

Not Perfect But Definitely Extraordinary

Written by Tactical Genius

Monday, 13 June 2011 22:34 -



I was one of the few Celtic supporters who really believed that we would win the league on the last day of the season. I felt that it was right and that it was somehow destined. I didn't hide what I thought would happen and I kept believing until just after kick off on the 15th of May when it was evident Rangers were going to romp home against Kilmarnock.

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The context was that I had long felt that Celtic's form under Neil Lennon was truly remarkable. To take this fresh-faced, newly formed team (evidenced by the fact every player in the CU top ten list of 2010-11 was a new entry), to top of the League for half the season, win the Scottish Cup and to prioritise exciting football as the means of winning to was a vast improvement on the prior two seasons at least. Naturally, a new team's growth would see some familiarity and confidence lead to cohesion as time wears on and this was reflected in the balance of results against Rangers markedly swinging in Celtic's favour from the turn of 2011 and the general SPL form improving. Similarly, the new manager has learned lessons and learned them quickly in what is surely the most intense glare of public scrutiny any SPL manager has ever endured.

To me, results such as Hamilton, Inverness and the failure to win at Ibrox despite an otherwise mature performance were inevitable. These weren't systematic failures of Lennon or his squad but the growing pains of a talented but inexperienced side. Disappointment in the performances and results were natural but I refused to criticise the side or manager because they were evidently learning from such setbacks. Perhaps this refusal to criticise fed into my belief that right would win out and we would win the League. Although I clearly believe winning the SPL isn't the only criterion by which a Celtic team and manager should be judged (I would have stuck with Jo Venglos), winning it meant a huge amount to me. To win the league, to overcome like a classic underdog who has been attacked at every turn but kept picking itself up for the fight anyway was what the players, fans, club and most importantly the manager, had earned.

So I believed to the bitter end.

On the other hand, from the end of the Inverness game there were many Celtic fans who were supremely confident that 'we had blown it' and 'the league is over'. Alas, I was wrong and the negative few were vindicated. At the time I was angry that they show such defeatism. I thought to concede the title when it was still to play for a crime. The queue to be the first to say 'I told you he was shite/we are shite/we would lose' is always a long one and in my opinion populated by many a curmudgeonly arsehole with whom I wouldn't want to drink a pint. I felt there were some who were looking for an excuse to let the league go. It was a form of defeatism to find triumph elsewhere when triumph could only really be defined in finishing first.

I was proved very wrong.

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As our form inclined at Kilmarnock and Hearts the mood lifted among the support. Because of the season that had been, the tangible victories the Celtic institution had earned and the almost frightening displays of will and character that the manager repeatedly shown, there came a groundswell of positive feeling that existed alongside and irrespective of the SPL result. Everyone still wanted the League but it wasn't the most important thing. Paramount was the connection between fans and club (or at least the team and management) that had returned in a way, I'll be honest, I wasn't quite as aware was lacking as it had been in the preceding five seasons or so.

The attitude of the fans towards the game, the team and the manager on Sunday the 15th of May left many, including those among the support, incredulous. The allegations of defeatism against fans I had made sold them criminally short. In an attempt to be a better fan by steadfastly supporting the club in my way I had reasoned that other had done so in a lesser way. The songs, laughter and rejoicing of the Parkhead crowd showed how wrong I was.

Ironically, it was only because of the league defeat that we were able to rise above the level of almost any other set of fans. Had we won, such jubilation would have been ascribed to the victory but in defeat the celebrations became emblematic of the exceptional nature of the Celtic support. In my observation of global football, only the insane zealot fans keep supporting their team in defeat and it is often tinged with the dark threat of violence against the club, team or other fans (even among their support).

I can never recall seeing a support so celebratory of their identity and what had been materially achieved by a team and manager under such trying circumstances. And in almost total unity. The memory of the Huddle at 3-0 that day that involved what must have been 80% of the support still makes the hair on the back of my neck stand up.

It sometimes seems that no two Celtic fans will have anyone speak for them such is their wont to disagree and disinclination to be spoken for. But when it mattered the shared views, the love of the club and the joy in football that Celtic fans share was on display in 90 minutes of simpatico. This was unadulterated Celtic and it's why we call ourselves the Greatest Fans In The World.

That's maybe a bit navel-gazing and perhaps the Penarol or Besiktas fans could possibly

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eclipse us. No set of 60,000 fans (or 60,000 people in any setting) will possibly have completely unblemished behaviour but the standard the Celtic fans showed that day, and I am sure will show again, was incomparable.

We have to carry this feeling, this positivity and this momentum into next season and realise all that we deserve.

We may not be perfect but we are extraordinary.