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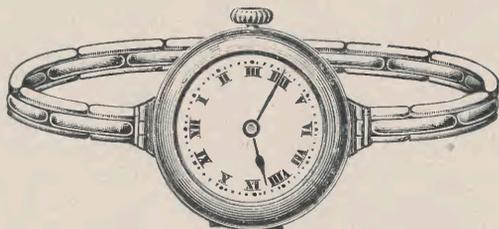
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The History of the Raith Rovers Football Club

BY
R. M. CONNELL.



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KIRKCALDY

The Raith Rovers Football Club

EVERY neuk of Fife where smoke curls from the chimneys has produced some laddie who has grown up to gain lasting fame in the domain of sport.

Golf and football established the sporting reputation of Fife the world over. Who has not heard of St. Andrews! Of old Tom Morris the High Priest of Golf, of Andrew Kirkcaldy of whose eccentric sayings so many quaint stories are told, of James Braid and many other celebrities who learned to swing a wooden club on the playing fields of the Kingdom of Fife!

If senior football in the county were cradled in the Auld Grey Abbey toon of Dumfermline long before the dribbling game became the ruling passion in Kirkcaldy, it was left to the Raith Rovers of Kirkcaldy to gain a distinction in football no other club in the county ever secured.

As recent as the season of 1923-24, David Morris of Raith Rovers, was in Scotland's team against England at Wembley, in the side against Ireland at Celtic Park, and he was also honoured with a place in the Scottish League eleven against the Irish League at Belfast. Tom Muirhead of the Rangers gained his first experience of senior when he was in the Army Pay Corps at Perth, and travelled to Kirkcaldy and played for the Rovers. When Muirhead left the Rangers as player-Manager of the Boston F.C. in Massachusetts, he was surpassed by none other in Great Britain as a left half-back. Another of the brilliant school of International players at Ibrox Park, Alexander Archibald, wore a dark blue jersey at Stark's Park before he signed on for the Rangers.

Kirkcaldy has proved a fruitful nursery for the rearing of football players of the best class. Many of them gained fame in England. Two of the leading members of the team of 1923-24, William Inglis and William Collier joined Sheffield Wednesday. Both these stalwart defenders were among the best known footballers throughout the country.

The Rovers were the most discussed team in football at the period. The artistry of their forwards Bell, James, Jennings, Miller, and Archibald had made to ring in their praise the football centres of England. Unheard of offers were made for the transfer of the leading men. One club coveted the entire five forwards and every other newspaper contained sensational articles of a £50,000 bargain which never matured. Tom Jennings, the centre-forward, was one of the foremost scoring forwards of the year, with 27 goals to his credit.

My first association with football in Fife was linked with Kirkcaldy. The town was a hive of football activity and could boast of about a score of well organised junior clubs when first in 1888 I dandered across the long stretches of turf, centuries old, where the laddies of the "Lang Toon" jinked and jooked with a clooty ba' or anything that was round enough to roll and could be kicked.



The senior club of the town at that early period was Kirkcaldy Wanderers. This enterprising combination derived its chief excitement from membership with the Edinburgh Football Association. There were forty-three clubs on the roll of this organisation at the time, and Frank G. Watt, the manager of Newcastle United F.C. was the secretary. How the passing of the years and the rise of the bigger clubs

have changed the whole football atmosphere in the East!

There are many patrons of the sport of the round ball in Kirkcaldy who follow from week to week the

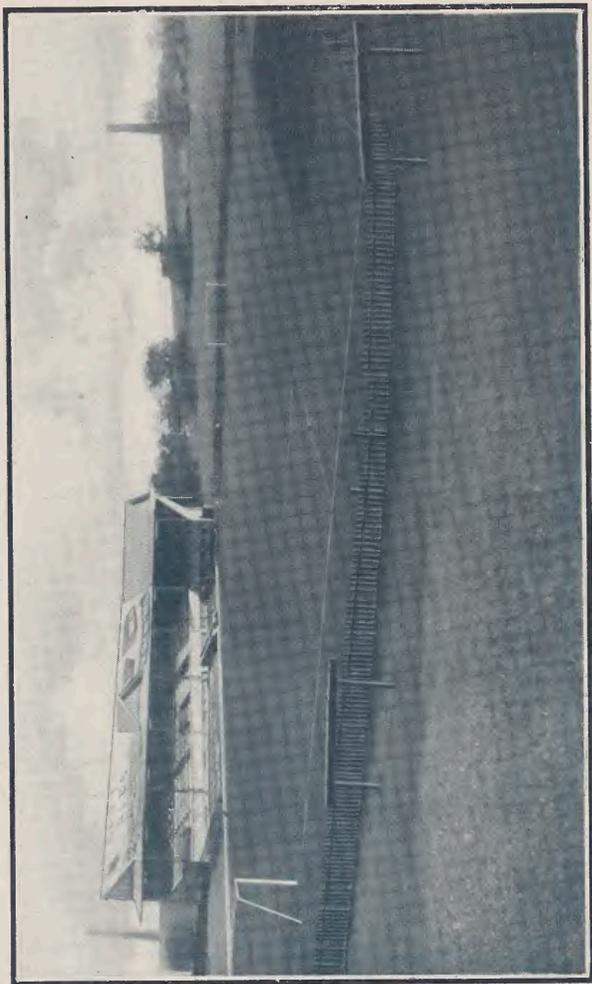


Photo by]

Stark's Park, The Rovers Ground.

[R. Miliken

fortunes of the Rovers in the stirring League contests for a senior championship, who have vivid recollections of the formation of the Kirkcaldy Junior F.A., on 4th February, 1886. The cup competition was open to clubs in the extended burghs of Kirkcaldy, Kinghorn and Dysart. The original members comprised twenty clubs and included the following sixteen clubs:— Abden, Albion, Blackburn, Dunnikier, Eastern, Eclipse, Fern, Raith Rovers, Ramblers, Ravenscraig, Rosslands, Royal Oak, St. Clair Blues, Thistle, Union, and United.

In the semi-final round the best match of the whole competition was witnessed at Newtown Park, ground of the old Kirkcaldy F.C. when the Albion beat Raith Rovers by 1 goal to 0, after playing a protested game, and triumphed in the final over the Union by 4 goals to 1. The Rovers had been in existence for almost three years. They were an ambitious lot those humble lads who beguiled their hours of recreation at Robbie's Park. They kept the club alive with a whip round of sixpence each and sensed the unspeakable joy of the budding athlete when they were able to possess a blue and white "gansy" and a pair of football boots.

By enthusiastic endeavour these youthful Rovers forged ahead. In the second year of the Kirkcaldy Junior Cup Ties they turned the tables on the Albion in the final by 4 goals to 0, after a drawn game. For three years in succession they held the cup and then, sighing for more attractive games, the Rovers turned senior and joined the Scottish Football Association in 1889-90. To-day they possess one of the most attractive teams in the country, and young forwards who reveal the beauties of combination in a style that seldom fails to arouse the enthusiasm of the onlookers.

The crack team of Scotland among the juniors, when first I visited Kirkcaldy, was Wishaw Thistle, in whose ranks was Andrew McGregor, a right winger with a screw kick comparable only with the great John L. Kay of Queen's Park. The brilliant footwork of the curly-footed Wishaw winger was a feature of the English Cup Final at the Oval in 1890-91 when he was in the Notts County team against Blackburn Rovers. Three years



FIRST TEAM 1887.

A. Ness, W. Jarvis, J. Russell, C. Ramsay, P. Hazel, P. Lyle,
T. Nelson, A. Holborn, J. Lister, D. Clark, J. Chalmers,
D. Jarvis. (Kirkcaldy Cup.) B. Clark.

[R. Miliken

later McGregor was in the winning Notts team in the Cup Final against Bolton Wanderers. I met him last at Calgary when the Scots International Team toured Canada in 1921.



The Wishaw "Jags" won the cup in 1888, and the hardest run they had was at Kirkcaldy on Robbie's Park. The speed of the Rovers was the distinguishing characteristic of a grueling struggle. A sensational opening dash by the men of Fife ended in Litster scoring. In the end Wishaw won a desperate struggle by 4—3. Clark and Adamson were sound Fife backs. Clark vied for power of kicking with Willie McCallum, on the other side. The Rufus-locked McCallum was a compositor to trade, and afterwards threw in his lot with the Celts at Parkhead.

The Rovers half-backs—Hazel, Russell, and Jarvis—proved their mettle against the big fellows up against them. The Fife forwards were as clever as the more renowned Wishaw lot. If Henderson could have played they might have won. All the same, D. Jarvis made a good substitute in the centre, and the wing play of Litster and Neilson left a memory of the contest, as abiding as the huge throws-in of Hazel, which were as good as a free kick to his side.

There were clever players in the Rovers team at the time. Tom Chalmers, A. Holborn, J. Litster (all forwards), and J. Russell (half-back), had played in the Inter-Association match against the rival Cowdenbeath Association.

Around the social board after the match there foregathered five youths who assisted to form the Scottish Junior F.A. One of them was James H. McLeod, an official of the Rovers Club and another one was the founder of the Association who had the pleasant task of writing this brief story of the career of the most popular club in Fife.

There was more cloud than sunshine in the early

years of struggle when the Rovers entered the senior ranks, but the officials put "a stoot hert tae a stey brae" and kept plodding on. Even the dismal experience of a 7—2 defeat in Edinburgh when they played their first Scottish Cup Tie against the Heart of Midlothian did not repress the zeal of the members or damp the enthusiasm of the players to bring the club to the front.

The Rovers outlived their great local rivals, the Kirkcaldy Wanderers. The passing of the Wanderers was a blessing in disguise for football in the town as the best of the players threw in their lot with the Rovers. "Willie" Mackay, who was at Tynecastle in the days of "Curly" Fraser and the flying Jenkinson imparted much sage advice to the team. Here is an example of the canny shrewd way he was wont to encourage the players :

"Look here, Jamie, you've got to beat that back" !

"But I canna' dae it!"

"Aye can ye man! An here's his failing!" A simple lesson in tactics followed from the patient football philosopher. The delighted player profited by what he was told and managed the task of beating the back he dreaded so much the very next time the pair met.

"Don't go out to meet the man; that's where he beats you;" was the advice he gave when a Rovers' defender was baffled by a tricky forward who was a bit too smart for him. The old head again! The waiting game and changed tactics puzzled and confounded the speed merchant who relied on the other fellow being drawn out to oppose his advance.

Other kind friends were ever ready to help, even to the extent of providing steaks for the daily meal of some fellow who could not afford the expense of a special diet as the day of a big match drew nigh and the players were being handled with extra care for the ordeal.

The club spirit of the Rovers' players was a source of joy to their supporters. When professionalism was recognised by the Scottish Football Association the Rovers followed the fashion. They turned professional. There never was money in the club's coffers to pay the

men who were professionals in name only. What did it matter. They were loyal Kirkcaldy lads to the core, happy that they were privileged to play football and were fit and skilful enough to keep their place in the team! Fife boys were ever clannish.



The fine club spirit of the Rovers enabled the club to achieve a remarkable triumph in the closing week of season 1901-02. There remained four matches to play to complete the club's Northern League fixtures. Two elevens were picked, two matches were played on the Wednesday evening and the other two games took place on Saturday afternoon. All four matches were won to make historical the only season the Rovers participated in the

competition. A step forward was the clubs association with the Second League.

There was no promotion to the First Division by merit until the Central League became defunct and the Second Division was resuscitated else the Rovers would have been in the First Division much sooner than they were. In ten years of First League football (from 1910-11 to 1916-17 and 1919-20 to 1921-22) the Rovers called upon 135 players for the 380 League games that were played.

Outstanding events in the history of the club occurred in the following seasons :—

1889-90...Joined the Scottish Football Association.

1890-91...Won King Cup.

1897-98...Won the following five trophies :—Fife Challenge Cup, East of Scotland Qualifying Cup, East of Scotland Consolation Cup, Wemyss Charity Cup, and Nairn Charity Cup. See Photo of Team with Cups.

1901-02...Won Northern League Championship.

1906-07...Won Scottish Qualifying Cup.

May, 1907...Formed into Limited Liability Company.

1907-08...Runners-up for Scottish Qualifying Cup.

1907-08...Won Second League Championship.

1909-10...Joint Champions with Leith Athletic.



1898 TEAM.

J. Adams (Trainer), W. Kay, J. Cairns, J. Flanders, J. Lambert
 C. Moodie, Mr. D. Mitchell (Treasurer), Mr. A. W. Lumsden (Secretary), J. Sinclair.
 J. Stocks, J. Neilson, Mr. J. Nicoll (President), G. Ramsay, D. Walker,
 A. Ramsay, Mr. J. J. Tod (Vice-President), J. Eckford.
 J. M'Queen.
 D. Stewart.

Winners of E. S. Consolation Cup, Nairn Charity, E. S. Qual. Cup, Fifeshire Challenge Cup,
 Wemyss Cup.

- 1910-11...Elected to First League.
 1912-13...Opposed Falkirk in Scottish Cup Final.
 1921-22...Gained third place in the Scottish League
 Championship with 51 points.
 1922-23...New Grand Stand opened by Lord Novar
 at League match with Celtic 27th December
 1923. Rovers lost by 3-0.
 Won Fife Cup. Won Penman Cup.
 1923-24...Finished fourth for League Championship.
 Won Dunedin Cup. Won Penman Cup.
 The Scottish Cup competition was
 suspended from 1914-15 to 1918-19 inclu-
 sive owing to the war, and military
 restrictions compelled the club to remain
 out of the Scottish League tournament
 in 1917-18 and 1918-19.

The turning point in the fortunes of the club occurred in the season of 1906-07 when the Rovers gladdened all Fife by winning the Scottish Qualifying Cup. The team was captained by George McNicol. This player had the unique distinction to gain a Qualifying medal for three different teams—Aberdeen, Port Glasgow Athletic and Raith Rovers. In the preliminary rounds the Rovers defeated Kirkcaldy United (2-1). Lochgelly United (1-0 at Methil after two draws of 3-3 and 1-1), Cowdenbeath (2-1), Clachnacuddin (4-0), and Renton (1-0). In the final round two games were necessary ere they accomplished the downfall of St. Bernard by 3 goals to 1. The Saints were a club of longer standing than the Fifers and before reaching the final round their victims were Broxburn Shamrock, Broxburn Athletic, Leith Athletic, Arbroath, Forfar Athletic and Johnstone.

For the first time in the history of the competition the final tie had an Edinburgh setting. Seven special trains were run from the "Lang Toon" of Kirkcaldy to the Scottish Capital to accommodate the proud supporters of the club. The first game took place at Tynecastle on November 24, 1906. The same day Hibernian and Rangers met at Easter Road in a First League match, yet the more important match did not prevent a fresh record for a Qualifying Cup Final having been established on the Hearts' ground. The sum drawn



1890-91 TEAM.

W. McKay, T. Nelson, H. Clunie, J. Thomson, Geo. Webster, A. Hall,
W. Cowan, A. Strachen, S. Hepburn, W. Dall, K. Donaldson, Dr. J. M. Campbell, A. Bogie,
A. Leach. N. Duchers.

was £255 12s. 3d., and £31 at the stand. These look modest figures nowadays, but at the time the attendance occasioned much surprise in the west.

The rival teams were:—St. Bernard—Ramsay, Buchanan and Reid; Sloggie, Smith and Findlay; Ritchie, Beveridge, Hall, McDonald and Tait. Raith Rovers—Dowie; Inglis and Cumming; Moodie, Manning and Grierson: Mitchell, Dalrymple, McNicol, Gourlay and McDonald. But for the brilliance of Ramsay between the sticks it would have been a black day for the Saints who were unbeaten in the League at the time. The Edinburgh men recovered late in the game to force a draw of two goals each. The display of McDonald on the left was the revelation of the match. His feinting and passing on the run would have done credit to the incomparable Sandy McMahan.

Easter Road was the scene of the replayed match and once again another record was put up. The attendance was 13,000 and the gate money totalled £280 with £45 extra for the Hibernian Club. Gourlay was unable to play for the Rovers and the rearranged attack was Mitchell, Wilkie, McNicol, Dalrymple and McDonald. The change did not affect the combination forward which was controlled admirably by McNicol.

On a pitch resembling pretty much in lay out their own field at Stark's Park, the Rovers played the more open game, and all round were the better side against opponents whose football showed a marked improvement on their exhibition of the previous week. The Kirkcaldy men were three goals up at half-time. The astuteness of McNicol was responsible for the first goal early in the struggle, a faulty pass back from

Reid to the goalkeeper, which Ramsay missed, gave them a second goal, and after a brilliant dribbling run, McDonald got through with the third one. In the gathering darkness Findlay worked a goal for the dispirited Saints. The liveliest members of a fine winning side were Dowie, Cumming, Grierson, Manning,





SCOTTISH CUP FINALISTS, 1912-13. [R. Miliken
C. Coutts (Trainer), J. Gibson, J. H. Logan, R. McLeod, J. Gourley, Fred Gibson, J. Brown (Asst. Trainer).
H. Graham, W. Morrison, F. Martin, A. Cumming, H. Anderson, F. Cranston, J. Tod (Director),

McNicol, Mitchell and McDonald. Once again the extreme wing forwards bore off the palm.

Kirkcaldy Trades Band did full justice to the occasion as the players of the winning team were "chaired" to the pavilion. A band from Kelty added to the joy of the big contingent of Fife people on the ground. The pious wish was expressed by the Scottish F.A. president Mr. John Liddell of Queen's Park F.C. as he handed over the cup to Mr. D. A. White that the victory of the Rovers would give a big impetus to football in Fife. The exalted position held by the Rovers now and the inclusion also of another representative of the Kingdom of Fife in Cowdenbeath F.C. in the First Division of the Scottish Football League, show how very much the game has progressed in the county since that never-to-be forgotten final on the Hibernian ground.

The whirligig of time brings its revenge. The St. Bernards' had not long to wait for theirs. The season following the rival clubs of Kirkcaldy and Edinburgh again fought their way into the Qualifying Cup Final. Memories of the stirring contests between the pair were rekindled at Tynecastle. From all parts of Fife the football enthusiasts poured into Edinburgh on the last day of November, 1907. The receipts topped by £100 the record established at Easter Road when the Rovers won the trophy.

Brilliant sunshine brightened the outing for those among the 20,000 spectators who had travelled from the outlying districts. The sides had undergone numerous changes since the previous final. Gourlay was the only survivor of the Rovers attack while the Saints had an entirely new combination, forward. Wilkie and Chapman were introduced to the Fife club's middle line, and Ross to the corresponding section of the Saints eleven. The teams were:—St. Bernard—Ramsay; Buchanan and Reid; Findlay, Smith and Ross; Murray, Simpson (H), Simpson (J), Logan and Tennant. Raith Rovers—Dowie; Inglis and Cumming; Wilkie, Chapman and Grierson; Sutherland, Devine, Axford, Gourlay and Campbell. In defence the sides were well matched; in attack the Rovers were the heavier lot.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS, 1923-24-25.

J. H. Logan (Secretary & Manager), D. Hetherington, R. J. Morrison, J. Bogie,
A. Fraser, T. Smith, A. G. Adamson (President), G. Kilpatrick (Vice-President), Wm. C. Ritchie,
[*R. Miliken*]

On hard frozen ground the Fife men took uncommon risks. I heard on the ground there was a big bonus at stake. The desperation and determination of the Rovers to prevail at all hazards was probably the reason why they had to surrender the cup to the Saints, who reversed the score of the previous final. The Saints got their first and third goals off penalty kicks well taken by Buchanan, and in between when the second half was eleven minutes gone, Tennant scored from a free kick for a bad foul.



Had there been less fiery heads among the Rovers, they might have won the cup, a second time. They were first to score in thirteen minutes, but the fat was in the fire a minute later when Harry Simpson was brought down in the penalty area and the score was levelled. The turn of the game for the Saints occurred shortly before the interval. For the rest of the time they played like a glorified team. They won through by sticking to the real sporting game in a struggle that did not quite touch the standard of the 1906-07 final. Five of the winning players—Reid, Findlay, the Simpsons, and Murray hailed from as far north as Peterhead and Aberdeen.

An unusual incident of this game occurred at half-time when on account of similarity of colours, the Rovers changed to salmon pink jerseys. They had a sound team, but under pressure the defence as a whole did not play to reputation. Several players in this game later on gained fame in England. Archie Devine and Peter Logan won English Cup honours with Bradford City in a team almost entirely comprised of Scots, while George Chapman was a brilliant success in the ranks of Blackburn Rovers.

Lingering reminders of a trying winter were ever before the mind in the bite that came out of the East when the Rovers met Falkirk at Celtic Park on April 12, 1913, in the final for the Scottish Cup. A snowstorm had threatened, but the atmosphere fortunately remained crisp and dry.



Capt. J. H. LOGAN, Secretary and Manager.

The occasion was a memorable one for Kirkcaldy as no other Fife club ever attained to such distinction, in other respects the Cup Final was notable. For the first time in seventeen years Glasgow was without a representative in the last stage of the competition for the most coveted prize of Scottish football. The Heart of Midlothian and Hibernian in the season of 1895-96 had similarly stimulated the enthusiasm of the rest of Scotland by breaking the monopoly of the Glasgow clubs. East and West rivalry has ever exercised a beneficial influence on outdoor sport. Football is never so interesting as when the clubs of the East are powerful enough to dispute supremacy with the clubs of the West.

On their way to the final the Rovers disposed of Broxburn (5-0), Hibernian (1-0 in Edinburgh, after a 2-2 draw at Kirkcaldy), St. Mirren (2-1), Clyde (1-0, at Tynecastle in the semi-final, after a draw of one goal each). The club was fortunate to have a bye in the first round. When it is recalled that Falkirk had accounted for Morton, Rangers, Dumbarton and Heart of Midlothian, the task set the Kirkcaldy men was not an enviable one.

In spite of the absence of local colour the attendance was 45,000 and the gate and stand drawings were £1250. The total exceeded by £125 the money drawn at the previous year's final between the Celtic and Clyde clubs. Tom Robertson, the famous Queen's Park half-back and the doyen of referees, controlled the game. Tom was a familiar figure on all the big football grounds in England, Wales and Ireland. This was the last Scottish Cup Final of many he had handled. The teams were:—Falkirk-Stewart; Orrock and Donaldson; McDonald, Logan (Tom) and McMillan; McNaught, Gibbons, Robertson, Croal and Terris. Raith Rovers—McLeod; Morrison and Cumming; Gibson (J.), Logan (J. H.) and Anderson; Cranston, Graham, Martin, Gourlay and Gibson (Fred).

The debut of Falkirk and Rovers in this fortieth final

surpassed for merit many final struggles I had witnessed between teams of greater pretensions. The pace of the first half was terrific. The play was gloriously free and characterised by a dash and abandon that thrilled the spectators. In a punishing game there was more repose among the Falkirk forwards: a little more steadiness in front might have made all the difference. The Kirkcaldy forwards slung the ball free and open across the line, but the ball was too much in the air, and they did not draw the defence of their opponents in the way that Croal and "Sojer" Robertson managed to do on the other side.

Back play had much to do with the success of Falkirk, who after thirty years of patient plodding and striving won the trophy by 2 goals to 0. Robertson scored in the first half and Tom Logan sealed the fate of the Rovers with the other goal early in the second half. "Bill" Morrison proved not only an able captain, but a sound back in this greatest of all games in which the Rovers ever took part. Morrison was well known in other fields. The previous year he was one of the Clyde team in the Cup Final and at various times he played also for St. Bernard, Glossop and Fulham. He was the hero of an ever memorable cup tie when the Clyde, with Morrison dominating the forward line, gained a sensational victory over the Rangers at Shawfield Park.

One cannot pass from the national cup final without paying tribute to the Rovers half-backs. This section of the team gave backbone to the side. Logan's height and strenuous tackling were invaluable while his wing supports copied his example with courageous skill. Harry Anderson had the honour to captain a Scots team against Wales. Two members of the Falkirk team, James Croal and Tom Logan, afterwards joined Chelsea. While with Falkirk, Croal played against England in 1914.



In the Celtic pavilion. Mr. D. A. White, the Rovers' president, and Mr. W. C. Ritchie, a director, acknowledged in sportsmanlike manner, the flattering tributes that were paid by Mr. A. M. Robertson, the head of the Scottish Football Association, to the losing team. "The big thing that mattered was that a country club had won the cup."

George Drummond, who trained the Falkirk players, was probably the greatest all-round footballer of all time. He was a member of the famous Invincibles of Preston North End when the Lancashire club was at the zenith of fame.

I remember asking Peter Hodge, who had engaged all the members of the Rovers' Cup Team except the Sunderland forward Martin, to name the best all-round player the Rovers ever had. He singled out William Dall, a Kirkcaldy born player of other years. Not only did Mr. Hodge believe Dall was the Rovers' best, but he said that Dall was one of the greatest all-round footballers he had ever seen.

When the club was formed into a Limited Company Mr. Hodge was its first secretary-manager. He held the office down to the November of the Scottish Cup Final year. He returned to Kirkcaldy in October 1916 when John Richardson left. Peter looked after the nondescript footballers in the remaining years of war and returned to Leicester City of which club he is still Secretary-manager, in September 1919.

The present holder of the office is Mr. James H. Logan, who served the club ever since with a tactfulness characteristic of all past officials. Mr. Logan was a member of the Rovers' cup team that opposed Falkirk in the Scottish Cup Final. During his time of office the club's headquarters has been brought up-to-date in every respect. Stark's Park has accommodation for 35,000 spectators, and the capacious grand stand and equipment are a credit to the town. Mr. A. G. Adamson,



D. MORRIS (Scotland).

the chairman, is a leading member of the Scottish Football Council, and for long has been identified with the inner circle where his services on the International Selection Committee have been invaluable.

The future is bright with the prospect of Raith Rovers one day achieving the coveted distinction of Scottish Cupholders. League Championship honours may also be in store for Kirkcaldy. The team is clever enough, and strong enough to realise the loftiest ambitions of the group who guide the destinies of the club.

None other team but Raith Rovers encompassed the downfall of the champions of the Scottish League at Ibrox Park in 1923-24. The inspiration of that triumph over the Rangers and the continued high standard of football the youthful team repeated, are omens of greater triumph to come.



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