

# Can anybody stop Rangers?

*Europe is only threat to Glasgow club's domestic dominance*



Rangers' 1999-2000 league title was its 12th in 13 years.

Barnes and Kenny Dalglish, who were both fired after being hailed as the "Dream Ticket" upon their arrival in June 1999.

O'Neill knows the cards are stacked against him in the bid to halt Rangers.

"Rangers did not get 21 points clear of Celtic by accident, nor did they get there overnight," O'Neill said. "They are a strong team with international players who would grace any top club in Europe."

BY PHIL GORDON  
*in Glasgow*

The Scottish season kicked off July 29 with only the prospect of an extended Champions League run likely to prevent Rangers cruising to its 12th title in 13 years.

Martin O'Neill, Celtic's seventh manager in nine years, will be doing all he can to restore some pride at Parkhead, but, as ever, no other side can hope to muster a serious challenge.

Rangers, featuring U.S. national team captain Claudio Reyna, beat Zalgiris Kaunas of Lithuania, 4-1, in the first leg of their second-qualifying-round series to maintain its ambitions of reaching the group stage of the Champions League.

**SETBACK WAS CATALYST.** Rangers, which struggled to beat St. Johnstone, 2-1, on opening day, failed to reach the knockout stage, but midfielder Jorg Albertz says that setback was the catalyst for the success in the Scottish Premier League, which it won by a record margin of 21 points over Celtic.

"We knew we had to forget about it as soon as possible," said Albertz. "That is what we did and won the championship again and the Scottish Cup again—you can't have the Champions League on your mind all the time."

After being knocked out of Europe, Rangers lost only once, on the final day at Motherwell, which ended a 22-game unbeaten run.

Manager Dick Advocaat did not dwell on the success. Instead, he spent \$18 million on Dutch defenders Bert Konterman from Feyenoord and Fernando Ricksen from AZ Alkmaar and strikers Kenny Miller from Hibernian and Peter Lovenkrands of AB Copenhagen.

And Albertz underlined that Rangers has not lost its appetite for success despite its monopoly.

"I want to win the league this season and next season as well," said the German international. "Even if we won it 13 times in a row, it would never get boring."

Celtic fans, who might disagree with that, are hoping O'Neill can help the club recover some of its traditional fighting spirit.

O'Neill was wooed from English club Leicester City and has to clear away the cobwebs of the disastrous era of John

**SUTTON FOR VIDUKA.** Celtic, which won, 2-1, at Dundee United in its opener, lost Mark Viduka, the club's top scorer with 27 goals last season, to Leeds United and replaced him with Chris Sutton.

Belgian international defender Joos Valgaeren arrived from Roda JC, and O'Neill has offered Leicester roughly \$10 million for midfielder Neil Lennon. Celtic also is looking to sign Australian keeper Mark Bosnich on loan from English champion Manchester United.

None of the other 10 clubs — the Premier League has been increased to 12 teams this season — is able to come close to matching the spending power of the Old Firm. (Reuters)

## SCOTTISH TRANSFER MARKET

**ABERDEEN:** In: None. Out: Ilian Kiriakov (free agent), Jamie Buchan (Dundee United). **CELTIC:** In: Chris Sutton (Chelsea), Joos Valgaeren (Roda JC). Out: Mark Viduka, (Leeds United), Regi Blinker (free agent). **DUNFERMLINE:** In: Youssef Rossi (Rennes), Andrius Skerla (PSV), Marco Ruitenbeek (Go Ahead Eagles). Out: None. **DUNDEE:** In: Marco del Marchi (Vitesse), Georgi Nemzadze (Reggiana), Fabien Caballero (Sol de America), Jose Sara (Cerro Porteno). Out: None. **DUNDEE UNITED:** In: Danny Griffin (St. Johnstone), Jamie Buchan (Aberdeen), Joachim Fernandez (Udinese). Out: Jan Telesnikov (Beitar Jerusalem), Joaquim Ferraz (Maritimo), Sigi Johnsson (Akranes). **HEARTS:** In: None. Out: None. **HIBERNIAN:** In: John O'Neil (St. Johnstone), Hakim Sar-Temoury (Nantes), Didier Agathe (Raith Rovers), Paul Fenwick (Raith Rovers), Ulrik Laursen (OB). Out: Kenny Miller (Rangers), Paul Hartley (St. Johnstone), John Hughes (Ayr Utd.), Pat McGinlay (Ayr Utd.). **KILMARNOCK:** In: Craig Dargo (Raith Rovers), Andy McLaren (Reading). Out: None. **MOTHERWELL:** In: Greg Strong (Bolton), Stuart Elliot (Glenroan). Out: Simo Valakari (Derby County). **RANGERS:** In: Bert Konterman (Feyenoord), Fernando Ricksen (AZ), Kenny Miller (Hibernian), Peter Lovenkrands (AB), Allan Johnston (Sunderland), Paul Ritchie (Bolton). Out: Gordon Durie (Northern Spirit), Stale Stensaas (Rosenborg). **ST. JOHNSTONE:** In: Craig Russell (Manchester C), Paul Hartley (Hibernian), Tommy Lovenkrands (AB), Mohammed Sylla (Le Havre). Out: Danny Griffin (Dundee Utd.), John O'Neil (Hibernian), Keith O'Halloran (Swindon). **ST. MIRREN:** In: Jens Paesleck (Karlsruhe), Ricky Gillies (Aberdeen). Out: None.