CHAPTER 1

KICK-OFF

Look straight ahead, don't catch anybody's eye. Fuck's sake, this is it. Stretch, bounce. Did I tie my laces tight enough? Don't smile, don't look nervous; don't give them anythin'. We cannae lose, not this game. Look at them, what are they thinking? Just concentrate, remember whit you've been told and win the first tackle, win it hard, no prisoners, no' the day. We need to win this game. And be calm, don't be gettin' caught up in anything. That ref'll be all over us, he gives nothin' away. And watch for him comin' infield, remember that, when he lines up to shoot; you've got to close him down. If he gets a clean shot away in this game, the gaffer will be fuckin' raging. Come on, you've got to be up for this today, in their faces, right-a-fuckin' way. And for Christ's sake don't be caught ball-watching, because he's good in the air, and he'll fuckin' have you.

Jesus, when's this fuckin' referee leading us out. Come on. Don't be intimidated, play your game. That's why you're in the team, because you're good enough. You can do it out there. Keep your cool, don't get dragged into anything. Be smart. And don't do anything stupid. The gaffer said to keep it simple, and he means it. No fancy shit today. Do your job. That's all you need to do out there. Fuck's sake, bloody palms are sweating and everything. Come on.

Right, out the tunnel now. Here we go. Into that fuckin' noise. Jesus. Jesus. Look at them all, fuckin' hell. That noise. Fuck me. Right, routine. Run and stretch. Run and stretch. Got to limber up. Just be

normal, do the usual stuff. Look at those fans, they're nuts. Maybe a wee scowl for them, just so they know I'm up for this, and they won't get to me. 'Right, here we go lads, this is it. Come on, we're up for this. Let's fuckin' do it. First ball. First tackle. Make it count.' Hurry up, ref, let's get it started. Come on.

Right we're in it. Nothing else matters but now. Where's the ball? I need that first touch. Wait for the first challenge, it's coming, it'll be a sore one. Take it. Don't show any sign of weakness. Get back up. 'Ref, keep an eye on that, will you? Fuck's sake. C'mon.' He's worried about me, that tackle was desperate, I've got his number. I need to make my mark, show I'm up for this. I'll not be pushed around; this is my game. Right, come on, let's get into this. Who's got the ball? Who's behind me? For fuck's sake, keep the ball, pass the fucking thing, keep it simple. It's not the time for that kind of shit. Close him down. Chase. I need to get involved. Watch him, he's your man, stay on him, stay on him. He's yours. We can't lose, not this game.

Players who have experienced other renowned derby matches, like Barcelona v. Real Madrid, AC Milan v. Internazionale, or Everton v. Liverpool find a greater intensity in the Old Firm fixture, something frenzied and urgent. It is the most significant game, in terms of rivalry, in terms of the league, in terms of its meaning outwith football, that the players will ever encounter, but it is also endless. The two sides meet four times in the league, so the next meeting is never more than three months away, while the build-up and the aftermath make the games more exhausting and collapse the space between them. The games always seem pivotal to the title race (it was 1985 when a club outwith the Old Firm last won the Championship). They are always in the minds of supporters, who feel compelled to

tell players of their duty, their obligation to this huge following that they represent.

Foreign players who move to Celtic or Rangers find themselves thrust into the midst of this impassioned throng, and coming to terms with it either emboldens or diminishes them. When players sign for either of the two clubs, they are immediately confronted with the Old Firm game; journalists ask about it straight away – 'What do you know?', 'What have you been told?' – so that it becomes the fixture they are first aware of. Then teammates tell them that beating the other side is all that matters, and supporters say the same in every encounter: 'Just make sure you beat that lot, big man.' The game seems to take on an identity of its own, even before the depth of the religious rivalry is revealed. Many foreign players understand that an Old Firm match represents Protestant v. Catholic, but not the animosity that it generates. Many come from countries where religion remains more influential and routine, such as Italy, Spain and Algeria, and few are prepared for the antagonism that confronts them in Glasgow.

'The game is famous wherever you go in the world. People know about the rivalry,' said Brian Laudrup towards the end of his Rangers career. 'It's recognised everywhere. When I joined up with Denmark soon after joining Rangers, Peter Schmeichel took me aside and said: "I thought the pace of the game in England was quick – but we've got nothing on that [Old Firm game]". He reckoned even a Manchester United–Liverpool match couldn't compare and admitted he'd love to sample that kind of atmosphere. Basile Boli was another player who rated this fixture as highly as anything he'd witnessed. He stunned me once by saying one of our Old Firm clashes had been screened live in France and was voted the best game seen in France that year. I've played in front of 80,000 during an AC Milan–Inter Milan derby and the football has been exceptional. But nowhere beats this game for passion and commitment – on and off

the pitch. My brother Michael has also played in massive games in Italy and few matches can compare with the Barcelona–Real Madrid clash he's starred in. But even he admits his one regret is he never managed to experience an Old Firm game – it's the only thing he's envious about. If I learned one thing it's to avoid thinking about Old Firm games beforehand. Inexperienced players can let it eat away at them for weeks – they end up draining themselves of all their energy.'

Gary Lineker played in the North London derby between Arsenal and Tottenham, the Liverpool derby and the Barcelona v. Real Madrid fixture, and although he never featured in an Old Firm game, he attended several of them, which he later wrote about in his newspaper column. 'I can testify that there is nothing to compare with them in terms of their intensity and ferocity, not to mention the sheer noise,' Lineker said. 'And I thought North London derbies were fairly nasty. My view of the Celtic–Rangers games was from a position between both sets of supporters, many of whom were more interested in displaying their hostility towards one another than watching the game. It was the look of hatred on some faces which I will never forget. I found it quite disturbing. The Merseyside derby is a far cry from that. I remember travelling on the Everton team bus to the 1986 FA Cup final against Liverpool and seeing a father in a blue scarf carrying a son in a red one. It may not have been typical, but rivalries within the same family are not uncommon in Liverpool, which probably makes that derby unique. The Barca–Madrid derby is also exceptional inasmuch as the rivalry between fans does not manifest itself at the games since hardly any visiting supporters attend them. There are few things in football quite as bizarre as the hush which descends on a crowd of 120,000 following a goal by the visitors.'

Old Firm players spend less time at supporters' functions than in previous years, but interaction with the fans is a way of life in Glasgow,

because even for those living in the suburbs, everything gravitates to, and revolves around, the city centre. Players and fans mingle – in bars, restaurants, clubs, even on golf courses and in high-end shops – while the Scots in the dressing room or the backroom staff make sure that newcomers, particularly foreigners, know what the supporters will expect and how they will express their views. Footballers are no different from the rest of society in that religion is less of a defining issue in their identity, and in many ways the macho atmosphere of the football dressing room offers little scope for the personal expression of a player's faith. As professionals, they are often conditioned to their surroundings, bringing with them a sense of self-preservation, and treating their time at a club as an assignment. 'If you're a Catholic and you play for Rangers, then you're a Protestant,' said Fernando Ricksen, the Dutchman who played for Rangers. 'If you can't handle that, if you're really a Catholic and you feel too much about it, you don't come to Rangers. You stay away. You'd better go to the other side [Celtic] or there will be a lot of problems for you.'

It is this sense of the way that the two clubs exist in absolute opposition to each other that intensifies the Old Firm derby match. Jimmy Nicholl, who played for Manchester United, Rangers and Northern Ireland, once characterised the manic nature of the fixture by recalling a standing ovation he received for winning a throw-in. Ray Wilkins, the former England international, remembered being told to 'take his football head off' for the game, and not even think about trying to play any slow, thoughtful passes.

'My plan was always to try and set the tone in an Old Firm game, you need to let the other side know what you're all about early on,' said Barry Ferguson of his approach to the fixture. 'Whether it's an early shot on goal, a good attacking move or even a crunching tackle, you need to stamp authority on the game. "We are here, we are right up for this, let's be having it." The mental side of an Old Firm game

is crucial. You need to try and find any kind of edge. Who has the hunger; who wants it most; who is up for it? You could look around the pitch early on in an Old Firm game and see who was up for it, and who wasn't.'

In playing the game, when it feels as though so much is at stake and the very atmosphere itself is volatile and unnerving, the challenge is often just to remain calm. Ricksen was substituted twenty-two minutes into his Old Firm derby at Celtic Park (which the home side eventually won 6–2) after being terrorised by Bobby Petta, the Dutch left winger. Ricksen later admitted that he had not been prepared for the intensity of the occasion, and teammates spoke of him sitting in the dressing room afterwards looking ashen-faced. It is a fixture in which the crowd, and the players, seem forever on the verge of fury. 'These particular ninety minutes have a habit of throwing up the unexpected – like the day Stefan Klos and I squared up to each other,' recalled Paul Lambert, the Scotland international midfielder, of his experiences playing for Celtic. 'I mean we are good friends from our time at [Borussia] Dortmund together. There was a penalty claim for Celtic and Stefan wasn't for giving us the ball, so we had a wee go and squared up to each other. It's crazy, absolutely stupid behaving like that, but in these games you just get caught up in it.'

It is fear that drives performances in an Old Firm game: the terror of losing, of making a critical mistake, of becoming a scapegoat. Win this match and for a time everything will be calm and untroubled, but lose it and it feels like an act of betrayal. Rangers and Celtic players are surrounded by the communities that look to the two clubs for their sense of identity. The population of Greater Glasgow (the city and its immediate surroundings) is almost 1.8m people, yet the 60,000-seat Celtic Park, and 51,000-seat Ibrox Stadium can be full for even the most mundane of fixtures, with support for the two clubs spreading beyond into the west of Scotland and even out across the rest of the country. So much is bound up in the notion of being

a Celtic or Rangers supporter that it becomes a form of self-definition: you are one or the other, with us or against us. Old Firm players feel a responsibility that is informed by their team's vast communities and their values, their obligations, their prejudices, so that the derby match becomes a test of them as footballers, but also as individuals; they feel duty bound to defeat the other side, and not let the supporters down.

Glasgow is such a small, self-contained city that there is no respite. In the affluent suburbs where players tend to live, there is no seclusion and they are surrounded by as many Old Firm fans as they are when they head into the city centre for a night out. The sense is of being constantly enclosed, a suffocating feeling that is exacerbated by the insatiable media attention. For the Scottish players who have grown up immersed in the rivalry, there is an instinctive understanding of how the antagonisms between the two sets of supporters are expressed, but it is also personalised by the friends and family members who are part of these communities. In some ways, it feels more intimate and more vital because of that, particularly if they grew up supporting one side or the other themselves. Then, the tension before Old Firm games can feel even more febrile.

Strong characters thrive on the pressure. Glasgow is an aggressive place, hard and spiky, with an attitude of feisty self-assurance, but also a contempt for meekness; people have either grown up in hard, often violent surroundings that have brutalised their spirit, or they are aware of this harsh environment because it exists next to them. And everything seems to revolve around the fortunes of the city's two major football teams. 'You wake up in the morning and you think about Celtic, you go training and you think about Celtic, you pick up a paper and you read about Celtic, you walk down the street and people with Celtic tops are calling out and you think about Celtic, and then you go home to sleep and you dream about Celtic, before you wake up and start all over again, thinking always about

Celtic,' said Neil Lennon at the end of his playing career at the club. 'You think about the game coming up, and every game is a big game, every game is a "must-win" for Celtic. I have had that pressure for nearly seven years and I'll tell you, I've loved it all. It has been a really intense time in my life and it has been truly fulfilling and rewarding.'

Peter Grant played in fifty Old Firm games for Celtic, and when the team lost 5–1 to Rangers at Ibrox in 1988, he was so ashamed that he did not leave his house for four days except to go to training and, once, to visit the chapel. 'Celtic consumed me as a player. I loved being part of Celtic, but whether I enjoyed it is a different question,' he later reflected on his fifteen years at Parkhead. 'The intensity of this club, going straight from being a fan to playing for Celtic, was huge. Both my grandfathers ran Celtic supporters' buses and the club was all I knew.'

To players who have grown up supporting either of the two sides, the matches are more personal; they are experienced both as a fan and as a participant. Ally McCoist once remarked that there were some Old Firm games that made him feel like lying down in a darkened room afterwards, and the sense is always of trying to survive them. A win is not so much enjoyed as treated as a source of relief, while a defeat becomes a burden. Billy Dodds, the former Rangers striker, played at Celtic Park when the visitors lost 6–2, and remembered the journey back to Ibrox as being desolate. 'The silence on the bus was deafening,' he later revealed. 'No one dared to speak. Suddenly, I looked up and glanced out of the window. Hundreds of heartbroken Rangers fans were lining the streets. Each one had his arms wide open as if to ask, "What the fuck happened, lads?" I'd never been so embarrassed in all my life. I couldn't shake the feeling we'd let them all down. That feeling stayed with me for weeks. The Old Firm match gets inside your head, your heart, and doesn't let go.'

There's no time to breathe here, it just doesn't stop. Christ, I wish somebody would go down injured or something, just to get a minute's peace. I need a drink of water, my mouth is dry. Where's the ball? Where's that guy? And what's he shouting? I can't hear a bloody word he's saying. I need to get into this match, show what I can do, show that I can play in these games. Christ, it's frantic. 'Feet, feet, play it to feet. For fuck's sake, how am I supposed to chase that down? Hey, play it to my fucking feet will you?' Fucking idiot. I need a chance, just one, I'll get at this defender, either skin him or he'll bring me down. C'mon, get me on the ball, get it over this way. I fucking hate them and their fans, they give out nothing but abuse. Bastards. I'll show them. Right, past him, and . . . nobody there. Not one fucker in the right place in the box. That was a great ball in, what chance do you have? Next time.

On 12 May 1989, Maurice Johnston posed for pictures at Parkhead, clutching a green-and-white hooped jersey and standing next to Billy McNeill, the Celtic manager. 'I didn't want to leave Celtic [in 1987, when he joined Nantes], and I don't intend to now', Johnston said. 'There was some rubbish about me wanting to join Manchester United, but it never entered my head to play for any other club. In fact, there is no other British club I could play for apart from Celtic.' At twenty-six, and approaching the peak of his career, the striker wanted to return to Celtic Park, where he had first established himself as a quick-witted, streetwise goal-scorer, and something of a playboy. With his cocksure, insouciant attitude and his dyed blond hair, Johnston was a charismatic footballer but also an arch finisher. In France, his ability had been refined (he was always a hard trainer, which made up for his fondness for enjoying the nightlife), so that his movement

and appreciation of the geometry of the game were sharpened. A deal was agreed between Johnston and the club, with the player signing paperwork and Celtic making a £400,000 down-payment on a reported £1.2m transfer fee (Johnston also secretly joined the Celtic players on the team bus to a game at St Mirren before the season ended). Then on 10 July 1989, Johnston signed for Rangers.

The move was typical of Graeme Souness, the Ibrox manager: brash, confrontational, audacious and shrewd. From the moment he arrived at the club in the summer of 1986, Souness wanted to end the unofficial policy of not signing Catholics on a moral level – his wife and children were Catholic – but also because it seemed to him absurd that such an outdated practice could be allowed to hold the team back. To him, it was a measure of the club's attitude and stature, and so a reflection of his management, that they sought to sign the very best players, however much they cost, and regardless of their background. It was an attitude he shared with David Murray, the Edinburgh businessman who bought Rangers in 1988, having been made aware of the club's availability by his friend, Souness. As with the majority of his decisions at Ibrox, the Rangers manager wanted to be bold, to make a statement of his intent, but also of his own sophistication and single-mindedness. He was desperate for Terry Butcher, the first of his keynote signings, to turn out to be Catholic, but instead had to rely on his status as England captain to make an impact on Scottish football and beyond. Souness later sounded out players like Ian Rush, John Sheridan, John Collins and Ray Houghton about becoming a high-profile Catholic signing at Ibrox, to no avail, with some unwilling to provoke the ire of the Catholic community in Glasgow by joining Rangers. Then he learned of Johnston's desire to return to Scotland, and sought out the striker's agent, Bill McMurdo.

There remain some ambiguities about how the move unfolded, but Celtic were adamant that Johnston was effectively their player

(a stance later supported by Fifa), even though he backed out of the agreement. Once Celtic began to realise that the player wasn't committed to the original transfer, McNeill confronted him while he was staying at the Marine Hotel in Troon with the Scotland squad. Andy Roxburgh, the national team's manager, was reluctant to disrupt the squad's preparations, but McNeill was not to be denied. 'Andy, if you don't let me talk to him, I'll make sure he can't play for you or anybody. If he wants to fuck me about, I'll fuck him about.' Once Roxburgh relented, McNeill stormed into the player's room and angrily accused Johnston of betraying him and the club. 'You mess me about and I'll fight you all the way,' McNeill said. 'I'll make sure you never fucking play again.'

The Celtic manager was so furious that he urged the board of directors to pay the rest of the transfer fee owed to Nantes, so that they would then own his registration and could force him out of the game. By now, Johnston was negotiating with Rangers, and although Souness claims no contact was made until after the Celtic deal fell through, both Butcher and Ally McCoist, Johnston's international room-mate, heard hints from the striker that he was considering a move to Ibrox – Johnston used to playfully say to McCoist that, 'Graeme Souness has some house, hasn't he? It's brilliant inside.' Money was a motivation, since Rangers were financially stronger than their Old Firm rivals, having redeveloped their stadium some years before clubs had been compelled by the Taylor Report that followed the Hillsborough disaster to spend the resources to make them all-seater; but so, too, was Johnston's chutzpah. Despite growing up a Celtic fan, and having understood his role as an idol for the Celtic support but also as a hate figure for Rangers fans – he crossed himself after being sent-off in an Old Firm game – the opportunity to be so brazen and heedless stirred him.

Souness is a charismatic figure, conceited but so self-assured that he appealed to Johnston's unabashed nature. Yet there was still an

element of doubt in the striker's mind, a nagging uncertainty that prompted him to flee back to France and refuse to answer his phone for several days. It was not so much that he needed to be persuaded by Souness to make the move, but more that he had to take the time to come to terms with the enormity of what it would mean to turn his back on his former club and then sign for their oldest, fiercest rivals. If there was ever a moment when the deal – which would represent one of the great and brazen acts of oneupmanship in the history of the Old Firm – might flounder, this was it. Sensing that a final push was required, Souness flew to Paris, met Johnston at a pavement cafe near Orly airport, and the deal was signed. The Rangers manager kept the pen that they used, knowing the historical significance of the contract, but also that this was the gravest blow he could strike. Souness swept aside years of tradition at Ibrox (something that reflected old mindsets from other industries, when Catholics were told not to apply for jobs), while at the same time wounding Celtic, who lost out on a striker who was at the peak of his game, and who was revered by the fans. It was a transfer that epitomised the way that Rangers were moving purposefully and ambitiously into football's commercial age while their rivals dithered.

'Hurting Celtic was not the drive behind the deal. But yes, I knew it would be a consequence of the transfer,' Souness later reflected. 'I felt the manner of the move would damage them for a number of years. What was the chairman's reaction when I told him I wanted to sign Maurice? Disbelief. But within a minute we were all convinced that it was the right thing to do. It was done for all the right footballing reasons. That was all I was interested in. I was a lot younger at the time of the deal. None of the other stuff really bothered me. To be honest, a lot of that stuff was kept away from me. I only found out later all the different things that had happened. But at the time, I can honestly say I wasn't worried. I knew his quality and I knew he'd scored goals in different places throughout his career. The age

was right and the money was right. The only problem for some people was his religion. You have to remember we weren't just signing a Roman Catholic – we were signing a Roman Catholic who had played for Celtic and who had posed with a Celtic strip on just a few weeks earlier. Mo had the full set of reasons not to make the move. That's why he deserves so much credit for going through with it. I can't say enough about Maurice in that respect. He had an attitude towards it that said, "Don't worry about it because I ain't worried about it and I'll make it happen." To be fair to him, he did make it happen and that spirit of his shone through. There was no fear with Maurice and that showed in his play too.'

Only a handful of people knew about the unfolding transfer, but it was also to change the dynamics of tabloid journalism in the country. The Scottish edition of the *Sun* was a small, dogged operation taking on the established might of the *Daily Record* when Jack Irvine, the editor, won a holiday to Majorca in a Press Fund lunch raffle. While away, he spent several evenings out with Souness, who alternated between asking Irvine's opinion about breaking Rangers' signing policy and being distracted by telephone calls. Irvine returned home on Saturday, 8 July believing something was stirring, then the following morning a sixteen-year-old boy on work experience asked to see him. He had been at his girlfriend's house when he saw a fax in her father's study with Johnston's name on it. The man did insurance for Rangers, and Irvine suddenly realised the story that had come his way. It was two o'clock in the afternoon, and he immediately phoned Souness, whose plane had just landed at Edinburgh airport.

'Those drunken dinners when you were asking me about signing a Catholic,' Irvine said. 'It's Mo Johnston, isn't it?'

'I'll phone you back,' Souness said, then hung up. An hour later, Irvine's phone rang. 'It's Graeme,' said the voice on the other end. 'Print it.'

The *Sun* ran with the news on its front page the following day,

but there was still a sense of disbelief, of denial even, that such a transfer could take place, and other newspapers did not lift it and run it as their own story. This was something more than Rangers signing a high-profile Catholic footballer; it was the Ibrox club seeking out the player who had become not only synonymous with Celtic's ambition and sense of identity, but also the hate figure of the Rangers support, somebody who had scored goals in a successful Parkhead side, and become a talisman for the Celtic fans.

Even when Rangers called a press conference at Ibrox, journalists were expecting John Sheridan, the Republic of Ireland midfielder, to be revealed as the club's latest signing. Hours before, Johnston and McMurdo were hiding behind a cubicle door in the directors' toilet at Ibrox Stadium. Johnston had been shaving and smartening up his appearance when he and his agent were forced to suddenly hide from Doddie Soutar, the Rangers kitman, and a friend who came in to use the facilities. So they cowered behind a toilet door, panicking and trying to stifle their nervous laughter. 'They're getting things ready as if there is a signing. Who is it?' asked Soutar's friend. 'I don't care who it is, as long as it's not that Celtic bastard Johnston,' Soutar replied.

Johnston had doubted himself during the negotiations, but it was his fearless, almost insolent nature that pushed the deal through, and that saw him walk into the Blue Room at Ibrox later that day wearing a sheepish grin, while Souness looked on with stony defiance. 'First and foremost it was a football decision,' said David Murray, the chairman. 'We signed the player because he was the best Scottish player around and that is what mattered. Of course, it removed a cloud that hung above Rangers.' It was never revealed at the time, but Johnston made sure that there was a clause in his contract allowing him to walk away at any moment, but once the deal was signed, and the fierce response instigated, he was in his element: cocky and defiant.

Johnston later claimed that he could have accepted an approach from Montpellier – who signed Eric Cantona instead, after Johnston turned them down – and received more money than Rangers were paying him, and he also disputed that he had signed a contract with Celtic (although in effect it was a pre-contract agreement and Fifa eventually fined him £3,000 for reneging). McMurdo, too, says that the Celtic deal was not valid since it was his view that Nantes did not own Johnston's contract, but instead his registration was owned by a third-party company which he represented. McMurdo was banned from Celtic Park at the time, and so also claims that when Johnston told him he was travelling to Scotland to talk to McNeil, McMurdo made him take a letter stating that the striker could not sign any contract. More than twenty years later, the complexities of the deal remain vague, but the feelings have barely subsided – McNeil has spoken little more than a few words to Johnston in the intervening years, and is still irked by the Celtic board's refusal to pay the rest of the fee and allow them to ostracise the player for what he saw as a betrayal of his club.

Glasgow reacted to the transfer with a typical show of aggressive posturing and dark humour. Rangers fans gathered outside Ibrox to protest, and some even burned their scarves and season tickets for the watching press photographers, while one fan staged a sit-in at the turnstiles. A hearse stopped outside and a wreath was laid mourning '116 Years of Tradition', while a handful of Union flags were raised bearing a 'No Mo Here' message, but there was not the outcry that was anticipated. For Celtic supporters, the transfer hurt like an act of treachery. They loathed Johnston, and for much of his time at Rangers he was accompanied by six bodyguards working a rota system – including one, Big George, who followed him almost everywhere – while the club even hired a bomb disposal squad to protect the players' cars during a house party that they attended. At one stage after the transfer, there were even reports of Johnston's

father having been attacked. McMurdo was assigned a bodyguard for six months after the transfer, and being a Rangers fan himself, he later earned the mocking nickname, Agent Orange. Among Celtic supporters, Johnston became known as Judas, with his portrait in Baird's Bar – a renowned Celtic pub – having a blue nose painted on it. A Celtic supporters' group based in Motherwell also wrote to the club asking for permission to change their name to the We Hate Maurice Johnston Celtic Supporters' Club. The feeling among them was of being distraught, but also anger and fear, the sense that a great shift of power had occurred, leaving their side behind. Rangers were able to outspend them and be more boldly ambitious, and the moral authority that Celtic had claimed for so long – signing players of any faith and considering their club's background as one of persecution compared to the prejudice of the Protestant community that Rangers represented – was also slipping.

But there was an air of farce to much of the reaction once the initial indignation – on both sides – had diminished. Andy Cameron, the comedian and Rangers fan, was presenting a cheque at a Glasgow school when the story broke, and the janitor said to him: 'I dunno where he's going to live . . . he'll need to get a hold of that Salman Rushdie's hoose.' A Celtic fan, Nan O'Malley, also received death threats addressed to her dog, which was called Mo. A quip that quickly did the rounds of the city's drinking establishments and workplaces was: 'Forgive me father, for I have signed', which captured the religious element of the transfer, but also satirised it.

To find respite from the torrent of attention, Johnston lived in a house in Edinburgh owned by Souness, but threats, intimidation, and broken windows at other properties he owned or that his parents lived in, were commonplace. He also had to integrate with the Rangers squad, many of whom had grown up with the club's traditions, or embraced them on arrival at Ibrox – it was Souness and Terry Butcher who hung portraits of the Queen in the home dressing room.

After signing, Johnston flew to Italy where the squad were doing their pre-season training at the Tuscan resort of Il Ciocco, arriving at the complex by helicopter. It was lunchtime, and the Rangers players were sitting, as usual, at a long dining table. A smaller one was set-up in the corner, for one person, with only bread and water on it. Johnston was told to sit on his own, like a pariah, and only realised it was a joke when all the players started laughing. Butcher also recollects Jimmy Bell, the club's kitman, refusing to wash Johnston's training gear, but the general response was one of acceptance, or even admiration for his courage. 'I don't think anybody else could have done it. It was very brave,' said Richard Gough, the Rangers defender. 'Mo was a good lad so there was never bitterness among the players.' As he did on international duty, Johnston roomed with McCoist, and one afternoon after a training session, they went for a sleep. With the wooden shutters drawn, the room was pitch black, and Johnston was still on edge from the threats that had been made in the hours following his transfer, with McCoist having joked that if an attacker broke in then he was worried he would be mistaken for Johnston. When McCoist woke suddenly from his sleep, he saw a shadow move across the doorway, and he started to scream in terror. Then another voice began to holler, and when the light was eventually switched on, Johnston was curled up in the corner of the room with his hands over his head. He had been making his way to the toilet when he heard McCoist shouting, and had panicked that somebody had broken in. The players wound Johnston up about his Celtic background and the furore his signing caused back in Scotland, but there was also an acknowledgment that the club had bought a talented and accomplished striker, who would also be the centre of attention, taking the pressure off the rest of the squad.

Souness was certain that signing Johnston was right for the team, and necessary for the club. But it turned out that the vast majority of the Rangers support could accept the deal for what it was: progress,

a smart football move and an act of wilful superiority over Celtic. Of the Rangers fans who returned their season tickets on hearing of the transfer, many later ruefully asked for them back, or claimed that they had lost them. A hard core of fans would never accept Johnston – for being a Catholic but also for being a former Celtic player who had inflicted pain on them; and a story is often told about a supporters' club that years later worked out results and league tables for Rangers that disregarded all of Johnston's goals. The striker himself later admitted that he was always aware of a small background noise of resentment that he would never overcome. But once the season started, and he began to play with an immediate sense of assurance and determination, the majority of the Rangers fans were won over.

His first Old Firm game was at Celtic Park, a 0–0 draw in which Johnston was the focus of derision and wrath, a hatefulness that he toiled against. His second was at Ibrox, on 4 November 1989, and he scored a late winning goal with a true strike of the ball. He had only registered his first goal for the club in the previous game, but suddenly Johnston's potential as a significant player, and a source of aggravation for Celtic, became clear to the Rangers support; they celebrated him, and while it could never be an unreserved acclaim for some, the ovations for Johnston became a riposte to justified criticism of the club's Protestant-only signing tradition. 'The fans had been thinking, "Does this guy ever want to score?" But I knew my time would come, and when it did, I seized the moment,' Johnston said. 'Afterwards, I walked into the dressing room, and there was a different respect. When I came out, I walked past the marble staircase, out through the front door, and everything had just lifted. All the shit was finished. I could have told the security guards to scram there and then. After three or four months it was no problem. I was scoring goals and enjoying my football. The odd problem cropped up. Stones would be thrown at my parents' house and I'd

get things chucked at my car. My own stupidity didn't help things. I'd answer back if someone shouted at me in the street when I should have kept my mouth shut. I'm proud of what I achieved by signing for Rangers. I opened the door for Catholic footballers to sign and take satisfaction from that. I made it easier for players to go there. Things moved on.'

Johnston was a success at Rangers, scoring forty-six goals in a hundred games, twice winning the league and earning several individual player of the year awards from supporters' groups. One was from the Moodiesburn Loyal, whose president was Doddie Soutar, the Rangers kitman Johnston and McMurdo had hidden from in the Ibrox toilet. And it was Soutar who introduced the player at the awards night, then presented him with his trophy.

But the controversy has never lost its edge. Some Celtic supporters still refuse to speak his name, while others stalk him on the internet, using messageboards to threaten and abuse him. When a charity match between former Rangers and Celtic players was due to be held some years ago, and Johnston proposed playing one half for each side, he was forced to pull out because Celtic supporters were threatening to boycott the game. Yet Johnston has twin sons, T.J. and Tyler, one of whom supports Rangers and the other Celtic. Johnston's own father was a Rangers supporter, and it was his Catholic mother who encouraged his boyhood love of Celtic. He has now found peace and a certain perspective from living in America then Canada, having ended his playing career in Major League Soccer and moved into coaching, but Johnston declines most requests to talk about his Old Firm careers, preferring instead to let the story provide its own meaning.

Rangers now regularly sign Catholic players without the issue being raised, with some like Jorg Albertz, Lorenzo Amoruso, Rino Gattuso and Shota Arveladze becoming cult heroes (and all of whom developed their own sentimental attachment to the club

and the fans, despite the obvious anti-Catholic rhetoric of some of the terrace songs). Paul Le Guen, a French Catholic, also managed the club, although his reign is not fondly remembered since results were poor and he struggled to understand the mentality of the Scottish players. Celtic never refused to sign a player because of his religion, having always taken great pride in their all-inclusive policy (a reaction, no doubt, to the feeling of persecution felt by Catholics in Scotland when the club was formed). Jock Stein, the legendary Celtic manager, would often target Protestant signings first, particularly among young players, because he always knew that Rangers would not be interested in any Catholics. Stein himself was a Protestant who was raised as a Rangers fan, but who railed against any notion of bigotry, while many of the club's most revered players, such as Kenny Dalglish and Danny McGrain, also grew up as Protestant Rangers fans.

Yet neither group of supporters can claim to be unblemished. Mark Walters, the black English winger, was pelted by bananas thrown from the Celtic Park terraces when he made his Old Firm debut there for Rangers. John Spencer, a Catholic who signed for Rangers as a schoolboy, also tells of being abused at school and challenged to fights by fellow pupils. A friend even threatened him while the pair were watching an Old Firm game together and Spencer celebrated Rangers scoring. For players coming into the Old Firm rivalry from outside Scotland, it can often be an unsettling experience.

'I remember in my first few weeks there were all kinds of rumours going round and I'd be asked by Rangers fans which school I had been to and what my parents' names were,' said Terry Butcher. 'I didn't say. I simply told them I was an English footballer. It eventually came out [that] I was Church of England. I recall one incident at Ipswich before a reserve game when I crossed myself, something I'd seen Alan Brazil do. Big Allan Hunter [a Northern Ireland

international] was sitting in the stand and after the game he grabbed me and asked me if I was a Catholic. I told him I wasn't. I was an English Protestant. Why, then, he asked, did I cross myself? I told him it was for luck but he told me to remember I was a Protestant and warned me never to do it again – if I did, he would really sort me out.

'I quickly forgot about it, but my arrival in Scotland soon reminded me – and then some. This thing went far beyond religion. It is more than a passion, it is a way of life, and there is nothing like it down south. It can be very intoxicating as well as weird, spooky, strange and scary. Initially, it was just a case of getting used to it. Rangers and Celtic have hundreds of supporters' clubs all over Glasgow, Scotland and the world, and they all have award ceremonies for their own player of the year. They were such warm, generous people, but you couldn't just go for an hour. There were flute bands too and they would have you up on the stage singing the usual party songs, which I learned quickly. The first Rangers supporters' club I went to was in Larkhall and I was asked to sing a Rangers song. I tried to explain that, as I had only arrived, I hadn't had time to learn any. There was one thing I knew about Glasgow Rangers. Allan Hunter had taught me the phrase "No surrender" and, with those two words, I brought the house down. Old Firm games do something to you – they turn you into a different person. At times I became someone I didn't like. I'm normally a placid bloke, but my senses totally left me. Yet until you have played in an Old Firm game, you can have no idea the effect they have on you. Potentially, they are the best in the world. But they can also be the worst. And definitely the most volatile. They are extremely frightening because you carry the responsibilities of your set of fans. And these fans often expect far too much. At times there is no way you can live up to those expectations – and you react in a way that is totally out of character.'

The ball's there, it's mine, fuck. I caught him there, that was a bad one. Fuck it, he needs to know I'm not messing around. 'I was going for the ball ref, the ball. No, my studs weren't up, it's just the way I stretched for the ball. And it's my first foul, the first one of the game. You can't book me for that.' I got away with that one, the gaffer would've been fucking raging if I was sent off. Still, those fucking fans shouting and bawling, I'll show them if I get a chance. I'd love to score in this game, then I'd give it right fucking back to them. Right in their faces. Yeh, that would be something. Imagine their faces. And imagine our boys, they'd be going mental. I'd be the man then, no shitty comments from anybody after that. I'd be untouchable, they'd love me then, all of them.

Got to stay on the park, though. No more daft challenges. That fucker really does my head in, though, arrogant bastard. Thinks he's right better than me. Him and their fans. If he starts any shit, I'll be right in his face. No backing down, not today. We really need to start playing some football here, or this game's going nowhere. How long to go? This result's all right, but a win would be special, they'd really be fucked then. And we'd be the ones. No doubt about it. The fucking ones.

In his innocence and eagerness to fit in, Terry Butcher was not alone among the players who moved to Rangers in the decade after Graeme Souness changed the scale of Rangers' ambition. In July 1995, Paul Gascoigne moved to Ibrox from Lazio in a £4.3m transfer that was sealed after Walter Smith, the Rangers manager, bumped into Gascoigne on the beach during a holiday. The midfielder was, by then, still considered to be within touching distance of the best of his talent, the kind of chutzpah he showed during the 1990 World Cup, when he was one of England's best players on their journey to

the semi-final. It was the tears that Gascoigne could not contain during that game against West Germany, when he received a booking that ruled him out of the final, that both endeared him to the English nation but also enhanced the character that he had become: Gazza, the clowning figure whose emotions were uninhibited but who was also capable of moments of brilliance on the football field. He had failed to settle in Rome, while his career had been dogged by a cruciate ligament injury suffered during the 1991 FA Cup final against Nottingham Forest (and one that was self-inflicted, after Gascoigne launched a reckless challenge on Gary Charles). But Gascoigne was still one of British football's most high-profile and, on occasion, talented footballers, and his arrival represented a coup for Smith. After signing his contract, Gascoigne stepped outside the main doors at Ibrox to be greeted by a throng of supporters. The midfielder was sporting a cropped, peroxide blond haircut that immediately became popular with Rangers fans throughout the city, but he brought with his undoubted talent that sense of being a manic, sometimes impulsive character.

Even Ian Ferguson could not foresee the furore that Gascoigne would provoke. A Glaswegian who grew up supporting the club – and who reflected more than most players the sense of hostility within the Old Firm divide – Ferguson suggested to his new English teammate that he should mimic playing a flute on the Ibrox pitch. The pair were talking in the dressing room before Gascoigne's first game for the club in 1995, against Steaua Bucharest in a pre-season tournament. 'You should run in front of the fans and kid on you are playing the flute,' Ferguson told him. 'They will take it as a bit of a laugh and they will really appreciate it.' Gascoigne was already called Ticker by the other players, a nickname based on the phrase: tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock . . . boom, and his tendency to be involved in dramas that suddenly blow up around him. In the forty-fifth minute of the game, Gascoigne scored with a simple

tap-in, and then turned to the Rangers fans and pretended to play the flute, which represents the marchers who take part in Orange Walks in the west of Scotland and Northern Ireland. 'He wis playin' in an Orange Walk band,' said Mick Martin, a Rangers fan, after the game. 'Brilliant. That's what we're aw aboot.' Yet as much as the Ibrox supporters revelled in Gascoigne's display, and the club sought to emphasise to him how serious his misdemeanour was by fining him two weeks' wages, it took outside intervention to reveal the extent of the divide in the city he had moved to. A week after the incident, Gascoigne was sitting in a traffic jam when a car pulled up alongside him. The driver motioned to the player to lower his window, then told him: 'I wouldn't do that again, mate.'

'Why not?' Gascoigne replied.

'Because I'll slit your throat next time.'

As Gascoigne laughed nervously, the man slowly ran his finger along his throat, before driving off. 'Looking back it was utter madness on my behalf,' said Ferguson. 'I could have ended up getting him killed – it was that bad. He was raging and rightly so.'

Gascoigne came to realise the significance of symbolism and the religious nature of the Old Firm rivalry, but he could not restrain his own impulsive behaviour. His first season was a success, and on the field he generally tended to excel, but life was always troubled for a man who suffered from depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder and an inability to relax or fill time on his own. He was never truly at ease with himself, and the tensions of Glasgow only exacerbated this restlessness. On 2 January 1998, while warming up behind the goal as a substitute at Celtic Park, Gascoigne was verbally abused by the home fans, and eventually responded. He turned to them and pretended again to play the flute, with the gesture seen by many people in the stadium as well as being captured on the live television coverage. The reaction was

furious, and this time the Englishman could not claim ignorance to the meaning of his gesture. Although he later apologised, a television viewer complained to Strathclyde Police, who launched an investigation, as did the Scottish Football Association, with Rangers again fining the player and then donating the money to charity.

This time, the aftermath saw Gascoigne receive 126 threats, including a handwritten letter from Ireland, in Gaelic, warning him to 'watch his back' and detailing much of his daily routine. The player was terrified, as the author of the letter claimed to be writing on behalf of the IRA. Gascoigne immediately took the letter to Govan police station, who traced it to a man in Dublin, but they were unable to prosecute him unless he set foot in the UK. Instead, they showed Gascoigne how to open his mail safely and to check under his car for bombs. Although Gascoigne's friend, the DJ and television presenter Chris Evans tried to make light of the situation by sending the footballer a T-shirt with a target on the front, for six months Gascoigne fretted about his safety, moving out of the lodge in Loch Lomond that he had made his home and turning increasingly to drink to escape the sense of his life unravelling. He sent his two cars – a Range Rover and a convertible Mercedes-Benz – to England, and rented four different chalets, at a cost of £15,000 a month each, so that he could randomly vary where he slept. His lifelong friend, Jimmy 'Five Bellies' Gardner, continued to act as his driver, but they used hire cars and changed them on a regular basis.

Then the police came to visit, to tell him that the man in Dublin had phoned them to say that the threat was rescinded. But by then Gascoigne was more and more lost to the alcohol and erratic behaviour that was to lead to his departure from his Ibrox in 1998. He was a fragile character, capable of genius on the football field, but self-destructive and often hapless off it. Gascoigne was needy and

often infantile in his behaviour, qualities that made him vulnerable in a city like Glasgow, where weakness tends to be met with disdain. The player lacked self-awareness, and while playing for Middlesbrough in a testimonial match for Alan McLaren, the Rangers defender, in 1999, Gascoigne repeated the flute gesture again. The Englishman was guilty of immaturity, certainly, and struggled with a reckless, self-destructive streak, although much of this behaviour was later explained by the revelation in his autobiography of the traumas of his childhood and the troubled mental state they resulted in. At first, he did not fully understand the nature of the Old Firm divide, seeing it only as a football rivalry rather than something that reflects but also influences tensions in society. Any footballer or manager with a streak of arrogance can set out to irritate opposition fans – while manager of Galatasaray, Graeme Souness placed a large club flag in the centre of their city rival's Fenerbahce's pitch after winning the Turkish cup final, which almost caused a riot – but in Glasgow such gestures would carry a greater impact.

Artur Boruc joined Celtic in 2005 from the Polish side Legia Warsaw as a goalkeeper with international experience and a reputation for occasional lapses in behaviour. In August 2006, he crossed himself in front of Rangers fans at Ibrox during an Old Firm game, then laughed at them and motioned with both hands for them to 'come ahead'. Police officers later claimed that it took ten minutes to calm down the situation in the stands. Like many footballers, Boruc crosses himself as a matter of habit or faith as he runs onto the field at the beginning of the first and second-halves of games, but the direct goading of the Rangers fans that accompanied the gesture was deliberate, and it exposed the angst that gathers around so much of Scotland's attitude towards the religious rivalry of the Old Firm. Following complaints from Rangers supporters, Strathclyde Police submitted a report of the incident to the Procurator Fiscal, and six months later Boruc was cautioned for breach of the

peace, with the formal warning coming for behaviour that 'provoked alarm and crowd trouble'.

The Catholic Church reacted with indignation, describing the caution as an 'alarming development, especially since the sign of the cross is globally accepted as a gesture of religious reverence. It is extremely regrettable that Scotland seems to have made itself one of the few countries in the world where this simply religious gesture is considered an offence'. Alex Salmond, then the leader of the Scottish National Party in opposition at the Scottish Parliament, demanded an explanation from the Fiscal, who later clarified the caution by saying it was 'based on an assessment of behaviour, not one single act, which appeared to be directed towards the crowd, which was being incited by that behaviour'. So Boruc placed himself in the midst of the enduring tension of the Old Firm's rivalry, its religious language and expression, and Scottish society's uneasiness at dealing with the complexities of this relationship between the clubs. Waving Union Jack or Irish tricolour flags at Old Firm games cannot be considered inflammatory, and many players have blessed themselves without being cautioned or causing trouble, including Rangers players, yet Boruc then proceeded to compound his gesture by stirring the Rangers fans with his invitation for them to attack him. Although his agent claimed it was merely an act of Boruc's faith, what he did after blessing himself was seen as incitement. Yet any nuance was lost as the Church, politicians, the criminal authorities and football agonised over the events, and asserted a point of view shaped by their own agenda.

He became known among the Celtic fans as the Holy Goalie, yet Boruc, like Gascoigne, could not contain the antagonistic part of his nature, or at least not fail to respond to his hounding by Rangers supporters, who routinely booed him. In an Old Firm game at Celtic Park in April 2008, which the home side won 3–2, Boruc removed his goalkeeper's jersey after the final whistle to reveal a T-shirt that

bore a picture of the late Pope John Paul II and the words, 'God Bless the Pope', which prompted the Democratic Unionist MP for East Londonderry, Gregory Campbell, to propose a parliamentary motion that expressed support for the work carried out to combat sectarianism by Rangers and Celtic but that deeply regretted the actions of the Celtic goalkeeper Artur Boruc.

That's it, all over. Thank God. A draw, could be better, but at least we didn't lose the game. That would have been disastrous. I'm fucked, my legs are empty, there's nothing left. I wish I'd taken that chance, but it's gone now. 'Well played. Well played. You too, mate. Aye, well played.' Survived it. A couple of shaky moments, but I did okay. I can't be hung out for anything by those fucking journalists. What do they know? The gaffer should be all right, too, I did everything he asked. Kept the head, too.

Got to go over to the fans, show some appreciation. Look at them all, still here, still singing. It's crazy. Some'll be out tonight. I wonder if I should go out for a drink? I should be all right, no hassle, surely. Could be a good night, plenty of folk wanting to hang out. But then maybe it's safer just to stay at home, sit it out just for tonight. There are some crazy bastards out there. I mean, look at them. I need to get inside, up the tunnel, into the dressing room. No bother, no hassles, just back inside. Away from it, the noise. Away from it.

Other Old Firm players have been more curious about the historic divide between Celtic and Rangers. The Norwegian striker, Harald Brattbakk, attempted to come to terms with the religious nature of

a football rivalry he found more intense than anything he had experienced. After signing for Celtic in 1997, he read about the background of the relationship between the two clubs. 'It was amazing. I don't think I realised how important the game is, how big it is,' he said. 'I could sense the feeling in the dressing room, I could sense the supporters and everything around the game before it. It was huge. I had a good experience playing in big games for Rosenborg, but the Old Firm is like nothing else. I've told people who go to see *El Clásico* in Spain, or the Manchester derby, that if they want to see a real derby, they should go to Glasgow. I played against a lot of big clubs in Europe, but the Old Firm is beyond everything. I had to find out what it was. I didn't know that the emotions could be so strong and that religion was such a big part of the game. In terms of getting a good Old Firm game, it's positive, but I remember a kid being killed on his way home from Ibrox. He was just going through the wrong neighbourhood on his way home, wearing a Celtic strip, and he was killed. That's not acceptable. I'm a Christian myself, but I don't treat Muslims, Catholics or whatever any differently, I let people have their beliefs, and it's sometimes too bad when it becomes a part of sport.'

While playing for Celtic in 1998, the Danish defender Marc Rieper travelled to Buncrana, a small town in Donegal, to help to carry the coffin of Oran Doherty. The eight-year-old boy was one of the twenty-eight victims of the Omagh Bomb, and he was an avid Celtic supporter, even being buried in the team's strip. 'That was the saddest day of my life,' Rieper said soon after returning to Glasgow. 'I was asked by the family to attend Oran's funeral, and my immediate response was yes. There were 10,000 people there, including all the politicians. All for a wee boy who was buried in his Celtic strip. A Celtic flag was on his coffin. That was how much the club meant to the wee boy. Some things go beyond football. Certainly, that day put life into perspective. It was so sad. I spoke to the family afterwards,

and they said they were very grateful. I suppose, if I could help them in any small way, then it was right I was there.

'I played in London derbies with West Ham, and you cannot compare them. The Old Firm is different to any other game in the world. People will say the Milan derby is better, but there is more to Glasgow's one than football. That is something we have to live with. It doesn't make it right, but it won't change, no matter who is on the pitch. The supporters look at it differently. For them, it is the biggest thing in football, and it is a fantastic occasion, but we need to put it into perspective and not make it more than it really is.'

Foreign players can sometimes struggle to accept the sheer scale of the Old Firm rivalry, what it means and what it expects of them. When Rangers lost 5–1 to Celtic in November 1998, Ian Ferguson, who grew up near Celtic Park in an area famous for its staunch support of the Ibrox side, embarked on a furious rant in the dressing room afterwards. He felt that the foreign players signed the previous summer by Dick Advocaat, the Dutch manager, in his first season in charge did not understand what the game represented, and his rebukes were fearsome. The foreign players all came from clubs that could accept losing a match, because the points could always be regained in the next game. But in Scotland, for the Old Firm, the culture is of winning, and especially of being dominant over your city rivals. The following day at training, the Dutch international full-back Arthur Numan, an experienced and senior member of the squad but also one of the newcomers after joining from PSV Eindhoven, said privately to Ferguson that he felt the midfielder had been harsh. Ferguson's response was another tirade about the importance of the game, which Numan eventually came to understand.

'Although I am a Catholic I never had any problems with them being the Protestant club,' said Jorg Albertz, the German midfielder who became a great hero of the Rangers fans for his commitment

and goals against Celtic. 'Among the foreign players it is first of all the performance which counts. As I played really well right from the start, I was accepted by the fans. This relationship turned into something like love – I have never had a better relation with the fans than I had with the Rangers loyals. It doesn't get better than that.'

Even the final whistle does not bring respite from the strains of the Old Firm rivalry, with players wary of socialising after a defeat, or being careful which restaurant or nightclub they visit after a victory. Glasgow can be a sullen, edgy place after a Rangers v. Celtic game, with all of the violence that once agitated the terraces now displaced to pubs, streets and homes across the city and beyond. The players experience the same extreme emotions, of triumph in victory and despair in defeat, but they also become targets for supporters. The losers do not like to see opposition players out celebrating, nor their own players, who they feel should be too wracked by sorrow to leave the house. Billy McNeill and Tommy Burns used to advise Celtic players to avoid Glasgow in the aftermath of Old Firm games, since there was too much danger of encountering situations that were outwith the players' control. Yet Andy Walker, the Celtic striker, did not follow McNeill's advice, and after a 1–0 win at Celtic Park in his Old Firm debut in August 1987, he joined his friends on a trip to a Glasgow nightclub. As he ordered a round at the bar, Walker included a lager tops for himself. 'Is that for you,' the barman asked.

'Yeah, that's mine,' said Walker, as he opened his wallet to pay.

The barman then spat in his pint before charging for the drinks. Walker immediately left the club and went straight into a taxi home. He was to encounter other incidents during his Celtic career, including being out for a drink when a man came up to him to say, 'You're in the wrang pub,' before dropping a full pint glass on the floor at his feet, and the night he was out with Derek Whyte, a Celtic teammate, when a man in a smart suit walked up to Whyte and,

unprovoked, punched him in the face, before stamping on him then walking away.

The game is capable of creating heroes and villains in the simple narrative of sporting achievement, but what distinguishes the Old Firm rivalry is Glasgow's mixture of religious intolerance, football obsessiveness, and aggressive, macho behaviour. There is also no place to hide, even for those players innocent of the mistakes of Gascoigne, the controversies of Boruc, or the sheer, headstrong shamelessness of Johnston. It is, in many ways, a game that is indifferent to the players who are taking part, because it is the rivalry that matters, even beyond the sporting consequence of the outcome. If one side has already won the league and there is an Old Firm match, it remans frenzied and full-blooded, even though the points at stake are meaningless. At times, it is a spectacle, something more than a football match, and closer instead to a way of life.