

## Second Team Syndrome

Written by Sparrow Thirteen  
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In the recently recent book 'We Are Celtic Supporters', author Richard Purden encounters several fans whose love for Celtic is linked by the fact that they all support other teams first. In Germany, a fan of SpVgg Greuther Furth of the 2.Bundesliga enthusiastically recounts following Celtic across Europe. Likewise, a Spanish fan tells of his fondness of Celtic in relation to the minority communities in Spain, with an emphasis on the shared human values and ideas of freedom that stem from being an outsider in a wider, oppressive society. Further on in the book, Manchester musicians Johnny Marr, Noel Gallagher, Richard Ashcroft and Mani link their passion of Celtic with a perceived sense of Irishness, in addition to the working-class subculture that links their home city to Glasgow.

But is it truly possible for a love of a second team to be any more than a side project or a temporary fling? As someone who has Celtic firmly in second place of his affections, the idea can become complicated. For a start, several of the musicians mentioned may be accused of labelling Celtic as something overly simplistic. The argument that the club is anti-fascist, anti-royal and anti-establishment is certainly a romanticised one, and whilst it does contain large

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elements of truth, Celtic being a club for all means that it transcends gender, class, race and politics. The same can't always be said for other teams within Glasgow.

Can a second team truly be loved as much as a first, and has the notion of adopting a second team resulted due to the greater exposure of football around the world due to TV? Taking the first question, I do not think that it can. Celtic is firmly rooted within my own identity due to my family background. The only legitimate identity I have to Coventry City is that they are the team of the city in which I was raised. An accident that has forever etched a passion for a team that no other family member carries. When Celtic wins, I cheer, but this can be watered down someone if City have lost the day before. A Celtic treble would be a feeling of euphoria, yet the feeling of deflation from City's impending relegation cannot be detached. A parallel would be that of a parent faced with one healthy and one sick child. Any enjoyment from the healthy offspring cannot be appreciated as a stand-alone sense of joy, as there is always the perceived fear close at hand.

In terms of the popularity of second teams, wider TV coverage may result in this. To question of support must also be raised here, because there is a vast difference between watching an international tournament for example, and randomly cheering for one country, and actively supporting a team in another league. Whenever I speak to Celtic fans and tell them that I support an English team first, I anticipate a sense of exasperation, yet am usually met with them telling me who their English team is. This exhaustive list includes teams whose identity and politics may not match the idealised concept of Celtic, such as Chelsea and West Ham. With the internet, a football fan in Coatbridge could be captivated by a team in the Dutch second division, harbouring a passion until they develop the jubilation and anguish that comes with being a football supporter. Seeing a score in a newspaper could never match these emotions.

In Italy, 'linking' between clubs is commonplace, with fans of clubs (if not necessarily the clubs themselves) developing friendships based upon politics and identity. Lazio and Verona, for example, are linked due to their absurd far-right beliefs, and as a result are rivals of the traditionally left-wing club, Livorno. This can raise problems for those fans of Verona and Lazio who are not on the right, politically. Whilst the easy scenario would be to ignore any potential link, that would also mean ignoring the true identity of a club you love. Right-wing Celtic supporters may find the link with St Pauli embarrassing. In addition, an increasing number of left-wing fans find this link a little cringe worthy. From a friendship that is rooted in anti-fascist ideology, the 'punk' club are being rebelled against by its own supporters for the increasing commercialisation and distasteful advertising within FC St Pauli. An unofficial friendship

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between a small section of supporters has somehow been commercialised, but not before unwittingly creating an unofficial link between Hamburg and Rangers, based on nothing more than the view that, as their city rivals are friends, they must also adopt a courtship. Is it possible, as a result of linking between supporters, for a Celtic fan to follow a German team other than St Pauli? As the Furth fan mentioned at the start suggests, it is, but does this highlight a wider uncertainty between choosing a team and having one thrust upon you by the club itself?

Does the famous quote about Celtic jerseys not shrinking to fit inferior players have a similarity in terms of supporters? Is it disrespectful to only regard Celtic as second fiddle in someone's affections? Again, wider issues are raised that simply highlight complexities. The German who watches Celtic in European games whilst having a season ticket at his first love may attend more games a season than some fans who choose to watch every game on TV. Does support mean someone who is actively at the game cheering the team on, or does it link to the feelings of anxiety and hope that can only stem from the pores of someone who loves a particular club? In terms of myself, I love Celtic, but I have a first love. During the one and only time I brought these two loves together, my half Coventry City, half Celtic scarf was roundly laughed at when I wore it at Celtic Park. Keeping two loves separate is the best way for them both to flourish within the depths of the soul.

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