

Football 283

Chapter 283 Glasgow Derby (2)

Across the hall, in the Rangers' dressing room, Steven Gerrard's approach was calmer, more measured, yet every bit as inspiring. Dressed in his immaculate suit he looked every bit the noble man he has become in the hearts of the Rangers fans.

"Alright, lads. We all know what this match means," he began, his voice steady, but filled with conviction. "But I don't need to shout, I don't need to hype you up. You've prepared all week. You've seen how far we've come, the progress we've made. Today, it's about execution. It's about being smart, disciplined, and ruthless when it counts." He paused, letting the weight of his words sink in.

"We respect them, but we do not fear them. They may have the home ground, but we have heart and the desire of our fans pushing us forward. Stick to the game plan, control the midfield, and take your chances when they come. Morelos, Kent — they can't handle your speed, so I want to see you use it. Jack, Arfield — I want you to dominate in the middle, break up their rhythm. We're not here to sit back. We're here to win."

Gerrard looked around the room, his eyes sharp. "We are Rangers and I for one am proud to be a part of this team, the most successful club in Scotland. You wear that badge with pride, and today, you show the world what it means to play for this club. It's time to prove that we are back to challenge for glory and not just another team in the league. Give it everything, leave nothing out there, and when the final whistle blows, we'll walk off this pitch knowing we gave it all."

After finishing his speech he looked towards the 22 year old Worrall, "Joe I want you at your best that Rakim boy does not get an inch to breath, wherever he goes you follow, be his shadow." he told the blond English man who gave him a confident ready to accomplish his gaffer's task, "I don't think you get me, if the boy takes a dump I want you to be the one handing him the toilet roll. Don't let him make us a backdrop to his genius," He reiterated getting a much more serious response from Worrall whilst the nearby players chuckled slightly.

With his final words, the players stood, ready for battle. The calm intensity in Gerrard's voice had fuelled them, filling them with confidence and focus. Everyone knew what this game meant for not just the club but also the fans and they were ready to prove what it meant for them. They Quickly filled out of the changing room where they met their opponents with an aura reedy for battle one that matched their own desire for glory.

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The teams emerged from the tunnel to a thunderous roar. Celtic Park was a cauldron of noise, green and white scarves waving furiously in the stands. Ranger's supporters, though slightly fewer in numbers, matched the atmosphere with their own chants, their blue-and-white flags rippling through the air.

The wall of blue behind the away goal seemed especially fierce as blue smoke wafted through the crowd making them look especially fierce. The loud rhythmic gong of drums added with the loud exclamation of the fans whenever the stadium commentator introduced a player in their line-up added to the atmosphere. The stadium was truly divided just like the city was for that very day and following 90 minutes would decide who was in the right.

"Right then," Callum said, his voice rising, followed by the crackling of his mic as he adjusted it. "Here we go, the atmosphere is electric. You can barely hear yourself think inside Celtic Park today! Both teams walking out onto the field, and you can see it on their faces, this is more than just a football match. It's a battle for pride, for supremacy in Glasgow." He paused for a second to catch his breath and get a second to gather his thoughts.

"This is it. The Glasgow Derby. Celtic versus Rangers. The fiercest rivalry in Scottish football. We're just minutes away from kick-off, and I tell you, Roy, this is going to be a cracker of a match."

Roy Townsley, the professional that he is did his job adding his two cents, "Exactly, Callum. You look at both teams, and there's no doubt we're in for a fierce contest. There's quality all over the pitch. For Rangers, it's about getting off to a strong start, silencing the crowd, and showing that they've closed the gap on Celtic."

Both squads went through the pre match proceeding of shaking hands and taking a team photo to commemorate the derby. Both Brown and James Tavernier represented their team as captains meeting the match official as they went through the coin toss. Tavernier won the coin toss choosing to kick off the match and brown choose to shoot into the Celtic goal first.

The players took their position as a lull silence hung over the Celtic stadium only waiting for the final seconds to tick down. They didn't have to wait long before the referee blew his whistle, and Morelos knocked the ball back to his side. Immediately a sea of green jerseys exploded forward into their half looking to apply pressure from the first moment. The Glasgow Derby had begun.

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The Rangers players moved the ball around cautiously in the opening seconds, clearly intent on establishing control early on. Arfield received the ball in midfield, quickly passing it back to Jack, who calmly spread it out to Tavernier on the right. Celtic, pressing high as Lennon had instructed, wasted no time trying to force Rangers into a mistake.

Callum McDonald's voice cut through the hum of the crowd. "And we're off! Rangers taking possession early, trying to settle into their rhythm. Celtic pressing high already, with Brown leading the charge. You can see that intensity from the start, Roy. They're not giving Rangers an inch."

Roy Townsley nodded; his tone analytical. "Yeah, Callum. Celtic know that if they let Rangers get too comfortable in possession, they'll be in trouble. Rangers have pace on the wings with Kent and Candeias, and they'll be looking to exploit that. But Celtic's press is stifling them right now."

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In the third minute the ball found its way to Kent on the left wing, who immediately faced off against Lustig. The Celtic right-back held his ground, forcing Kent to turn back and pass to Halliday. The pressure was mounting as Celtic's midfield surged forward, Brown and Ntcham doubling down on any loose touches.

Rangers were forced to play it back to McGregor, who launched a high ball forward toward Morelos. Boyata rose to meet the ball, heading it clear, but the clearance landed straight at the feet of Ryan Jack. Jack took a touch and then threaded a neat pass out wide to Candeias, who sprinted down the right wing. The crowd roared as Tierney raced to close him down.

"This is where Rangers can be dangerous," Roy commented. "Candeias is quick, and he's got space in front of him now."

Candeias surged forward, but Tierney's pace was unmatched. The young fullback timed his slide tackle perfectly, dispossessing the Rangers winger and regaining control of the ball. He quickly played it forward with a high diagonal pass towards the right flank to Rakim who had been waiting just past the halfway line. He calmly chested it down to his feet before being pressured by his marker.

"And there's Rakim Rex, getting his first real touch of the ball," Callum said with excitement. "Let's see what the lad can do in his first Old Firm Derby."

Rex received the ball under pressure from Worrall but with a quick flick of his foot, he sidestepped the defender, leaving him scrambling. The crowd responded with a collective gasp as Rex accelerated down the wing, showing flashes of the brilliance he was becoming known for. He drew in Halliday and McCrorie before cutting inside, leaving them both flat-footed. Rakim glided past them as if they weren't there, carrying the ball forward with intent.

"Brilliant from Rex!" Callum exclaimed. "Look at him go, Roy! He's dancing through the Rangers' defence already!"

Roy sounded a little more measured but impressed, nonetheless. "The boy's got talent, no doubt about it. But he's got to make it count in the final third. Rangers won't give him many chances like that."

Rakim spotted Edouard making a run toward the box and delivered a perfectly weighted through ball, splitting the Rangers' defence. Edouard latched onto it, darting between Goldson and Worrall who had used his pace to track back. He used his excellent field of vision and defensive acumen after being beaten by Rakim figure out the most dangerous area and rushed towards it.

Being a step behind Edouard he could only grit his teeth willing his legs forward as the striker approached the penalty area. He took a quick glance at McGregor's position, readying himself for the shot. But just as Edouard was about to pull the trigger, Worrall slid in with a crucial last-ditch tackle, sending the ball out for a corner. The Rangers defenders breathed a sigh of relief as the chance was snuffed out at the last moment.