Nicholson, Pentilla.

**CELTIC:** Gould; Riseth, Mjallby, Boyd; McNamara, Petrov, Moravcik, Lambert (Burchill 71), Mahe (Tebily 7); Viduka, Johnston. **Not used:** Kerry, Berkovic, Healy.

**Referee:** Willie Young

“The first goal came about after a great set-up from Andrei Kanchelskis and I didn’t see Billy Dodds behind me. I thought he was a Celtic player so that’s why I muscled my way in.

“I desperately wanted to score against Celtic because I missed a penalty against them a few weeks earlier.

“So to get two goals in the game was very pleasing. It’s a happy memory from my time at Rangers.”

The match was also special for Kanchelskis, who had one of his best days in a Rangers strip.

After setting up the first goal he sprinted beat Olivier Tebily for pace and fired home.

It meant that he joined the small band of men who have scored in the Manchester, Merseyside and Glasgow derbies.

Kanchelskis said: “It was great because it completed a great set for me in terms of derby matches. I scored four times for United against City in Manchester and I also netted for Everton against Liverpool.

“The big derby in Britain is the Old Firm so it was great that I was able to score in that one too.”

The victory sent Rangers 15 points clear in the title race and the Championship trophy was definitely remaining at Ibrox.

Happy days indeed.

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# Quiz

Bored stiff at half-time? Help those minutes fly by with our test of your football knowledge...

## CLUES ON THE BLUES

1. What was the half-time score in this month's Old Firm Scottish Cup tie?
2. How many goals did Egil Ostenstad score during his time at Ibrox?
3. With which team did Zurab Khizanishvili's father win the European Cup Winners Cup in 1981?
4. Who was Rangers' top scorer in European competition this season?
5. Which Ibrox manager gave John Greig his league debut?

## OLD FIRM CLASSICS

1. Who's only Old Firm goal clinched the 2002 CIS Cup semi-final for Gers?
2. Which was the last team to win an Old Firm game by more than three goals?
3. Who netted Rangers' opener in the 3-3 draw at Parkhead last season?
4. What is Gers' best-ever victory in any Old Firm first team match, competitive or otherwise?
5. Who were the managers when the Old Firm played out a sensational 4-4 draw at Ibrox in 1986?

## GOING DUTCH

1. Where did Frank de

## ZURAB KHIZANISHVILI: see Clues on the Blues



Boer score his first goal for Gers?

2. Which 'Nine-in-a-row' Ibrox hero went on to star for Ajax Amsterdam?
3. Who scored PSV Eindhoven's goal when they lost 4-1 at Ibrox in 1999?
4. What is the nickname of the Dutch national team?
5. Gers met which team in Rotterdam's Eneco Stadium in January 2000?

## TV HEAVEN

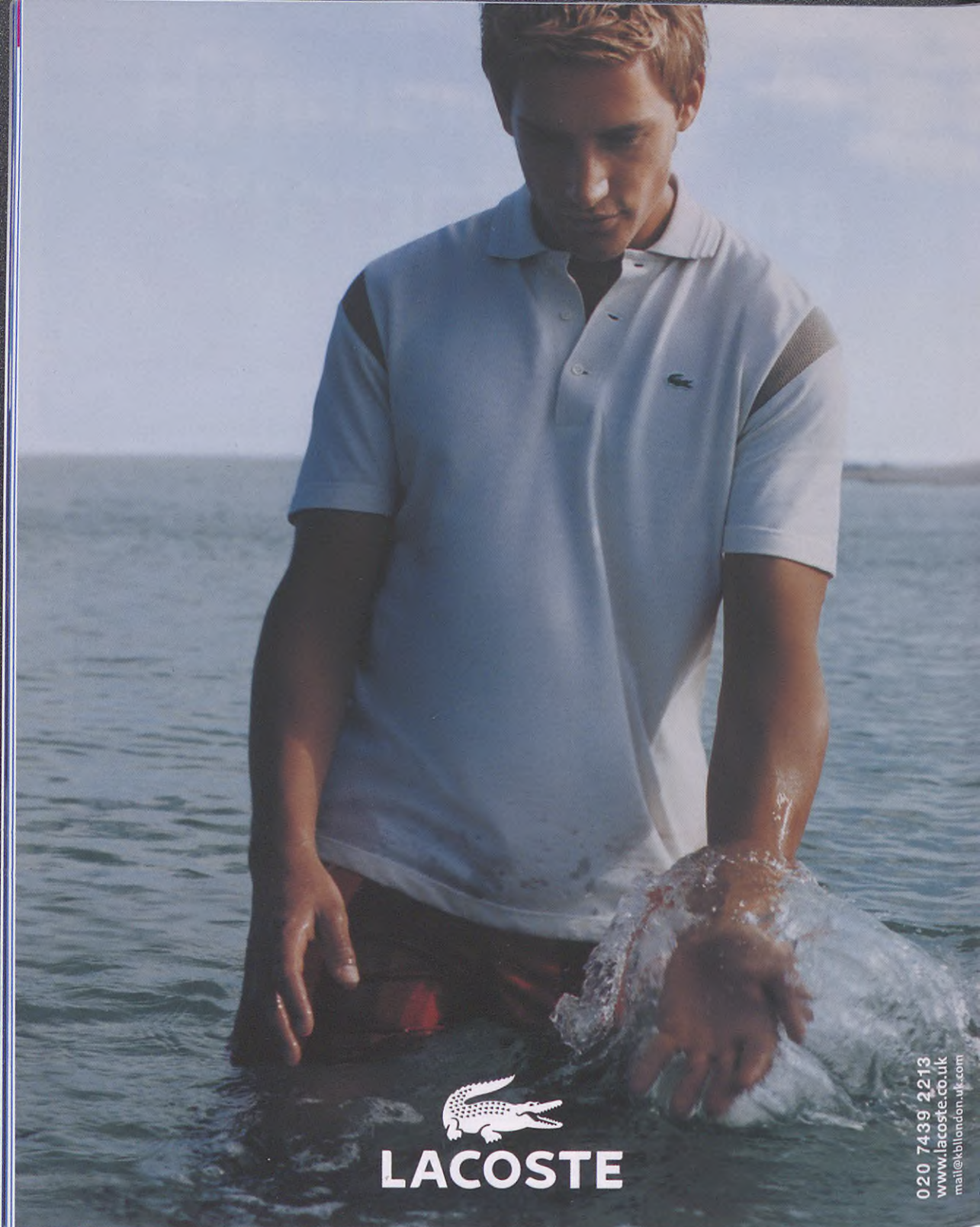
1. In April 1990 Rangers and Celtic became the first Scottish Premier

teams to be screened live on British satellite TV. What was the result?

2. Name the former football presenter who kept goal for the Arsenal side which won 2-1 at Ibrox in August 1973?
3. Which BBC football commentator is a qualified dentist?
4. What was the only match of Rangers' victorious 1971-72 European Cup Winners' Cup campaign to be screened live?
5. Which TV commentator came up with the legendary line "They think it's all over... it is now!"?

## Answers

- CLUES ON THE BLUES**  
1. 0-0. 2. Two. 3. Dynamo Tbilisi. 4. Peter Lovenkrands. 5. Scott Symon
- OLD FIRM CLASSICS**  
1. Bert Konterman. 2. Rangers (5-1 in Nov 2000). 3. Mikel Arteta. 4. 8-1 in 1943. 5. Jock Wallace and Davie Hay.
- GOING DUTCH**  
1. Pittodrie. 2. Brian Laudrup. 3. Ruud van Nistelrooy. 4. The Orange. 5. Sparta Rotterdam
- TV HEAVEN**  
1. 3-0 to Gers. 2. Bob Wilson. 3. Barry Davies. 4. The semi-final second leg against Bayern Munich at Ibrox. 5. Kenneth Wolstenholme



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\* Offer excludes games against Aberdeen and Celtic. Tickets will be for the family section and are subject to availability.

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**IT'S been one to forget in the blue corner as far as Old Firm games are concerned this season and our record of played three, lost three does not make enjoyable reading.**

However, it is never too late to get started!

Today sees the fourth meeting of the Big Two and it could well be the last time that some of our stars play in an Old Firm game in front of the home support.

We already know Henning Berg will leave Rangers in the summer, as he has made it clear from the outset that he would be retire from playing when his one-year contract expired.

Similarly, it could be a last hurrah for Michael Mols, who will also leave in the summer after five years with the Club. His time with the Light Blues could have been so different had it not been for that collision with Oliver Kahn.

The chances are that the de Boer twins will be heading off too, so it will be their last chance to score a win against our great rivals on home soil.

Of course there is one more man who will play in this fixture at Ibrox for the last time – and thank God for that!

Henrik Larsson is leaving Celtic in the summer and his departure is long overdue.

No more will the Swede haunt us with images of dancing past Bert Kontermann to score. He will soon be spoken of in the past tense, and aren't we Bears just so happy about that?

I had often wondered what it must have been like for the Hoops support during the days of Super Ally reigning supreme.

They must have cringed every time they saw McCoist on the Rangers team sheet because they knew there was every chance he would stick the ball into the Celtic net.

I have to say, with the damage

# Memories of nearly departed

## END OF ERA AT IBROX TODAY



**"It would certainly sadden me if Ronald leaves Rangers at the end of the season"**

that Larsson has inflicted on us over the years I now have some idea of what they must have gone through.

The thought of no "King of Kings" for the Hoops is a killer for them and the look on the faces of

most Celtic supporters these days reminds me of when the mulleted and skinny Charlie Nicholas left Celtic Park behind to seek riches and medals galore at Highbury with Arsenal.

We were happy to see him go too because he was prone to causing us a few problems, but it has to be said that we didn't have the best of teams in the early 1980s.

I shouldn't revel in the pain of the Celts losing their star man as there is every chance that Ronald de Boer will bid a fond farewell at the end of the season. I know this will not sadden all Rangers supporters, but it certainly saddens me.

Yes, Ronald has struggled with injury on more than one occasion since he arrived from Barcelona in 2000, but there is no denying he is a class act. He has also scored a few crucial goals in his time here – and fortunately a couple of them were against the Hoops.

Two of the three he snatched against Celtic last season on the way to a glorious treble really stick out.

The first was a fantastic header at Celtic Park only seconds after Celtic went 2-1 up.



## "I wonder if the Celtic support cringed when they saw Super Ally on the teamsheet. Larsson had a similar effect on us"

Rob McLean and Sandy Clark were still waxing lyrical about Celtic taking the lead when McLean uttered the immortal words "and what can Rangers do about this situation... there's Ronald de Boer!"

The celebrations from the Dutchman were also a memory to treasure as he high fived probably the entire front row of the Rangers support.

The whole thing was



### GOODBYE GLASGOW:

Gers fans will be glad to see the back of Larsson

made even better watching television replays of the goal, because the Hoops fans were still celebrating Larsson scoring for them as Ronald buried the header straight into the net.

The

astonished looks on their faces told it all.

The other goal that brings back sweet memories was the second in the vital 3-2 win against the Celts at Ibrox in December 2002.

With the game poised at 1-1 after Craig Moore equalised a 30 second

opener from Chris Sutton, Neil McCann sent in a vicious cross from the left that de Boer met, as sweet as a nut, and rammed it perfectly into the roof of the net.

If this is to be the Dutchman's last Old Firm game at Ibrox, let's hope it has a similar score to his first one at the stadium – we enjoyed a 5-1 win that day, with Ronald scoring the third!

Yes, it could be a day of fond farewells all round.

Ideally, it will be the day we say good riddance to our recent run of poor results against our old rivals, and secure a victory that would provide a silver lining to a season that has so far been shrouded by clouds.

*\*The views on this page are not necessarily those of Rangers Football Club*

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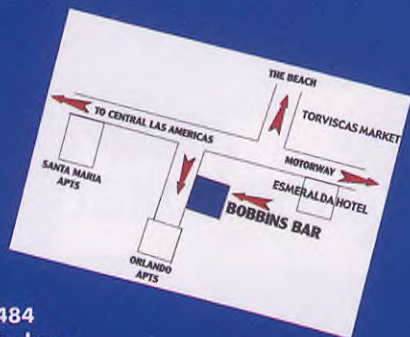
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BY GRAEME MACPHERSON

**CELTIC put their unbeaten league record on the line again this afternoon against a Rangers side desperate to clinch their first Old Firm league victory since December 2002.**

While the outcome of today's match may matter little in deciding the destination of the championship, for Alex McLeish and his squad it is the perfect chance to restore some pride and continue rebuilding for next season.

Rangers have yet to score against Celtic this season and after a pair of 1-0 defeats home and away and a 3-0 reverse at Celtic Park on January 3, the onus is on McLeish's men to stop the sequence and put an end to Celtic's stranglehold on the fixture.

Without a victory over Martin O'Neill's side since last season's CIS Cup final, today's clash would be an ideal time to end that run.

The Light Blues can count themselves unfortunate to have lost the last time the sides clashed at Ibrox on October 4, with Zurab Khizanishvili diverting a wayward John Hartson effort past Klos.

Further encouragement was taken during the recent Scottish Cup tie at Celtic Park, when the Light Blues battled gamely and had sufficient chances to force a replay at the very least.

McLeish described that cup defeat at Celtic Park as "a watershed" and since then Egil Ostenstad has moved on and others will join him at the exit door.

Their imminent departure has given the likes of young Scots Gavin Rae, Steven Thompson, Stephen Hughes, Mo Ross, Alan Hutton and Chris Burke the chance

**"Today is a chance to continue the rebuilding for next season"**

# Gers looking to the future

## EYE ON THE BALL:

Michael Mols closes in on Stanislav Varga in last October's Old Firm clash



to shine in recent weeks and they have responded with performances rich in commitment and no little skill over the past few games.

A victory over Celtic would further enhance their burgeoning reputations and help to cement their futures at the club.

Celtic, however, remain the in-form side in Scotland and have yet to taste defeat in the league this season.

One thing that looks certain is this will almost certainly be Henrik Larsson's final appearance at Ibrox.

The Swede should play against the Light Blues for the 29th time

today and will be looking to add to the 14 goals scored in that spell.

Rangers fans will not be sad to see him leave in the summer.

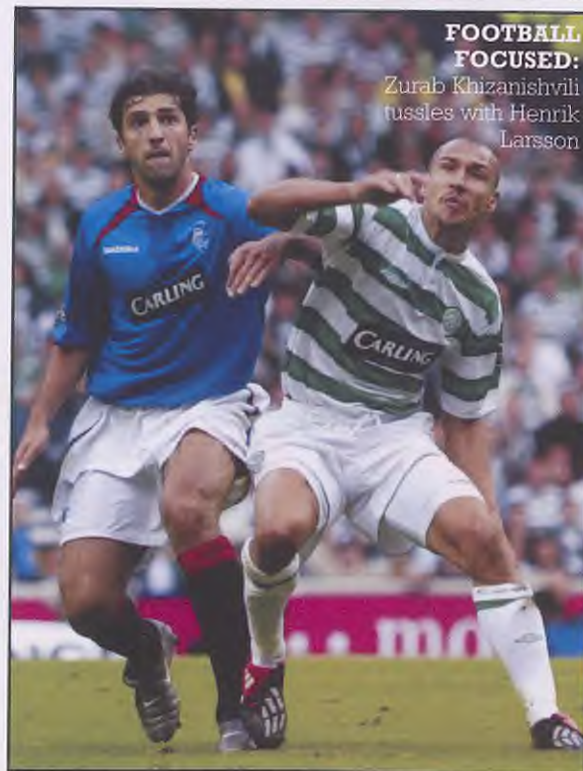
Here is the lowdown on the Celtic squad:

## RAB DOUGLAS

Unlike Rangers, Celtic have struggled to find a consistent performer between the sticks of late. Douglas should return in goal today after suspension kept him out of the Barcelona match.

## STANISLAV VARGA

Slovakian defender who signed from Sunderland at the end of last season. Made his debut in Celtic's Scottish Cup exit to Inverness Caley a year ago and has become a regular in the side this term.



**FOOTBALL  
FOCUSED:**

Zurab Khizanishvili  
tussles with Henrik  
Larsson



**WING KING**

Peter  
Lovénkrands  
gets the better  
of Didier  
Agathe



**JACKIE McNAMARA**

Unsung hero at the back, the Scotland internationalist has been at Celtic Park for almost nine years. Versatile player who can feature anywhere in the back line.

**BOBO BALDE**

Towering defender should return to the side after missing out on Celtic's match in the Nou Camp. Helped Guinea to the quarter-final of this year's African Nations Cup.

**JOHAN MJALLBY**

Swedish defender has missed most of this season through injury but returned last week.

**DIDIER AGATHE**

Stolen from Hibs for £50,000 in 2000 and has shown himself to be worth every penny. Lightning pace although his crosses aren't always the most accurate.

**PAUL LAMBERT**

The Scotland captain started a

glittering career by winning the Scottish Cup with St Mirren aged 17 before moving to Motherwell and then Dortmund where he gained a Champions League medal. Has been in and out the side this season and rumours abound that he may leave the club in the summer.

**NEIL LENNON**

Northern Irish midfielder who previously played under O'Neill at Leicester City. Was sent off in last season's CIS Cup final defeat by Rangers.

**ALAN THOMPSON**

The Geordie midfielder has been in fine form this season but it hasn't been enough to win an England call-up.

**STILIAN PETROV**

Bulgarian international

who has become one of Celtic's most influential performers in midfield. Led his country to this summer's European Championships in Portugal.

**HENRIK LARSSON**

Celtic's most valuable player who will make his last appearance at Ibrox today before leaving at the end of the season.

**CHRIS SUTTON**

Invoked the wrath of both Rangers and Dunfermline fans by claiming that the Pars "laid down" to McLeish's men in the final match of last season. Has struggled with injury in recent weeks.

**OTHERS WHO MAY  
FEATURE INCLUDE:**

Joos Valgaeren, Momo Sylla, John Kennedy, Liam Miller, Craig Beattie, Stephen McManus and Ross Wallace





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**THE Rangers Charity Foundation's new pin badge, which highlights Rangers' Guinness Book of World Records effort by being the first team to win 50 titles, has been selling like hotcakes in the last couple of months.**



But there are still plenty left for all Rangers fans who want to signify the amazing accomplishment the team made last season and to also support charity.

Fans can own a piece of this great triumph by wearing the new pin badge, which are available for a £1 donation.

There's no better time to show your support of the team and of charity than at an Old Firm match, so today, volunteer representatives from *The Rangers Charity*

*Foundation* will be making these sensational badges available in and around the world famous stadium.

Proceeds received from the new badge, which has been modelled on the Rangers Charity Foundation's "charitable scarf" design from last year, will go to the *Rangers Charity Foundation* and its three nominated charities this season: *Alzheimer Scotland*, *The Prince & Princess of Wales Hospice* and *The Variety Club of Scotland*.

Alternatively, if you can't make it to the match this weekend but still want to show your support, then the badges are also available to buy in all Rangers Stores around the UK.

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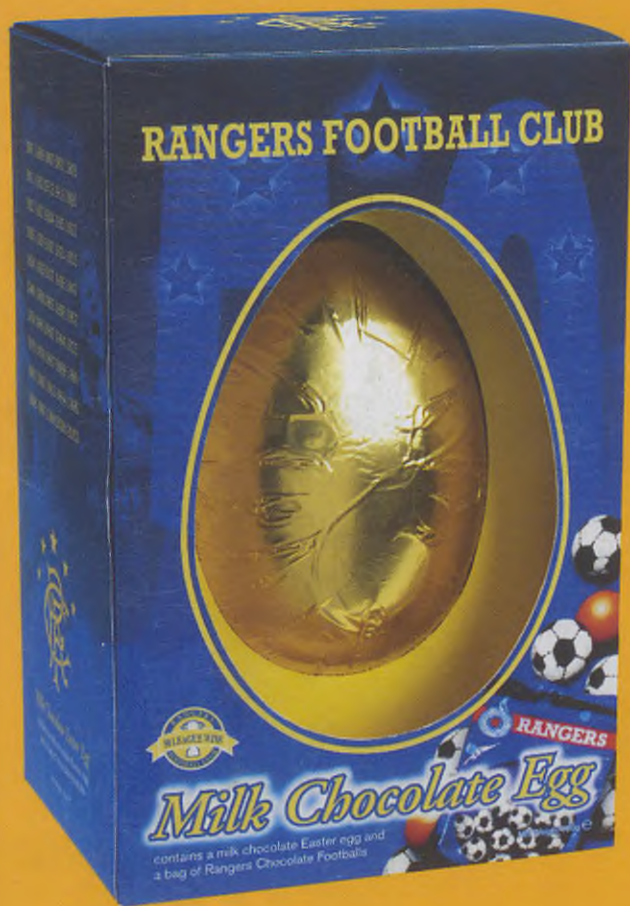


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Monday, March 29, 2004

## Kid Kennedy's Scots call

By Hugh Keevins

CELTIC defender John Kennedy has capped a sensational week by winning a call-up to the Scotland squad to face Romania.

Kennedy was outstanding as Celtic sent Barcelona crashing out of the UEFA Cup last Thursday and then

yesterday helped seal a 2-1 win over Rangers at Ibrox.

And his fine form has won him recognition from Berti Vogts, who has also called in ex-Celt Stephen Crainey and Coventry keeper Scott

Shearer to his squad. Manchester United's Darren Fletcher is set to pull out after suffering a groin injury in the 1-1 draw with Arsenal.

Rangers kid Alan Hutton has been drafted into the Under-21 squad after another strong showing yesterday.



CLAPPY DAYS: O'Neill

## Martin: My tired stars are amazing

By Neil Cameron

**MARTIN O'NEILL** last night admitted his weary Celtic stars continue to astound him after they chalked up their record-breaking fifth Old Firm win a row.

Before yesterday's 2-1 win at Ibrox the manager was worried about how his players would respond after their heroics in Barcelona.

But the champions-elect were worthy winners, despite being put under late pressure by Rangers - which O'Neill put down partly to the UEFA Cup clash on Thursday.

This is the first time Celtic have won five straight league games against their bitter rivals.

And they can wrap up the SPL title next weekend if they beat Hearts and Rangers fail to win at Motherwell.

O'Neill said: "I did worry beforehand about them being weary and thought we would have to weather a heavy storm early on.

"But I was delighted to get the first goal. After that Rangers came into the game and I was pleased to get in at half-time still a goal ahead.

"We scored the second and could have got a third or fourth but Stefan Klos made a great save and at that stage we looked reasonably comfortable, although I never thought

Turn to Page 42

# I FEAR WE'LL NEVER BEAT THESE CELTS



**HIGH FLYER:** Alan Thompson enjoys his goal

## Gers star admits Bhoys are the strongest he's ever seen

By David McCarthy

**SHATTERED** Steven Thompson last night admitted Rangers might not beat Celtic again until Martin O'Neill's all-conquering current team breaks up.

Celtic clocked up a club record fifth straight league win over their fiercest foes yesterday to move an incredible 19 points

clear. Ibrox substitute Thompson's late goal gave Rangers hope of rescuing a point after goals from Henrik Larsson and Alan Thompson had Celtic cruising.

But the equaliser failed to come and Rangers - who also lost in the Scottish Cup to

Turn to Page 40



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# WE'RE ALL WIN



## Our terrific team spirit is secret of Celtic's success says star Sutton

**C**HRS SUTTON limped into the Ibrox press room and creaked into his seat as if he were a geriatric heading for the long walk rather than a top-class footballer going for a treble.

The Englishman looked spent from 180 minutes of football in the space of four days after being out for three weeks with an ankle injury. He had nothing left to give.

He and his Celtic team-mates had run themselves into the ground, chased every lost cause, threw themselves into tackles all over the pitch, were first to almost every ball and had enough about them to play some football when an Old Firm game allows.

**By Neil Cameron**

The difference between Celtic and Rangers is the Parkhead club's sheer bloody-minded will to win.

They almost expect to sweep aside any team they come across, be they Barcelona or Rangers at Ibrox.

Martin O'Neill's side had no right to look fresher and sharper than their rivals yesterday, yet for long spells they did. Again.

Sutton was the prime example. It was hardly his greatest hour and a half in a Celtic jersey but he was a constant thorn in Rangers' side.

He found reserves of energy to get up and down the park in a performance that epitomises this Celtic side.

Sutton admitted the spirit in the Celtic dressing room is an all-time high and it is something that comes from winning.

### Prepare

The bad news for Rangers and all the clubs that come up against this team is that their wonderful run shows no signs of stopping.

Some of O'Neill's players were running on empty by the end but they kept going to the final whistle as Rangers threw everything at them in a vain bid to salvage a point.

Sutton said: "It was good to come and win here, especially after Thursday."

"We didn't get off the plane until 4am on Friday so it has been hard."

"Team spirit is always good when you are winning but never quite as good when you're on a losing run and we are obviously on a high after going through to the UEFA Cup quarter-finals on Thursday."

"We always try to prepare ourselves for our games. It is what everybody at Celtic sets out to do and fortunately right now we are getting good results."

"I wouldn't say we expect to win going into the matches."

"The only thing we expect is to go into every game in the right manner and try our best

and hope things do come off. I'm a bit tired right now. I hadn't trained for three weeks and that has taken its toll."

"However, we all want to play in every game, especially the big matches like the Old Firm."

"This was another good win for us. We defended well and had some good chances as well."

Rangers' scorer Steven Thompson made the point that this Celtic team have been together for so long it is only natural they have hit the heights they have.

Sutton agreed but also paid tribute to youngsters such as David Marshall and John Kennedy, who have made such assured starts to their Celtic careers.

And while his strike partner Henrik Larsson has played more games and run more miles than anyone this season, Sutton now wants to see the Swede rested.

Sutton said: "Continuity is important but it is also good to see the young players coming through."

"From a personal point of view it is good to play beside the guys you know inside and out and play with them every week."

### Difference

"Henrik is lucky he is a natural athlete. I think it's fair to say there are players in our team who couldn't say that - and I include myself."

"He is fit, always works hard for the team and even when he looks as if he is having a quiet game he pops up and gets a goal for us."

"I don't know why we are on such a good run in Old Firm games. They are decided by certain instances in certain games. They make a difference."

"In this one we scored from our first free-kick. They had a few chances before half-time and David Marshall made a couple of good saves and a couple went wide of the target."

"Goals change games and at the moment everything is going well for us."

Celtic wrapped up the league a long time ago but even yesterday nobody at the club

HOOPS THERE GOES ANOTHER ONE: Alan Thompson celebrates his goal with Stilian Petrov, Henrik Larsson and Stephen Pearson

## Martin: My tired stars are amazing

### From Back Page

that would be possible. I knew tiredness would come into it. Rangers had to go for it and I felt those spurned chances could go against us.

"And I thought the game could turn in their favour if they got one back but thankfully that goal came

in the 82nd minute. These players have played a lot of games at a high tempo and now for the first time we will start to think about changing the side around for league games."

Celtic are enjoying one of the most dominant spells in Old Firm history and when O'Neill was asked why they seem to have so much

over their old rivals, he said: "We are a very fine side."

"The players get themselves prepared and up for every match. They have a great spirit, desire and will to keep going. They can play a bit as well."

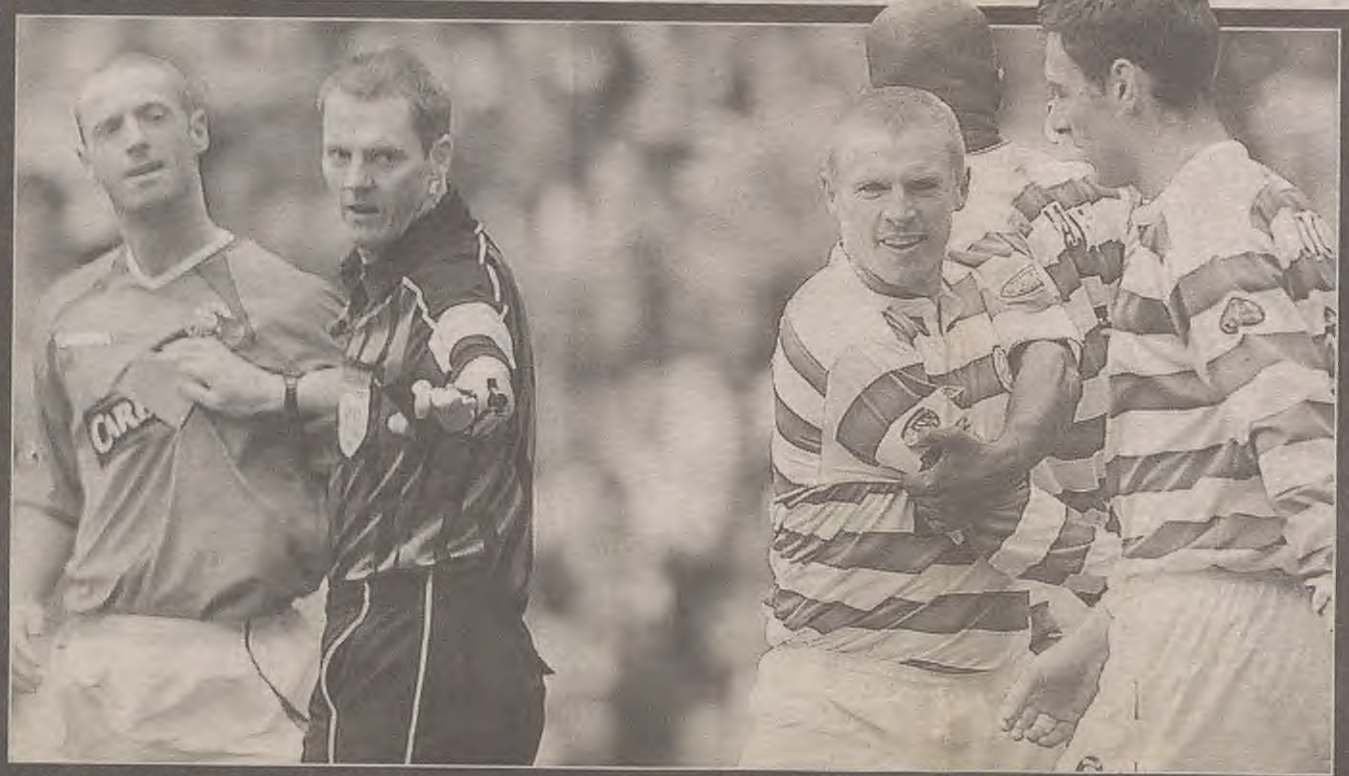
Keeper David Marshall grabbed the headlines again as he did last

Thursday against Barcelona. The 19-year-old made three great saves.

O'Neill had feared the hype after the Nou Camp would get to his player but he said: "There was a lot of pressure on him after Barcelona but not only did he survive it, he was exceptional."



# IT TOGETHER



GET AN OLD FIRM GRIP: Referee Kenny Clark steps in to separate Moore and Lennon after the pair had clashed at Ibrox

**THE plaudits will go to Henrik Larsson and Alan Thompson because they scored the goals that beat Rangers and moved Celtic to within touching distance of the Premier League title.**

Television made David Marshall man of the match because of saves from Stan Varga and Alan Hutton.

But my choice as the outstanding player at Ibrox yesterday would have to be Neil Lennon.

If I had to pick Scotland's Player of the Year it would be Jackie McNamara but Lennon was immense against Rangers.

This was a Celtic side who were out on their feet after their midweek exertions in the Nou Camp but the UEFA Cup didn't take so much out of them that they didn't have the legs for Rangers.

And most of that was down to Lennon's contribution in the middle of the park. He took the sting out of the game by getting his foot on the ball and giving the rest of his team time to breathe.

It was an unselfish performance that made a mockery of the claim that Lennon lacks fitness. He's supposed to be the wee, fat guy

## Livewire Lennon gives new legs to weary Hoops

**MURDO MACLEOD**

but his fitness levels are amazing.

Lenny was everywhere in Barcelona on Thursday night and he was plunged into an area of the park against Rangers that was busy with players like Stephen Hughes and Bob Malcolm.

I would like one of his critics to tell me when he did toil for fitness. He reads the game so well and he always gets there when the tackles have to be made.

When he was playing beside Paul Lambert in the middle of the park, Lennon could take one half of the field and Lambo could take the other half.

But now he takes responsibility for the whole domain.

He did have his moment of controversy when he clashed with Craig Moore but successful teams need that kind of

aggression - even if he does wind rival players up at the same time.

Martin O'Neill will have a job on his hands now if he wants to rest any of yesterday's team, even with Villarreal to come in the quarter-finals of the UEFA Cup.

Celtic can now win the title if they beat Hearts on Saturday and Rangers fail to win at Motherwell 24 hours later.

### Gloves

Nobody will want to miss the game against Hearts or the one that follows at home against Aberdeen because they will want to be part of the big day.

That includes young Marshall. His save from his own player, Varga, was the best of the lot at Ibrox and there is no doubt he is now holding the first-team gloves at Celtic Park. He's earned his right to attend the title-winning party.

It was good for Celtic that they had to go to Ibrox yesterday

after Barcelona because I can't think of any other team who would have inspired them to those heights.

There was none of the usual tempo to the game from Celtic but they have this winning mentality that can't be crushed. No player is ever left one on one with an opponent. Celtic hunt in packs.

There was a stage yesterday when it could have been three or 4-0 to Celtic if they had taken their chances - and if Stefan Klos hadn't produced an amazing save to prevent Henrik Larsson from extending their lead.

It's also a mystery why Rangers didn't produce Chris Burke earlier in the game. He could have nicked them a draw as the legs went from underneath the Celtic players in the second half.

But once again the strength of Celtic's mentality has beaten Rangers.



**BIG HAND:** Stefan Klos shakes hands with David Marshall

would claim it was an inevitable triumph.

There will be plenty of time to celebrate and the Parkhead players are now patiently biding their time before they get back the SPL trophy which has been residing at Ibrox this past year.

Sutton said: "Obviously we are in a strong position. The players now have to go on and win two more games. It's not over yet but it is a good position to be in." That's an understatement.

Celtic could yet win a unique treble and, incredibly, remain unbeaten in the league.

Sutton said: "I wouldn't like to say we won't get beaten. There are eight games left and we have just got to keep going."

"We will try to remain unbeaten but the chances are it will happen once, maybe twice."

Perhaps. But which club in the domestic game have the ability to achieve such a feat.

## Hotline

**ANTHONY HAGGERTY takes your calls**

**THE beach balls, flip-flops and sombreros were out in force once again as Celtic kept the party going in Govan to move within touching distance of the SPL crown.**

It was Celtic's fifth victory in a row over their Old Firm rivals and fourth of this season and Martin O'Neill could claim his third title in four seasons as early as next Sunday if Rangers drop any points against Motherwell.

And the Hoops fans lined up to heap praise on their manager and the side for giving them a week to remember.

But there was no shortage of Bears volunteering for the job as executioner of Rangers boss Alex McLeish.

First up in the green corner was **Thomas Trodden, Coatbridge**, who said: "Celtic must pull out all the stops to keep O'Neill in Paradise."

"To go to the Nou Camp and dump Barcelona out of Europe and then go to Ibrox and win says a hell of a lot for the way O'Neill has his side playing for him."

**John Stein, Wishaw**, said: "The last week watching Celtic has been magnificent. In years to come people will talk about the magnitude of what they achieved at the Nou Camp. To go to Ibrox on the back of that result and all but clinch the championship is all the sweeter."

**Brian Milesom, Renfrew**, said: "I'd like to congratulate everybody at Celtic for giving me one of the best weeks of my life supporting the Hoops."

The last few days will live with me forever and well done UEFA for insisting that Rab Douglas' ban stood. A star has been born in David Marshall."

**Billy Cairns, Torglen**, said: "Celtic once again got their tactics spot on. They were out on their feet at times but once they scored the second there was no way back for Rangers."

**Billy McDonald, Newton Mearns**, said: "It is high time that Rangers' shattered crest appeared in the newspapers just like Celtic's did a few years ago."

"Rangers are a club in crisis - 19 points behind Celtic, out of contention for everything and in huge debt."

**Archie McKennon, Airdrie**, had a pop at Ibrox defender

**To go to the Nou Camp and dump Barcelona out of Europe then go to Ibrox and win says a lot for O'Neill**

Quote of the week wins a bottle of **SCOTTISH LEADER**

Bob Malcolm. He said: "How can Bob Malcolm honestly say that Rangers are not all that far behind Celtic? On my calculator I make it 19 points and that is miles behind us."

In the blue corner, **Bruce Hill, Dumbarnton**, said: "Alex McLeish has to go now. How Stevie Thompson and Chris Burke were not playing from the start is beyond me."

"McLeish has had his chance. He just does not have what it takes to be Glasgow Rangers manager any more and we should be looking to appoint Terry Butcher as soon as possible."

**Tony Wright, Falkirk**, said: "Alex McLeish should do the decent thing and walk. Thompson and Burke should have been on from the start."

"That is no wins in five games against Celtic and that is a deplorable record."

**James Davidson, Pollok**, said: "The Rangers team were a shambles. Craig Moore is the worst Rangers captain as he and the manager cannot motivate the players any more."

"Peter Lovenkrands is an impostor and should be sold and we should offer Michael Ball for free along with him."

**Greg McAllister, Dundee**, reckoned whistler Kenny Clark was the man to blame for Rangers' defeat.

He said: "Clark was an absolute disgrace. The foul on Stilian Petrov that led to the first goal was never a free-kick."

**Ian Granger, Larkhall**, agreed. He said: "Kenny Clark never gave Rangers the benefit of a decision all day. It is hard enough to beat Celtic with 11 men on the park as it is but the man in black more or less handed O'Neill's men the SPL title."

**GARY RALSTON will take your calls today from 11am-noon on: 0131 624 6000**



# ECKSCUSES ECKSCUSES

**A**LEX McLEISH'S day started badly when news of Sven Goran Eriksson's new contract filtered through. That meant there was one less job out there for Martin O'Neill to be handed.

The Rangers manager must be praying for the Irishman to develop itchy feet because as long as they are planted firmly under his Parkhead desk, McLeish is destined to play second fiddle.

And history will tell him few Old Firm managers are allowed that luxury for too long.

The facts speak for themselves. Celtic have won the last five league meetings between the clubs and have dropped just four points in 30 SPL games this term.

That is phenomenal and even if Rangers had been playing exceptionally well, they'd still be gasping in their rivals' wake this term.

More than that, the sight of Celtic fans celebrating European success with sombreros and beach balls has become almost commonplace at Ibrox and that to Rangers supporters is unacceptable.

## Ridiculous

McLeish needs to find an answer but couldn't yesterday, even when Celtic arrived with oxygen tanks in their hampers after the exertions in Barcelona in midweek.

That Rangers lost two ridiculous goals is irrelevant. Those players involved - Craig Moore and Michael Ball in the first instance and Zurab Khizanishvili in the second - didn't do their jobs so bad luck can't be blamed.

Just as there is no point in McLeish claiming Lady Luck turned her back at the other end. She didn't - David Marshall did his job magnificently, so fortune didn't play a part.

What might have helped was if the Rangers manager had played Chris Burke from the outset - or at

## Gers boss blames defeat on missed chances and poor defending - truth is he picked wrong team



**UP IN ARMS:** McLeish tries hard to lift his players while counterpart O'Neill is a picture of calm

By David McCarthy

d.mccarthy@dailyrecord.co.uk

least from the interval. Celtic had John Kennedy out of position at left-back and still shattered from the Nou Camp.

Surely Rangers should have had Burke running at him, twisting and turning him for more than the last half-hour.

McLeish insisted, however, that he got his team selection right. Sorry, a look at the scoreline tells you he didn't.

He said: "We created three chances in the first half. It's arguable that we may have made

more with Burke on. It's difficult to second-guess Celtic's team and we've played well in the last two games although I accept Celtic are on another level.

"It's difficult to get it 100 per cent right but we've made three chances and I don't think Burke would have stopped the set-piece goal.

"But with the contribution he gave us when he came on we might have created more opportunities.

"But I don't think I was wrong in my choice of selection."

McLeish was right to be aggrieved at the loss of the goals and as a top-class defender in his playing days, he must be tearing his

hair out. He said: "The goals were a joke.

"The first one, Henrik is an excellent technician but he's got an absolute free header and you can't afford that so close to the goal.

"The second one was casual and slack. I said at half-time that Celtic were playing on our mistakes.

"It should have gone into Row Z and Row Z was mentioned at half-time.

"Unfortunately, Zurab has tried to play his way out of trouble and many times it works for you but when you play against teams at a higher level it can be difficult.

"But I am not criticising Zurab.

He's had an excellent season and hopefully he can learn from that."

While the Rangers boss cursed missed chances, he was honest enough to concede that in the minutes that followed Celtic's second goal his team was in danger of being swamped.

He added: "There was a five-minute spell in the second half when we looked as if we could lose a goal at every moment.

"Celtic had a couple of chances but overall it was a decent performance.

"A free-kick in the first half led to their goal and it has been the story against Celtic over the past three or four years.

"We need to get bigger players to cope with physical side and we have to score more goals.

"In the first 18 months we've had to score more than one goal to beat Celtic because they've invariably picked something up.

## Assume

"I'm not saying they've only beaten us with set-pieces but by and large they've scored the majority of their goals that way.

"We didn't get the breaks in front of goal and they had a couple of good saves from their young goalkeeper in the first half.

"Also, Peter Lovenkrands has missed what you would assume was a snip for a left-footer in that position just before half-time.

"The fact that we are not ruthless enough is an accusation that has been levelled at us for three or four years but Lady Luck was not on our side, although I feared the worst in the second half when Celtic had that wee spell.

"But we came back from that and got back in it with the Thompson goal and we tried to push it - but you've got to hand it to Celtic, they were strong despite their European exertions.

"They have got a real decent side there."

And a better than decent manager who has become the bane of McLeish's life.



**NOT AMUSED:** Ibrox steward

## Blues ball bursters guilty of beach of the peace

### TVWATCH

IT was a rollercoaster of a day, a nerve-shredder of a contest between a team who can climb any mountain and another being swept away by an avalanche.

Meanwhile, Stilian Petrov has happy feet and Stan Varga is a rock.

Paul Elliott said so about Petrov and, so as not to be outgunned in the metaphoric shoot-out, Rob Maclean was quick on the draw about Varga.

However, while the Sports-cene studio guest and the commentator were hatching metaphors, Rob's friend, Sandy Clark, was indulging in lip-reading.

While Alex McLeish was doing his Krakatoa routine in the technical area Clark said: "Keep it simple, I'm sure that's what he's saying."

Quite clearly what the Rangers boss did say was: "For f--- sake." My old auntie, who can see as far as a myopic bat, saw it.

I know she saw it for she said: "Oooh that's terrible, and him on telly and all."

She came over all wriggly nervous, like a spinster at a prison rodeo, so she did. But enough of this metaphor malarkey, or I'll be tying myself in knots.

I really wanted to start by saying Celtic have a lot of balls.

Actually, I mean the Celtic fans and, let's be honest about it, no supporters in the land have more balls than them.

Beach balls, I'm talking about, hundreds of them and judging by the number of fans wearing sombreros, one must assume they've been to Spain recently.

Anyhow, most of the balls ended up on the park, along with some life-belts, prior to kick-off.

Oddly enough, the Ibrox ground staff didn't take too kindly to it and they stabbed the wind out of them with pens and what looked like pointy keys.

I've got my serious head on now, so I've got to mention that Dougie Donnelly, the best anchorman in the world, might be angling for a rise.

Indeed, he must have pleased his BBC governors with: "Yet another big match live and free on the BBC."

A jibe at pay-as you go Setanta, who'll be raiding your piggy banks next season!

John Traynor

## says Ibrox hitman Tommo

year. It's completely different from the elation of last year."

Like his manager Alex McLeish, Tommo bemoaned the cheap nature of the two goals Rangers conceded.

He said: "Celtic are such a good team that you can't afford to give them a head start and that's what we did.

"We gave them two easy goals - again one from a set-piece which as we all know is their most dangerous asset - and we were caught dreaming at the other one.

"You saw Barcelona during the week and they couldn't break them down. Possibly it takes something a wee bit special to beat Celtic.

"We were confident and we started quite assertively but we just didn't clamp down on them and when you lose a goal as easily as we did and another one just into the second half you really are struggling to get back in the match.

"We were pushing them quite a lot in the last 15 minutes. Michael Ball had a good chance and we had one or

two other openings. It was nice to get Celtic on the back foot and it was a shame we had a mountain to climb after losing two sloppy goals.

"I was hoping to start today and I didn't so I came on trying to prove a point and get stuck in.

"Hopefully I can start the next Old Firm game but my main aim is to try to establish myself in the team, not as a substitute but as a first pick.

"If I keep scoring it makes it a lot easier for me to establish myself."



**AT LAST:** Thompson's header flies past Marshall