

Tom Campbell and Pat Woods, *Dreams and Songs to Sing: A New History of Celtic*. Mainstream Publishing, Edinburgh, 1996. Illus., index. pp. 350. £15.99.

Rangers may be having it all their own way on the field of play, and even with the big deals off it, but they are still a long way behind their old rivals Celtic when it comes to serious discussion of the history of the club.

When Campbell and Woods brought out their history of Celtic in 1986, *The Glory and the Dream*, it came in a long line of critical but celebratory histories. Most club histories are purely adulatory, especially those of Rangers, where John Allan and the ineffable Willie Allison, along with normally acerbic journalists like John Fairgrieve and Ian

Peebles, have painted wart-free pictures of the club that had commissioned them to write its history. Woods and Campbell have no formal association with Celtic, other than as supporters, and when the 1986 history came out it was seen as a rival to the official club history being prepared for the centenary in 1988 (like Rangers in 1973, it was one year out of date). At the launch of the bland club history at Celtic Park, Woods and Campbell's book was ignored, except with an oblique reference to this 'rogue' history. Rogue history it may have been, but with all the charm and forthrightness that this conjures up. In addition, it was thoroughly researched and well written.

This new history is not just an update of the 1986 book: it is an entirely new look at the history of the club, based on a host of interviews with past and present players, as well as many others associated with the game. Moreover, since 1986 there has been a world of change in football, not least in Scotland and the relations between its two big clubs. One change in this history that probably reflects the revolution at Celtic Park in the past decade, is that the authors were not only granted interviews with present Celtic staff, but were accorded the privilege of an interview with Fergus McCann, the man who now runs Celtic and is said to have saved it from receivership when he bought up the club and its debts on 3 March 1994.

Acceptance by the establishment has not dimmed the 'rogue' qualities of this new history, which retains the authors' role as firm but constructive critics of the club. Most histories are published to celebrate a key date or some recent triumph, but none of this has been the case at Celtic Park since 1988. Indeed the years since the 1988 double have been among the most desperate in the club's history, although not as grim as the relegation threatening days of the 1940s or playing second fiddle to Rangers in the 'several lean years' before the Stein revival. Since 1988, the silverware cupboard has been terribly bare, and the club that once won the admiration of Europe now ventures abroad as an also-ran. For those more thoroughly died in the green the most agonising aspect of these years has been watching their club swept aside by Rangers as they appear set to stroll towards equalling the 'nine-in-a-row championships held so triumphantly and once upon a time so unassailably, by Celtic.

All of this the authors report without excuses, although naturally enough taking what pleasure they can from the victories that have brightened up a long succession of set-backs which saw Celtic fall so far

behind Rangers that some thought The Old Firm' itself was finished. The bigotry that was part of that relationship may or may not still be there; the commercial basis certainly is, although the future of the two clubs no longer remains in Scotland.

Now that The Old Firm' once more exercises its dominance in the domestic game, and in the closing pages the authors can lift the hearts of the fans as they take them through the 1995-96 season where, although they were able to deprive Rangers only of the Cup, class imports played in an impressively-renovated stadium before regular crowds of nearly 50 000, most of them season-ticket holders.

Ten years ago Celtic had the ambiguous honour of being run by the same families as had controlled the club for most of this century. Today the once proudly called family club has entered the ranks of the glossily-packaged commodities more suitable to set before a sponsor. Despite the management consultants, however, it is hard to see the Celtic followers being dismissed as what the sociologist would like to call 'consumers'. Campbell and Woods remind us of the similar battles almost exactly a century ago, and while the moneyed men won that one, they have never quite been able to dismiss the fans who have played such a vital role in a club which more than most has been seen as a 'people's' club. Even in the revolts and backstabbing that accompanied the rebel takeover, the ordinary fan played an extraordinary role, whether on the terraces or the unofficial publications and meetings that called for a clean sweep at the top.

Woods is now recognised as Scotland's foremost researcher on the history of the game, and Campbell as one of its more skilled writers. Together and alone, and in other combinations, they have contributed immensely to raising the level of writing on football in Scotland. In this book based on revealing interviews and their customary combing of the press for the most unusual detail, the authors have come up with what is perhaps their best book yet. They are both Celtic men, but have not allowed this to diminish their work; on the contrary, it is their strength, and like Handley some decades before them they make a point of reminding the club of its origins and the ideals that have constantly been threatened with becoming 'sicklied over with the pale cast of gold'.

It won't be of much comfort to the Bhoys, or concern to the Bears, but at least in the written word Celtic are as far ahead of their rivals as Rangers are ahead of Celtic on the field. The likelihood of this changing

in the near future is for the dreamers to dwell on, and while this absorbing book gives much to ponder, it is only for so long that you can go on singing with no more than hope in your heart.

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