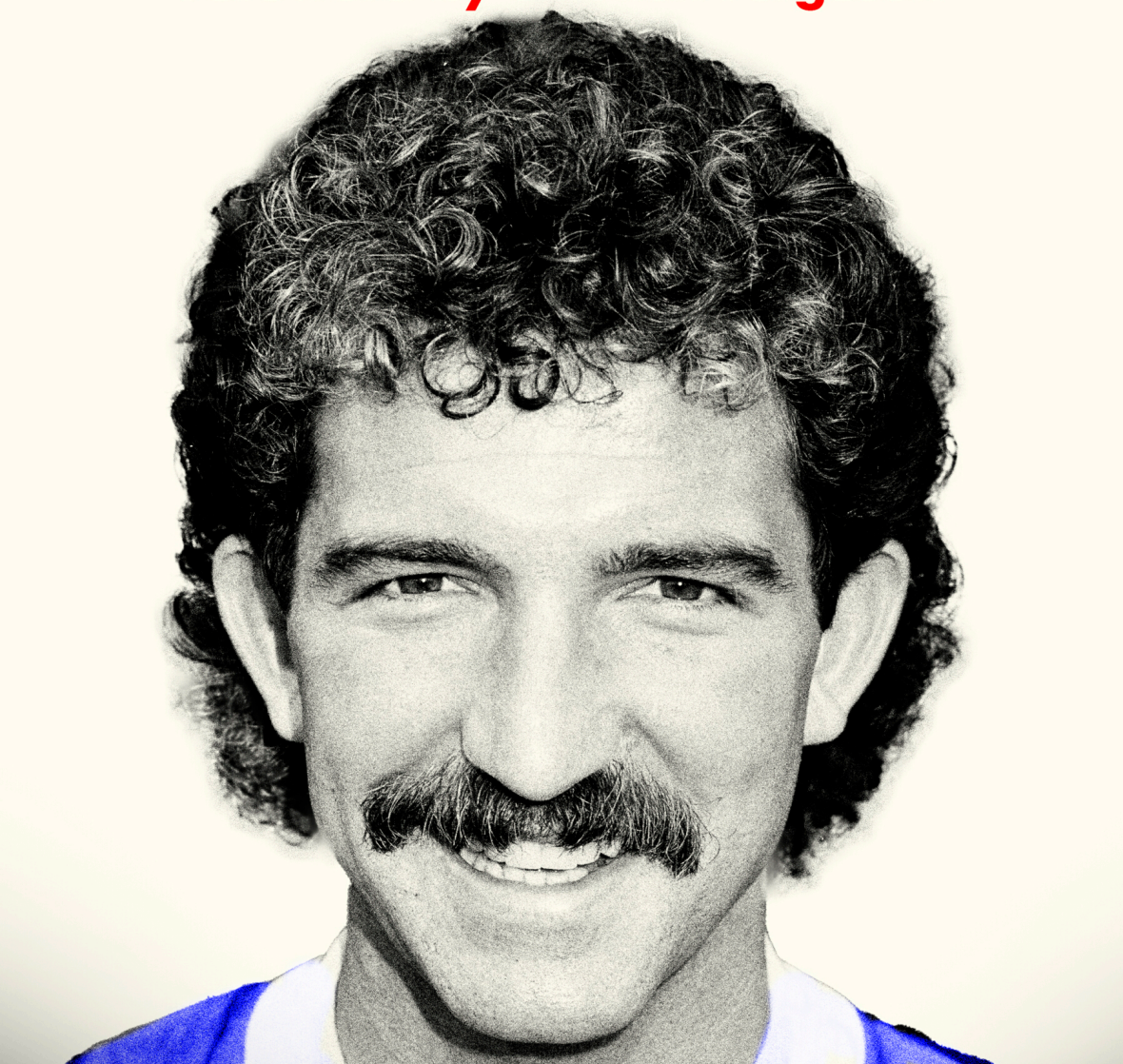
GRAEME SOUNESS

Foreword by Sir Alex Ferguson



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My Rangers

How I Changed Scottish Football For Ever

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How I Changed Scottish Football For Ever

GRAEME SOUNESS



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For my wonderful wife, Karen

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Foreword

By Sir Alex Ferguson, CBE

Graeme Souness's career as a footballer is easily defined. He captained Liverpool at the time when they were on a successful run in the European Cup, winning it three times, and he captained his country twenty-seven times. One of those games for Scotland will live in my memory for ever, against England at Hampden Park in 1985. As always, it was a fiercely played game, and I will never forget Richard Gough's goal with a header in the second half. But that is not my most vivid memory; it was another battle going on in the game – Graeme Souness against Bryan Robson, the two captains going head-to-head, winner takes all! It was a masterpiece of how two players could not hide their pride or their desire to lead their country in the field. At the end of the game, the two players stood in the centre of the pitch and hugged each other! What an amazing sight. Jock Stein – who unfortunately passed away some months later – was Scotland's

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manager on that day, and he was euphoric at Graeme's performance, as we all were.

I write this foreword on Graeme in admiration for a real man, who did not hold grudges – as he easily could have done at my decision to leave him out of our deciding game in the 1986 World Cup in Mexico. Graeme had lost some passes in the previous two games, against Denmark and Germany, when we'd played on extremely hot days. My dilemma was that the weather forecast for the deciding game against Uruguay was also extremely hot. I spoke to Graeme and explained why I was leaving him out, and he understood. But I made my second mistake by allowing him to decide if he wanted to go on the bench or not. As history will tell you, in a game we had to win to qualify for the knockout stages, we drew 0–0. I am 100 per cent sure that if I had been able to bring Graeme on we would have benefitted from his determination, leadership and composure. In the aftermath, and throughout the years since, when Graeme has been asked about the reason to leave him out he has always said the same thing: he wasn't fit enough – meaning he spared me the blame!

Graeme's management career hit the heights when he turned Rangers FC into a force of constant success. There followed spells at his former club Liverpool, Blackburn Rovers and Newcastle United, to name just a few, where

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the challenges meant his experience and leadership were paramount.

During his time as a TV analyst he was, in my opinion, the best by a mile! When he gave up that role I wasn't the only one who missed his articulate assessment of the matches every week. His latest achievement could have been his most challenging and rewarding, when he swam the English Channel on behalf of the charity DEBRA, for which he is also an excellent ambassador. Like many of his admirers, I was so inspired that I just had to support him in such a brave and generous venture.

Graeme is a real gentleman and a truly great player.

Sir Alex Ferguson, CBE

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Introduction: Can I Just Say Something Here?

By Chick Young

Magnificent Bastard. Although a lot of his enemies did not bother with the adjective.

The description of the former Rangers manager is one applied by fawning fans of the club who will be forever grateful for the miracle performed by the cool dude whose Ibrox memoirs you are about to peruse.

I hadn't heard the description myself and it certainly is not the light in which I see my friend bathe, but my nephew and godson and dedicated supporter of Rangers, Craig, assures me that it is one down from a deity. My invitation – sorry, command – from Souness to do the hard work on this literary gem has elevated me in the lad's eyes to unknown heights from which, looking down, I now feel quite giddy.

Souness has hung on to my coattails – have I got that the right way round? – for all of the forty years and

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beyond since he swung into Glasgow and set off a nuclear explosion in the once-sleepy hamlet. In the mid- eighties, Graeme rode into town somehow mistaking it for the O.K. Corral, and over the course of five incredible years left those of us making a crust in the football press wide-eyed, drop-jawed and breathless.

At the time – or at least at the beginning of this grand adventure – I was working for the *Evening Times*, the circulation area of which was the city and the greater parts of the west of Scotland, and its clubs were my beat. There was a wonderful sense of joviality about our game back then. I was living the dream, albeit I would rather have played for any of the clubs about which I wrote. The eternal dream of every Glasgow kid. To play the beautiful game and get paid for it. Apparently, I was lacking in just one commodity. Ability.

Newspapers were particularly muscular in the influence department in those days and mattered. No internet, no social media. Just people trained in the workings of the Fourth Estate, who in the main knew what they were doing. He was just Graeme in those days, an affable chap with whom I was on friendly terms, knowing him as I did as captain of Scotland. These were the kinds of people I was paid to get to know, and it was not filed under hardship.

But in the previously slumbering spring of 1986, when

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the shelf life of managers was a fair bit more enduring than it is now, Rangers sacked dear Jock Wallace who, incidentally, was some man.

And so the rumblings started. Then Graeme arrived like a hurricane. He should have had a red triangle attached. His was the kind of incoming storm that would lay trees horizontal. He had his pals in the newspaper business, and I think I was somehow adopted into that family, but I had not grasped the seriousness of the situation until later that same year, on the day we flew out to the World Cup finals in Mexico. I was on the team plane preparing for the full shift of altitude training – the players trained, the press spectated and judged – for a couple of weeks in Santa Fe, New Mexico. This was to be followed by a warm- up match in Los Angeles, and the games against Denmark, West Germany and Uruguay in Mexico itself.

On the plane across the Atlantic, Graeme, who was still the captain of Scotland but who had also now been confirmed as the new Rangers manager, came down the aisle and sat beside me. He ordered a bottle of champagne, which I reluctantly accepted. Me and willpower aren't old buddies. He then asked me for advice. Yes, I know, I cannot quite believe it either.

But this was his logic. He was a boy from Edinburgh – which is just forty miles along the road from Glasgow but

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might as well be on another planet – and had wandered off to London as a teenager and then to Middlesbrough and Liverpool. He was, to be frank, not totally *au fait* with my native city and its wacky ways. Three-quarters of a century into my residence on this planet, I am still not sure I get it either.

But I digress. 'You are a streetwise Glaswegian. Tell me about it,' he said. I started slowly, but that champagne stuff fairly loosens the tongue and I tried to paint a picture of what I'd learned was expected from every Rangers manager I had met, from Willie Waddell onwards. Around Graeme's neck was a small cross on a chain, and I suggested to him that a fair percentage of the club's support might not see the funny side of that. He argued that it had been given to him by his then-wife, at which point I hurriedly assured him that I hadn't the slightest issue with it, and nor would any man or woman touched with a degree of sanity. Bigotry is a cancer of a lifestyle as far as I am concerned. But he had asked me about the wider view and I had guessed that there were patrons at Ibrox who were still trapped in the quicksand of the seventeenth century. And, indeed, who sang of it.

It was then he spilled the beans about the sorts of signings he wanted to make for Glasgow Rangers and his determination to set fire to the club's traditions. He spoke gloriously about the club's future with such fervour,

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determination and enthusiasm that it suddenly dawned on me that I should ask if this was on the record and whether I should ditch the bubbly for a notebook.

It was and I did, hence arriving in America with the time difference on my side and enough material to fill the front page, the back page and page three of my newspaper the next day. And, who knows, a book some day . . . For a fleeting time only, I was the editor's golden boy. For me that was a brief but enjoyable tour of duty with dear old George McKechnie. Normal service between me and the newspaper's gaffer was soon resumed.

But that spark ignited something, and over the next five years Graeme Souness was far from shy in feeding me information. Indeed, by the time he left the club the BBC had noticed my frequent bylines preceded with the word 'exclusive', and your old reporter had been whisked into a new world. Graeme Souness was my leg- up in my profession. I have no doubt about that.

Not much in the entire history of our game on this little outcrop of rock in the North Atlantic compares to what he did here. Scottish football has been ordinary at times, but the combined talents of the Grimms and Rowling and Tolkien could not make his exploits and escapades and experiences up. It was and is still the greatest soap opera in sport.

Graeme is a remarkable man. I can only imagine what

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he was like to play against – or, for that matter, with – in his pomp, fire flaming from the nostrils, that moustache threatening like the horns of a Spanish bull intent on having a square go with the matador. I read somewhere that his one-time Liverpool teammate Michael Robinson said of him: 'I found him a very personable, cuddly chap who was actually quite vulnerable about being a human being with emotions. To this day he still tries very hard not to be this lovely cuddly person, when he really is.'

Tell that to some of his opponents, or to those players in his deployment who failed to understand the demands and complexities of his mission to restore Glasgow Rangers to the straight and narrow.

I would not want to be on his naughty step. But he is a caring man. He is focused on whatever commands his attention at any one time. He is driven, ambitious and, in stark contrast to the proverb, would indeed be very inclined to say 'boo' to a goose, or any other creature that was foolish enough to stand in his way.

And he would concede that some of the tackles which he inflicted on opponents over the years resulted in the victims looking as if they had just undergone extreme surgery. Or had been involved in a major road traffic incident. But still, I would insist, he is a very decent man.

This tale is not about his remarkable work for various charities, of his ridiculous commitment to raising funds

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for DEBRA and the British Heart Foundation and other unsung causes. Nor indeed is it about everything else he has done in his more than three score and ten years on this planet, a life that has been extraordinarily well lived. He took up swimming to raise funds for victims of the evil epidermolysis bullosa – butterfly skin – and has crossed channels more times than my remote.

It's not about the collection of European Cup medals jingling like loose change in his pockets, nor his cult standing in a Liverpool team which maybe bowed only to the Beatles in the places where they worship heroes on Merseyside. Nor his midfield swagger in three World Cups for Scotland, two of them as captain.

It is about just five years in the eighties – just one-fifteenth of that lifespan that I presume has a bit to journey yet – in which Graeme took Scottish football by the scruff of the neck and shook it so hard that it woke up in the real world.

It was not my idea to create this book, but I am glad someone thought of it and I am grateful that Graeme turned to me to help write it. The reliving of life forty years ago has been a sobering and did- that-really-happen experience. I know fine well that it did.

When we were discussing this book with various people interested in its publication, one gentleman in London sat open-mouthed as I told the tale of what

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happened from the moment Graeme arrived at Rangers. Eventually he looked at us and said: 'This isn't a book, it's a movie!'

And so it might yet prove to be, the tale recast on film, although who they would contract to perform as the hero of this story, the good Lord only knows. Magnificent Bastards, even in Hollywood, are thin on the ground.

Souness in the eighties was a force of nature and at times in the newspaper trade we wondered if we could find type sizes big enough to scream the headlines he was making. He re- energized the old business, if the truth be told, and I used to skip into the Glasgow offices of my paper rubbing my hands in anticipation of what high jinks would be unleashed from the south side that day. He seldom let us down. The signings came and went with – in the firstinstance – incredulity that the captain of England *and* the Auld Enemy's goalkeeper could be wooed to Govan.

And then it went off the Richter scale with Mo Johnston. My new pal in the publishing business in London could not get his mind round the fact that just four decades ago there was a football club in this country which would not knowingly sign Roman Catholics. And neither had they fielded any black players. Maurice Johnston and Mark Walters –both signed on Souness's watch – changed all that, to such an extent that no one now really knows or

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can surely care about the skin colour or faith of any player who signs for Rangers.

And that is the way it should be. But it sure was not in the days before Souness stormed in.

The policy of the club was an embarrassment to the city and country, and actually made Jock Stein, whose football wisdom had done for Celtic what Graeme was about to do at Ibrox, chuckle. Jock said it openly himself: if there were two young players of equal merit and one was a Catholic and the other a Protestant, then he would sign the Protestant, knowing that Rangers would not sign the other one.

It took a lot of courage to turn around all that social history. A chemistry of three men – Graeme, Maurice and the club's owner David Murray – did the trick, and society in Scotland, never mind the Rangers support, should be eternally grateful. Graeme took the club out the dark ages and locked the door behind him. He made up his own rules and followed them when it suited him.

By the time I was snuggling into life at the BBC, and Graeme had won his penultimate championship, I asked him for an exclusive one-to-one interview – in those days these things were not woven into contracts. He agreed and a camera crew and I headed over to Ibrox that May afternoon thinking that the interview would take place in the tunnel, or maybe his office. But at his suggestion

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a table had been put in the centre circle. It was covered with a linen tablecloth and standing on it were a jug of orange juice and two glasses. I interviewed him there and he even insisted that the cameraman climb the main stand for elevated shots of us on the pitch. The star became the director. Maybe if they do make that movie, he could just do the whole thing himself.

This book is his testimony about what went on back then. Historians in the years to come would do well to refer to his recollections of an era when there was a feeding frenzy for any nonsense that sounded as if it even remotely approximated what was happening at Glasgow Rangers.

This book is about how it really was. It was astonishing.

Maybe Craig was right. Magnificent Bastard.

Chick Young

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1

The Call

It was, I recall, mid-afternoon. I was relaxing in the Italian sun . . .

In 1984 I had signed a three- year contract with Sampdoria and the lifestyle and football here suited me. This, I was thinking, was the life. I was two years into that contract and contemplating extending it. Italy, with its food and people, was all very much me. I was thirty- two years of age, an Edinburgh lad who'd been exported to England when I was just fifteen. A boy leaving his mum and dad and the rest of the family behind to set off on his football journey. Since then, I had served an apprenticeship at Spurs, there had been a transfer to Middlesbrough and then a move to Liverpool, where we were the dominant force in England and Europe. All of which led me to my time in Italy.

My early days in professional football seemed so long ago and so far away. The north London club of the late

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sixties and early seventies was a world away from what they are now. The first team was peppered with legends of the game like Jimmy Greaves, Martin Peters, Pat Jennings and the great Dave Mackay, who went to the same school as me. The side was so good they won the UEFA Cup. In those days – 1972 – it was over two legs, and Spurs defeated Wolverhampton in an all- English final.

Still, I was a kid in a hurry. I am not sure I could have spelled the word 'patience' back then. I was nineteen and, for me, life at Tottenham under Bill Nicholson was not moving quickly enough. Even at that age I was not shortchanged in the confidence department. I would approach the boss every Friday afternoon to ask why I was not in the first team. So, by January 1973, he had obviously had enough of my overly inflated ego and accepted an offer from Middlesbrough, a princely fee of £30,000.

Other clubs in London wanted to sign me but I reckon Bill Nicholson wanted me as far away from Tottenham as possible. So I was off to the northeast of England. The manager at Ayresome Park was Stan Anderson but I only played two games for him, an FA Cup tie against Plymouth that we lost and one against Fulham, which we also lost. He was sacked immediately afterwards.

Then, in May 1973, Jack Charlton took over. He made me grow up very quickly and realize what being a professional was all about. You listen to a guy with that kind of

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pedigree, who has won the World Cup and was so successful at Leeds United. He was ruthless and taught me so much about how to succeed at the highest level. My education in football was accelerating under Jack, and I was learning what kind of attitude you had to have to get to the very top of the game.

I had five happy years in the northeast before, in January 1978, Bob Paisley paid £352, 000 – then a record fee between English clubs – for me to join Liverpool. Suddenly my life was on fire. Why such an odd number? Even in those days the rivalry between Liverpool and Manchester United was so big that the £2,000 was added to give Liverpool bragging rights over Manchester United, who had paid £350,000 for Joe Jordan!

I was now involved in one of the most ruthless professional environments in the UK and beyond. I was thrown into a different world. Ten minutes before my debut – West Brom at theHawthorns – I foolishly asked the first-team coach, Joe Fagan, how he wanted me to play and I will never forget what he said.

'Fuck off. Listen, son. We have just paid all this money for you, and you are asking me how to play football?' said Joe, who despite that, I later realized, was a sympathetic ear and a kind of favourite uncle. He turned and walked away. And that was the first and last time I ever asked a question in my seven years at Anfield.

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The mentality of the legendary boot room where coaches traditionally met at Liverpool was incredible. The team talks given by Bob Paisley, Ronnie Moran and Joe Fagan consisted of very few words – but every day at our training sessions they hammered home what was expected of us. They understood the game inside out, but they were also focused on its psychology and how to get the best out of each player. I look back at my education there and feel I attended the Oxbridge of football. It was not just that their football knowledge was second to none, their genius for keeping us on our toes every single day is something I tried to emulate right through my coaching career.

We won the English First Division title five times, but that was just the tip of the iceberg.

Three times we won Europe's premier competition. Liverpool almost had a monopoly on the European Cup at the time. And I became the club's proud captain. We were good. Really good. And with a Scottish core in me, Kenny Dalglish and Alan Hansen.

I didn't have a clue about it back then, but I would keep my Anfield education with me all my days.

Tales to be told there, right enough, but this is Italy in the spring of 1986. The phone call I am about to receive will change my life totally . . . the start of something that would forever alter not just Scottish football, but Scottish society too.

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Scottish football was vastly different back then. It was a league filled with mostly domestic players, and, for the national team, World Cup qualification was almost guaranteed. Scotland was in the middle of a run which took them to every finals from 1974 to 1990 – five in a row. Furthermore, the Old Firm, Rangers and Celtic, were far from getting their own way. In fact, the headline writers had to give birth to the New Firm. Aberdeen and Dundee United from the east coast had a grip on most of the silverware and were making headlines in Europe. Glasgow Rangers in particular were struggling under the self-imposed burden of a shameful signing policy that was not only wrong but hampered their attempts to be successful.

Forty years on it seems inconceivable, but Glasgow Rangers, one of the most famous names in world football, would not sign Roman Catholics. So had Pelé, Diego Maradona and Lionel Messi knocked at the front door begging for a contract, they would have been told to sling their hook. I could never figure it out. Did they want a sectarian team or a successful one? From our vantage point in 2026, it seems nothing short of absolute madness.

I had left Liverpool after unprecedented success in English football. Not that I was finished yet. I had helped Sampdoria win the Italian Cup – the first trophy they had ever won – and now the owners fancied the Scudetto – the championship of Italy. I fancied a bit of that myself.

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I had lived more than half my life outside the old country, although I was still a passionate Scot, with two World Cup campaigns in Argentina and Spain under my belt and a third in Mexico coming in a few months. Scots had played in Italy before – Denis Law for Torino in the sixties is the prime example. And Joe Jordan was at AC Milan and Verona just before I arrived at Sampdoria.

Nowadays, of course, Scottish international lads like Scott McTominay, Billy Gilmour and Lewis Ferguson – son of Derek, who played for me at Rangers – are out there playing in Serie A.

The globetrotting had brought me to the idyllic Italian seaside town of Nervi, along the coast from Genoa, the home of Sampdoria. I had a beautiful house and a garden that went all the way down to the Mediterranean. It had been a traditional fishing village but was now a chic small town with trendy boutiques and fabulous restaurants. Some claim that it was the birthplace of Christopher Columbus. I absolutely loved it. What a place to call home. It was a stunning setting. Lovely. *La dolce vita*. Nothing, I thought, can alter this course. Aye, very good, Graeme. I was to discover that life does not always work out the way you think it will.

Meanwhile, back in Scotland, there was a group of people planning a football revolution.

Edinburgh lad or not, my boyhood club had always

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