

Scottish League membership 1890-2004

Following the twists and turns in membership of the Scottish League and its divisional structures can be a daunting task. I have tried to keep it as uncomplicated as possible by listing the dates when clubs have joined, putting all clubs in bold and listing the town/city clubs play in where this is not apparent from the name.

To make it even more confusing, differences arise between historians regarding certain clubs. I have tackled some of the more problematical as follows:

Aberdeen:

There were teams with this name operating in the 19th century but the present club was formed by the coming together of three teams in the Granite City, with no one dominating the others. Accordingly, following custom and practice, I list only results since the present Aberdeen club was founded in 1903.



One of Aberdeen's all-time greats: ALEX McLEISH

Ayr United:

This club was formed as a result of a merger between **Ayr FC** and **Ayr Parkhouse** in 1910. Until the League admitted a side from Inverness in 1994 it was the only amalgamation in Scottish football and it remains the only amalgamation between existing League clubs. However, as Ayr were clearly the stronger of the two and brought the bulk of the fans, players and officials into the merged club, not to mention their ground, I have in the statistical section counted Ayr United as a continuation of Ayr FC.



Action from Somerset Park, home of Ayr United

Clydebank (1966-2002):

There was a club with this name in membership of the Scottish League 1914-15 and 1917-31. However, other than the name, there is no connection between the clubs. I have treated them as two separate entities. To avoid confusion you will see the first club labelled either as **First Clydebank** or **Clydebank (1914-31)**.



Jerry Kerr. He took Dundee United into the 1st Division in 1960

Dundee United:

Joined the League in 1923 but are the former **Dundee Hibernian** renamed. They have been regarded as such throughout. However, there is a school of thought which says that **Dundee Wanderers** should be regarded as being the original United. I have an open mind on the topic but until more research is done I am counting the Wanderers as a completely separate side.

East Stirlingshire:

There is the vexed question of the 1964-65 season when **East Stirling** decamped to **Clydebank** and played as **ES Clydebank**. Should this be counted as part of East Stirling's history? Clydebank's? Or as a completely separate team? To deal with the latter first. To my mind it is utterly fatuous to think there was ever a team which played for one season only in the mid-sixties. Did they fold? No. Were they kicked out? No. Did they join the League that year? No.

It would be just as foolish to claim this season for Clydebank. There was no League football played in that town the season before or the season after and while 1964-65 undoubtedly lent impetus to Clydebank's admission to the League, it is clear that, by virtue of having to apply for membership in the first place, that they were not members of the League.

The facts here are fairly straightforward. East Stirling were forced to play in Clydebank for one season against the wishes of their supporters. They had a team the year before. They had a team the year after. The players who played for ES Clydebank were by and large the same ones who turned out for East Stirling in 1963-64 and again in 1965-66. Therefore I have included this season in East Stirling's records.



Be it ever so humble... FIRS PARK. Shires home since 1921.

Inverness Caledonian Thistle:

A long-winded name for a club which doesn't know what to call itself. However, unlike Ayr United, this amalgamation saw a new ground and a new management and a new beginning as members of the League. Therefore I have counted their records only from 1994 and have treated their predecessors (the Inverness sides **Caledonian** and **Thistle**) as two independent entities which ceased to exist on the day the new club was formed.



Livingston:

There are those who claim this club is just a few years old. Nonsense! This club was formed in 1943 as **Ferranti Thistle**. Upon gaining admission to the League in 1974 they were ordered to change their name as otherwise it was giving free publicity to Ferranti (which by the very mention of it, I've just done). The League was understandably worried by the possible consequences (Coca-Cola Celtic or Pepsi Rangers anybody?)

So Ferranti changed their name to **Meadowbank** where they were going to play their League matches. This club moved to **Livingston** and changed their name. Sure, they've done well since moving there, but they are not a new club. No team called Livingston ever applied for membership of the League. Meadowbank took their players, their board, (but not their supporters) to Livingston and (very successfully) transplanted them. No-one thinks **Clyde** are a new team because they now play in **Cumbernauld** instead of **Glasgow** and their move was identical to Livingston's in all respects save the name change. So Livingston are a continuation of Meadowbank who in turn are a continuation of Ferranti. Got it? Good.



The way they were. From 1974-95 anyway.

Stirling Albion:

Their new ground is named after that of **Kings Park** who played in Stirling pre-war and there is evidence to suggest that by creating a new team Stirling officials who were involved with Kings Park were able to avoid that clubs debts. Nevertheless, one fact remains. Kings Parks ground was demolished by a German bomber in World War II. In addition there were seven long years while League football was in abeyance. A new team, a new ground, new management all had to be found and its not surprising that those who were involved with the previous club in Stirling would also get involved with the new one. So, as far as this writer is concerned, Stirling's records start from 1946

League Membership 1890-2004

1890-91

There were eleven founder members of the Scottish League: **Abercorn** (Paisley), **Cambuslang**, **Celtic** (Glasgow), **Cowlairs** (Glasgow), **Dumbarton**, **Heart of Midlothian** (Edinburgh), **Rangers** (Glasgow), **Renton**, **St Mirren** (Paisley), **Third Lanark** (Glasgow) and **Vale of Leven** (Alexandria). Renton were expelled after five games and their record expunged. In the interests of historical accuracy it has been included here.

1891-92

Cowlairs failed to be re-elected and were replaced by **Renton**. **Clyde** (Glasgow) and **Leith Athletic** were elected to bring the total membership to 12.

1892-93

Cambuslang and **Vale of Leven** dropped out. There were no replacements so there were ten members.

1893-94

Dundee and **St Bernard's** (Edinburgh) were elected to Division One to replace **Abercorn** and **Clyde** who joined the new Second Division along with **Cowlairs**, **Hibernian** (Edinburgh), **Morton** (Greenock), **Motherwell**, **Northern** (Glasgow), **Partick Thistle** (Glasgow), **Port Glasgow Athletic** and **Thistle** (Glasgow). There was no automatic promotion and relegation. The bottom three 1st division sides and the top three in the 2nd division contested elections with votes cast by the remaining 1st division clubs. There were now two divisions of ten clubs each.

1894-95

Clyde elected to Division One to replace **Renton**. Division Two Champions **Hibernian** are not elected. **Airdrieonians** and **Dundee Wanderers** elected to Division Two to replace **Northern** and **Thistle**.

1895-96

Hibernian elected to Division One replacing **Leith Athletic**. In Division Two **Kilmarnock** and **Linthouse** (Glasgow) replaced **Cowlairs** and **Dundee Wanderers**.

1896-97

Abercorn replaced **Dumbarton** in Division One.

1897-98

Partick Thistle replaced **Abercorn** in Division One. **Ayr** replaced **Dumbarton** in Division Two. After four games had been played **Renton** resigned from the League and their place and replacements **Hamilton Academical** adopted their record.

1898-99

Kilmarnock win Division Two in 1897-98 but are not elected to Division One.

1899-1900

Kilmarnock elected to Division One to replace **Partick Thistle**.

1900-01

Queen's Park elected directly to Division One which now has eleven clubs. **Partick Thistle** replace **St Bernard's** in Division One. **East Stirlingshire** (Falkirk) replace **Linthouse** in Division Two.

1901-02

Second Division champions **St Bernard's** are not elected to Division One but **Partick Thistle** are demoted to Division Two. **Arthurlie** (Barrhead) join Division Two to give a top division of ten and a lower one of twelve.

1902-03

Division One increased to twelve with the election of **Port Glasgow Athletic** and **Partick Thistle**. Division Two stays at twelve with the election of **Falkirk** and **Raith Rovers** (Kirkcaldy).

1903-04

Division One increased to fourteen with election of **Airdrieonians** and **Motherwell**. Division Two stays at twelve with election of **Albion Rovers** (Coatbridge) and **Ayr Parkhouse**.

1904-05

Division Two champions **Hamilton Academical** are not elected to the first. **Aberdeen** replace **Ayr Parkhouse** in Division Two.

1905-06

Division One increased to sixteen with election of **Aberdeen** and **Falkirk**. Second Division champions **Clyde** not elected. **Cowdenbeath** and **Vale of Leven** join Division Two to keep membership at twelve.

1906-07

Division One increased to eighteen with election of **Clyde** and **Hamilton Academical**. Second Division champions **Leith Athletic** not elected. **Ayr Parkhouse** and **Dumbarton** both rejoin Division Two.

1907-08

Division Two champions **St Bernard's** not elected to first.

1908-09

Division Two champions **Raith Rovers** not elected to first.

1909-10

Division Two champions **Abercorn** not elected to first.

1910-11

Leith Athletic and **Raith Rovers** are joint champions in Division Two but only Raith are elected to the first, replacing **Port Glasgow Athletic**. **Ayr** and **Ayr Parkhouse** merge to form **Ayr United**. **Dundee Hibernian** join Division Two to keep the numbers at twelve.

1911-12

Division Two champions **Dumbarton** are not elected to first. **St Johnstone** (Perth) replace **Port Glasgow Athletic** in Division Two.

1912-13

Division Two champions **Ayr United** not elected to first. Division Two increased to fourteen with election of **Dunfermline Athletic** and **Johnstone**.

1913-14

Division Two champions **Ayr United** elected to first along with **Dumbarton** as first division increases to twenty clubs. Division Two reverts to twelve.

1914-15

Division Two increases to fourteen clubs with election of **Clydebank** and **Lochgelly**. Champions **Cowdenbeath** not elected to first.

1915-16

Second Division shuts down during First World War. First Division continues. Of the clubs dropping out, only **Abercorn** fail to return at some stage. Champions **Cowdenbeath** not elected to first

1917-18

League reduced to eighteen clubs as **Aberdeen**, **Dundee** and **Raith Rovers** drop out and only **Clydebank** come in.

1919-20

League increases to 22. **Aberdeen**, **Dundee** and **Raith Rovers** all come back as do **Albion Rovers**

1921-22

22 clubs in Division One. Division Two restarted with 20 clubs. Of the fourteen teams in that division in 1915, three - **Abercorn**, **Arthurlie** and **Leith Athletic** do not rejoin. Two - **Albion Rovers** and **Clydebank** are in Division One. The remaining nine - **Cowdenbeath**, **Dundee Hibernian**, **Dunfermline Athletic**, **East Stirlingshire**, **Johnstone**, **Lochgelly**, **St Bernard's St Johnstone** and **Vale of Leven** are joined by eleven new League members: **Alloa Athletic**, **Arbroath**, **Armadale**, **Bathgate**, **Bo'ness**, **Broxburn**, **Clackmannan**, **East Fife** (Methil), **Forfar Athletic**, **Kings Park** (Stirling) and **Stenhousemuir**.

Automatic promotion and relegation is introduced at the end of the season. **Alloa Athletic** are the first side to go up this way while three teams - **Dumbarton**, **Queens Park** and **Clydebank** are first to be relegated. After this season it is two up and two down automatically between the two divisions.

1922-23

Two divisions of 20 as **Dundee Hibernian** and **Clackmannan** drop out of the League

1923-24

Dundee United (formerly **Dundee Hibernian**) rejoin Division Two at the expense of **East Stirlingshire** who are placed in the new Division Three. Rejoining the league in this Division are **Arthurlie** and **Clackmannan**. There are thirteen new members in this division: **Beith**, **Brechin City**, **Dykehead** (Shotts), **Dumbarton Harp**, **Galston**, **Helensburgh**, **Mid-Annandale** (Lockerbie), **Montrose**, **Nithsdale Wanderers** (Sanquhar), **Peebles Rovers**, **Queen of the South** (Dumfries), **Royal Albert** (Larkhall), and **Solway Star** (Annan). The three divisions are 20-20-16, with two up and two down throughout automatically.

1924-25

Division Three increased to 17 as **Leith Athletic** rejoin but back to 16 halfway through as **Dumbarton Harp** withdraw.

1925-26

Division Three clubs do not finish their schedule and the division is scrapped at the end of the season with no promotion/relegation.

1926-27

Broxburn (who had finished bottom of division Two) not re-elected. Replaced by **Forfar Athletic**. Two divisions of 20.

1927-28

Leith Athletic replace **Nithsdale Wanderers** in Division Two.

1929-30

Brechin City and **Montrose** replace **Arthurlie** and **Bathgate** in Division Two

1931-32

Edinburgh City replace **Clydebank** in Division Two.

1932-33

Armadale and **Bo'ness** expelled from Division Two. Unable to fulfil fixtures.

1933-34

Division One 20 clubs Division Two 18.

1939-40

Season abandoned upon outbreak of war. Unofficial regional competitions continue. Of the 38 clubs in League membership in 1939 only **St Bernard's** and **Kings Park** fail to reappear at the end of hostilities.

1945-46

Unofficial League season played with teams in the division they will be in the following season.

1946-47

Official restart to Scottish League with three divisions, A, B, and C. with memberships of 16, 14 and 10 respectively. **Division A** comprises: **Aberdeen, Celtic, Clyde, Falkirk, Hamilton Academical, Hearts, Hibernian, Kilmarnock, Morton, Motherwell, Partick Thistle, Queen of the South, Queens Park, Rangers, St Mirren** and **Third Lanark**.

Division B contains: **Airdrieonians, Albion Rovers, Alloa Athletic, Arbroath, Ayr United, Cowdenbeath, Dumbarton, Dundee, Dundee United, Dunfermline Athletic, East Fife, Raith Rovers, St Johnstone** and **Stenhousemuir**.

In **Division C** are: **Brechin City, East Stirlingshire, Edinburgh City, Forfar Athletic, Leith Athletic, Montrose**, and new members **Stirling Albion** (who are a direct replacement for **Kings Park**). Three Division Two reserve sides make up the numbers to ten. Promotion and relegation from/to this division depends upon a non-reserve team winning the title.

The placings are seemingly arbitrary. Six sides who were in Division One in 1939 - **Albion Rovers, Alloa Athletic, Arbroath, Ayr United, Cowdenbeath** and **St Johnstone** lose their places while two who were in Division Two - **Morton** and **Queens Park** are elevated to the top flight. C Division seems more sensible. It contains the sole new member and the bottom five from the last full pre-war season. But it also has **Brechin City** as a member. In 1938-39 Brechin finished higher than **Morton** who are now a top-flight side!

The League's decision causes great bitterness among the clubs who have lost out. In England the football authorities resumed the 1946-47 season by playing the fixtures scheduled for 1939-40. An altogether fairer way of doing things.

1947-48

B Division increases to 16 with promotion of **Stirling Albion** and **Leith Athletic**.
C Division adds more reserve sides.

1948-49

Last season for **Edinburgh City**.

1949-50

C division split geographically. **Stranraer** join the South & West section.

1951-52

Berwick Rangers join C Division North & East

1952-53

Last season for **Leith Athletic**.

1955-56

Division A increased to 18 with two promoted and none relegated. Division B increased to 19 by taking in the non-reserve teams from C Division - **Berwick Rangers, Dumbarton, East Stirlingshire, Montrose** and **Stranraer**. C Division scrapped.

1956-57

Divisions renamed 1 and 2

1964-65

East Stirlingshire move from **Falkirk** to **Clydebank** and compete as **ES Clydebank** for one season only.

1965-66

East Stirlingshire return to Falkirk and their old name.

1966-67

Clydebank (not related in any way to the previous club with that name) join Division Two which now has 20 members only to drop back to 19 at the end of the season when **Third Lanark** fold.

1974-75

Division Two increases to 20 as **Ferranti Thistle** (Edinburgh) join under new name of **Meadowbank Thistle**.

1975-76

Most radical shake-up in Scottish football history with the introduction of three divisions (Premier, First and Second) with a format of 10-14-14 with places allocated according to performance the previous season:

Premier: **Aberdeen, Ayr United, Celtic, Dundee, Dundee United, Hearts, Hibernian, Motherwell, Rangers and St Johnstone**

First: **Airdrieonians, Arbroath, Clyde, Dumbarton, Dunfermline Athletic, East Fife, Falkirk, Hamilton Academical, Kilmarnock, Montrose, Morton, Partick Thistle, Queen of the South and St Mirren.**

Second: **Albion Rovers, Alloa Athletic, Berwick Rangers, Brechin City, Clydebank, Cowdenbeath, East Stirlingshire, Forfar Athletic, Meadowbank Thistle, Queens Park, Raith Rovers, Stenhousemuir, Stirling Albion and Stranraer.**

Two up two down throughout.

1986-87

No relegation from Premier as that division is increased to 12 to give a format of 12-12-14.

1988-89

Three down from the Premier and only one up as League reverts to 10-14-14. But there is now only one up one down between Premier and First.

1991-92

No relegation from Premier. Two up from first as format once again is 12-12-14 with two up two down restored.

1994-95

Three points for a win introduced from the start of this season.

Another major overhaul with four divisions of ten clubs each established based on how they finished the previous season.

Premier: Top nine clubs from 1993-94 - **Rangers, Aberdeen, Motherwell, Celtic, Hibernian, Dundee United, Hearts, Kilmarnock, Partick Thistle** - plus First Division Champions **Falkirk.**

First: Bottom three clubs in Premier - **St Johnstone Raith Rovers, Dundee** - plus clubs finishing 2nd-7th In First - **Dunfermline Athletic, Airdrieonians, Hamilton Academical, Clydebank, St Mirren, Ayr United** - and also the Second Division Champions **Stranraer**

Second: Clubs finishing 8th-12th in First - **Dumbarton, Stirling Albion, Clyde, Morton** and **Brechin City** plus clubs finishing 2nd-6th in Second - **Berwick Rangers, Stenhousemuir, Meadowbank Thistle, Queen of the South** and East Fife.

Third: Clubs finishing 7th-14th in Second - **Alloa Athletic, Forfar Athletic, East Stirlingshire, Montrose, Queens Park, Arbroath, Albion Rovers, Cowdenbeath** - plus two new clubs. Elected to membership were **Caledonian Thistle** (an amalgamation of Highland League sides **Inverness Caledonian** and **Inverness Thistle** and later to change their name to **Inverness Caledonian Thistle**) and **Ross County** (Dingwall) also from the Highland League.

Two up two down except between Premier and First where there would be one up one down automatically and a two-leg play-off between 9th in the Premier and 2nd in the First

1995-96

Meadowbank Thistle change their name to **Livingston** after moving to that town.

1997-98

No play-off as First Division runners-up **Falkirk** do not have a ground suitable for the proposed new Scottish Premier League. Bottom club **Hibernian** are relegated however and replaced by First Division champions **Dundee**

1998-99

Yet another major re-organisation as the clubs in the Premier Division found their own organisation - the Scottish Premier League (SPL) - Founder members are: **Aberdeen, Celtic, Dundee, Dundee United, Dunfermline Athletic, Hearts, Kilmarnock, Motherwell, Rangers** and **St Johnstone**. One up one down and a play-off but only if club seeking promotion meets standards laid down by SPL. Chief among these are financial guarantees and a minimum ground requirement of an all-seated 10,000 capacity stadium.

2000-2001

No relegation as SPL increases to 12, admitting top two from First Division with promised play-off between 10th in SPL and 3rd in First failing to materialise as **Falkirk** finish 3rd in 1999-2000 but again do not meet SPL requirements. In future one up one down will apply. There will be no relegation from the SPL if the First Division Champions do not meet SPL standards.

SPL splits with five games to play into a top six and bottom six, each club playing once more against the others in their section.

To compensate for losing two members the Scottish League relegates just one club from First and Second and promotes three from Second and Third. By admitting two new members to the Third it maintains three divisions of ten. New clubs are both from the Highland League - **Elgin City** and **Peterhead**.

2001-02

At the end of the season Scottish football suffered its first casualty since Third Lanark in 1967, when Airdrieonians went into liquidation. As a result, Falkirk were spared from relegation from the First Division and Stenhousemuir similarly retained their place in the 2nd, leaving a vacancy in the Third Division.

2002-03

Gretna were elected to the spare place in Division Three but League football returned to Airdrie in the form of a new club **Airdrie United** who took over Clydebank and assumed that club's place in the Second Division. At the end of the season Falkirk were 1st Division champions but failed to meet SPL requirements on all-seater stadia. Consequently there was no relegation from the SPL and Falkirk remained in Division One.



The League's newest club makes its entrance

1890-1904 - A shared experience

The first Championship was like the Battle of Waterloo a close run thing. Even closer than that famous battle in fact. Both **Dumbarton** and **Rangers** finished level on points and with no other method of determining the championship decided the two teams had to face each other in a play-off. When that too finished all-square the League had no option but to declare both teams joint champions the only time this has happened. Had either goal average or goal difference applied, Dumbarton would have taken the title outright.

Dumbarton made no mistake the following season, finishing two points clear of Celtic to take the title for themselves. But this was the end for the *Sons* as a major force in the game. Within four years they had lost their first division status. Twelve months after that they were out of the League altogether.

Celtic won for the first time in 1893, edging out Rangers by a single point. And they retained it in 1894 when their strongest challengers came from the east - **Hearts**. The Edinburgh side secured the title by a five-point margin over Celtic in 1895 only for Celtic to win for a third time in 1896.

The next season saw **Hearts** win again with **Hibernian** in second place proving the League had not yet become an *Old Firm* plaything. This is the only time the Edinburgh clubs finished first and second and came a year after the only all-Edinburgh Cup Final. But the capital clubs were nowhere in sight as **Celtic** won again in 1898 and were **unbeaten** in doing so with fifteen wins and three draws.

By now you will have noticed one significant omission from the winners roll: **Rangers**. That shared title apart the *Ibrox* club had yet to record a success they could call their own. That all changed in 1898-99. For not only did Rangers win the League and win it easily, they won with a record which can never be surpassed, no matter how long football continues to be played. For no one can ever do more than obtain 100%. **Eighteen games played, eighteen games won, with a goal difference of 79-18**. Their 79 goals equalled Dumbarton's 1892 tally, though the Sons had played four games more. Oddly enough, **Kilmarnock** were unbeaten in Division Two that year. In more than 100 years of football since, no other club has finished a League season unbeaten.

Rangers runaway success set the scene for the Ibrox side's first great period of domination of the Scottish game. They won the following three titles more or less with ease but were forced to take a back seat in 1902-03 as **Hibernian** brought the title to Edinburgh; finishing six points clear of **Dundee**.

But East coast supremacy was again short-lived as the title returned to Glasgow twelve months later. On this occasion it was **Third Lanark** who claimed the flag, with a new record of 43 points, four ahead of Hearts with the Old Firm trailing behind. Their only consolation was that fourth-placed Rangers scored a record 80 League goals.

So, in its first fourteen years the Scottish League had produced six winners, exactly the same as in England. No one could call Scottish football a two-horse race. That was about to change.

Who's gonna be third? 1904-39

The Old Firm had always been the most powerful players but now their superiority which had always been evident in support and finance began to assert itself on the playing field. The League became their private tournament and the rest came nowhere.

That a long period of Old Firm supremacy was about to be embarked on wasn't apparent at the time but in retrospect the way the table looked at the end of the 1904-05 season was highly appropriate. **Celtic** and **Rangers** were locked together on 41 points, six in front of **Third Lanark** with a further gap of eight points to **Airdrie** in fourth place. It could sum up the entire era the Old Firm locked together, miles in front of any prospective challenger, with the rest nowhere in sight.

Both goal difference and goal average would have sent the title to *Ibrox* but had three points for a win applied then the flag would have flown over *Parkhead*. But the League still couldn't settle matters short of a play-off and it took such a game to provide Celtic with the title and provide the springboard for the next few, amazing years. All Rangers were left with was yet another scoring record, this time 83 League goals.

Celtic went on to take the next five titles. There were many who thought that six-in-a-row would never be equalled. And **Rangers** faded from view. **Hearts**, **Dundee** and, surprisingly, **Falkirk** were the teams who gave the Celts at least a run for their money. And some of Celtic's successes were close. A single point in 1909 and just two in 1910 keeping them ahead of the field. With an increasing number of games new records were bound to be set. The points total for the Champions stood at 43 in 1904, increased to 49 in 1906 and reached 55 in each of the two succeeding seasons



Guess the team? This is actually a Celtic strip from their golden Edwardian era

Falkirk carved their own little historical niche in 1908 when finishing second to Celtic. They scored 102 League goals in the process **the first team to score a century**. This tally represented an average of exactly three per match.

But all runs come to an end sometime and in 1911 a rejuvenated **Rangers** claimed the title finishing ahead of new challengers **Aberdeen**. They took the next two as well with Celtic trailing in their wake.

Celtic weren't to be outdone. After **Rangers** had captured three titles in succession, the Parkhead men promptly went out and won the next four. More records fell to the Celts. 67 points in 1916 topped 65 in 1914 and 1915 and that season they scored 116 goals in 38 League matches. In 62 consecutive home League matches stretching from November 13th 1915 to April 21st 1917, **seventeen months and four days** in all, Celtic remained unbeaten. It was on the very last day of the season that they lost at home to **Kilmarnock** to bring the longest unbeaten run in British football to a close.

Rangers pipped **Celtic** by a single point in 1918 and Celtic did the same to their great rivals in 1919. Rangers regained the flag in 1920, scoring their first century of League goals (106). The 1920-21 season aptly summed up the state of Scottish football; **Rangers set an all-time record for two points for a win** in taking 76 from a possible 84 and finished ten points ahead of Celtic. Third placed Hearts were a further sixteen points behind that.

This massive gap between the Big Two and the rest was just as apparent the next year when Celtic edged out Rangers by a point with **Raith** trailing a massive fifteen points behind that. To relieve the monotony a challenge had to come, and when it did, it was from the unlikeliest of quarters.

While people waited for **Hearts, Hibs, Aberdeen** or **Dundee** to threaten the Old Firm hegemony, few would have predicted that the most concerted threat would have emerged from **Lanarkshire**. But for a dozen years, firstly **Airdrieonians**, then **Motherwell** carried the challenge on behalf of Scottish football.

For four years in succession Airdrie finished runners-up, three times to Rangers and once to Celtic. But by 1926 all they had to show for their efforts was their 1924 Scottish Cup victory. As the **Broomfield** side faded from the scene, **Motherwell** took up the cudgels. For eight years in succession they finished in the top three.

But at this stage in the game's history **Rangers** were once again out on their own. They finished five points ahead of Motherwell in 1927, and the same margin in front of both Celtic and Well in 1928. Twelve months later they were sixteen ahead of Celtic with Motherwell a point further adrift. They were again five ahead of Well in 1930 before taking a fifth successive flag with 60 points in 1931, two and four points respectively clear of Celts and Well.

So, with **Rangers** poised to equal **Celtic's** six-timer, **Motherwell** stepped in. They won thirty League matches in 1931-32, drawing six and losing just two. Their 119 goals was one more than Rangers managed and a new top-flight record. But it was finishing five points clear of Rangers that was the real story. Motherwell's title was an astonishing feat for a club with an average gate of around 7-8,000. It not only earned them the gratitude of Celtic fans glad to see their side's record intact, but it took the praise of all of Scotland outwith the legions of Rangers fans. **The first title from outwith the Old firm since 1904**. The first from outside a major city since 1892.



Alan Morton: The Wee Blue Devil was an Ibrox hero between the wars

But the domination of **Bill Struth's Rangers** could only be cast aside temporarily. In both 1933 and 1934 the flag returned to **Ibrox** with Motherwell narrowly behind on both occasions. When Rangers won the League again in 1935 it was their **eighth win in nine seasons** and Motherwell's challenge had come and gone.

The title was prised away from Ibrox in 1936 as it found its way across Glasgow to Celtic Park as the **Bhoys** finished five ahead of both **Rangers** and **Aberdeen**. And for a long time the following season the flag looked like heading north to **Pittodrie** but the old, familiar story of the challenger collapsing while the Old Firm drive on relentlessly was played out once again as Aberdeen finished **double runners-up**, seven points behind Rangers in the League and losing the Cup Final to Celtic.

Celtic won the title back in 1938, three ahead of **Hearts**. The Edinburgh side had been a threat to the Old Firm in the early days but such was their decline that this was the first time in 23 years that they had managed to finish second. The last pre-war season was an anti-climax; **Rangers** winning easily, eleven points ahead of Celtic.



Motherwell - broke the Old Firm grip in 1932

BEST OF THE REST: 1946-65

When Scottish League football recommenced after the Second World War there was at first little to suggest that it was about to embark upon its most open era in terms of teams capable of challenging for the title. True, **Celtic** were in obvious decline and **Hibernian** looked a good team but the first post-war season ended with yet another **Rangers** triumph, two points clear of Hibs.

But the roles of these two clubs were reversed twelve months later as **Hibernian lifted their first title since 1903** and **Celtic narrowly avoided relegation**. 1948-49 should have seen a new name on the League trophy but **Dundee** lost on the last day of the season to **Falkirk** to allow **Rangers** to steal the flag by a single point. And the same narrow margin ensured the title would stay at Ibrox in 1950 as Hibs finished runners-up.

The outstanding *Easter Road* side of this era with its *Famous Five* front line wasn't to be denied for long. In 1950-51 they strolled to the finishing line ten points to the good with both Rangers and Dundee lagging behind. That success was repeated the next season as they ended up four ahead of Rangers. 1952-53 should have seen a **Hibernian** hat-trick but they finished level on points with Rangers. By now goal average was used to determine the winners. With an average of 2.05 compared to Hibernian's 1.82 **Rangers were the winners**. Either goal difference or three points for a win would have given Hibs their hat-trick. It was that close.



Lawrie Reilly - one of Hibs' Famous Five

It was the turn of a rejuvenated **Celtic** to take their first post-war title next before a new name was added to the roll of honour in 1955 when **Aberdeen** took the title north to **Pittodrie**. They couldn't repeat their success the next year, finishing second to **Rangers** and the flag stayed at Ibrox in 1957 as challengers **Hearts** ran out of steam in the run-in, finishing two points adrift.

The same couldn't be said of the *Tynecastle* club in 1957-58. Theirs was the most astonishing of title successes. They dropped just six points all season, losing only once (to **Clyde**, away) and scoring a **new record of 132 League goals**, just short of four per match. They finished an incredible thirteen points ahead of Rangers. But like previous non-Old Firm winners, repeating their success was harder and they had to settle for runners-up spot in 1959, two behind Rangers.

1960 saw Hearts come storming back and, with the Old Firm nowhere in sight, they reclaimed the flag ahead of **Kilmarnock**. The Ayrshire side challenged strongly again in 1961 but again had to settle for second place, just a point behind Rangers.



Willie Bauld: Goalscorer supreme for Hearts in the 1950s.

Dundee atoned for their near-miss of 1949 by winning the flag in 1962 in dramatic circumstances on the last day of the season. Now managed by **Bob Shankly** (who had been the Falkirk boss who deprived them thirteen years previously) they won away to close rivals **St Johnstone** to bring the title to Dens Park and relegate the Perth side in the process. Dundee used just *fifteen* players all season, a remarkable record.

The normal order was restored in the next two seasons as **Rangers** won both times with Kilmarnock the runners-up. The Ayrshire side were beginning to resemble Airdrie in the 1920s. They had now finished in second place four times in five seasons. With their manager **Willie Waddell** due to leave at the end of the season, 1964-65 represented their last chance of success.

And what a success it was to be. A tremendous tussle saw **Dunfermline** in with a chance of a League and Cup double until the second last match when a draw took them out of the flag race (they were to lose the Cup Final as well). The final game saw leaders **Hearts** at home to **Kilmarnock**, two points to the good. The Edinburgh team could even to afford lose by a single goal and still win the League. Killie confounded the odds by winning 2-0 and claiming the title by **0.04** of a goal.

Had goal difference applied, Hearts could have lost 8-0 and still been Champions. As it was, Killie's victory was just reward for years of second places and was only the third time (and to date, last) the title had gone beyond the four largest cities.



Some people are on the pitch... Sneddon, Murray, Ferguson and King celebrate Killie's remarkable League title win.

The Stein Era: 1965-74

Jock Stein took over as Manager at Parkhead in early 1965 and immediately won the Scottish Cup. His triumphs on the European stage can be read about elsewhere in this series but his impact on the Scottish League was no less momentous. Indeed, it was Stein's success which forced the clubs to re-assess and re-shape the League radically in 1975.

For nine years Stein and Celtic carried all before them. They scored a century of goals in their first three titles. The 1966 and 1967 triumphs had been hard-won, with Rangers narrowly behind. 1968 was no different but the gap between the Old Firm and the rest was put into sharp relief this season.

Rangers had been unbeaten until the last day of the season, losing at home to Aberdeen. Yet they had gone into that game in second place. Celtic dropped just five points all season (three of them to Rangers). Rangers dropped seven. Both sides lost only one match. Celtic finished with 63 points, Rangers with 61. Hibernian, in third, were sixteen points behind Rangers with fourth-placed Dunfermline a further six behind that.

Although such overwhelming dominance was not to be repeated, the Old Firm stayed way ahead and Celtic increased their lead over Rangers. The Ibrox side finished runners-up in the next two seasons but by five and twelve points respectively.



Danny McGrain: A Celtic stalwart in the Stein era...and beyond

A genuine challenge emerged from **Aberdeen** in 1970-71. But they wilted under pressure, losing their last match, thus not even putting Celtic under any pressure to equal their Edwardian six-in-a-row. Stein had the luxury of fielding his *Lisbon Lions* (minus keeper Simpson) for the last time against Clyde as Celtic won 6-1 to end up two points clear.

The next year saw another Aberdeen challenge but they faded even quicker than before, ten points being the final gap. Celtic's away win at East Fife gave them a record seventh successive title.

Rangers returned to push Celtic all the way in 1973. With only a single point in it, this was the closest of all Celtic's victories. When they held off Hibs by four points to record a ninth League title, it seemed Celtic were invincible in domestic football.

The Premier Division 1974-86

But Celtic's ninth title had been achieved with their lowest points total of the period and 1974-75 saw Rangers under **Willie Waddell** and **Jock Wallace** storm back to lift their first flag in eleven seasons with Hibs again second.

Stein's success though had already forced the League to declare that this would be the last season of the old First Division. The top ten at the end of this season formed the new **Premier Division**, playing each other four times. The idea was that by clearing out the dead wood there would be amore competitive League.

It didn't work out like that of course. Somebody still had to get relegated. And with the usual suspects out of the frame, suddenly teams like **Hearts, Dundee** and **Hibs** became candidates for the drop. After all, ninth place was no longer mid-table, it was a relegation spot. The wisdom of clubs like these voting for such a set-up defies all logic. Unless the club chairmen assumed their team would always be in the top half of the table. In which case, as **Oscar Wilde** said under different circumstances, it truly represented the triumph of hope over experience.

The first Premier season, 1975-76, ended with Rangers winning the League, Celtic runners-up and Hibs a fair way behind in third. Change? What change? could have been the cry.

Celtic won in 1977, Stein's last championship, before some competition came into play at last. In 1978 Aberdeen ran Rangers close but finished two points behind in the League and also lost in the Cup Final as Rangers secured another treble.

For a large part of the 1978-79 season it looked like **Dundee United** would be crowned champions but crucial defeats against the Old Firm saw them lose out. An amazing finale saw Rangers fail to hold on to a 2-1 lead against a 10-man Celtic side, losing 4-2. Celtic just squeezed ahead to win by two points.

But 1980 saw the breakthrough. **Aberdeen**, aided admittedly by two poor Celtic and Rangers sides, took the flag. The Dons had never headed the League until they went to Parkhead with five games to go and won 3-1. It was circumstances like these which had seen previous challenges collapse. Not so for **Alex Ferguson's** team. Even when they slipped behind Celtic they responded with a 5-0 win at Easter Road while Celtic dropped a point at St Mirren. That left Ferguson's side needing only to avoid a ten-goal defeat at Partick Thistle to win the flag. This time it had been the Old Firm club which had bottled it.



*A Championship winner's medal in 1980 allowed long-serving Aberdeen keeper **BOBBY CLARK** to bow out at the top*

But it seemed even Ferguson couldn't repeat his success. Celtic had a comfortable seven-point margin over Aberdeen in winning the 1981 title and although it was a lot closer in the end in 1982, Celtic had led from start to finish and their margin of victory should have been greater than just two points.

The next season saw that rarity in Scottish football a three-way title fight with the conclusion the closest and most dramatic since 1965. Celtic led for most of the season closely pursued by Aberdeen and Dundee United. But when the Celts lost to both these sides within four days near the end of the season it was the Tannadice side which edged ahead. On the last day of the season all three could still win the League and the final fixtures could not have been more dramatic. **Aberdeen** ruthlessly tore apart **Hibs** 5-0 but their goal difference was the worst of the three and they were reliant on the others slipping up.

Celtic were away to **Rangers**. No favours expected and none given as the Gers took a 2-0 half-time lead. Two **Charlie Nicholas** penalties helped Celtic's comeback to win 4-2 and leave the Rangers fans praying their old enemies wouldn't win the title at Ibrox.

Just as dramatic was the conclusion at Dens Park where **Dundee United** faced arch rivals **Dundee**. United took a 2-1 interval lead and as news crept in from elsewhere it became apparent that a point would give them the title on the narrowest of goal difference margins. But **Jim McLean's** men weren't taking any chances. Lessons had been learned from 1979 and this time they held their nerve. The score remained the same. Dundee United had earned the right to call themselves Champions of Scotland.



Dundee United legend MAURICE MALPAS was one of the Tannadice title winners in 1983. Malpas went on to become United's most capped player with 55 appearances in a Scotland shirt.

Although they gave a good account of themselves the next season, United were never really in the running to retain their title but **Aberdeen**, so close in each of the past three seasons took command to finish seven points ahead of Celtic. And that was pretty much the story of the 1984-85 season as well. Another Aberdeen victory, seven clear of Celtic with Dundee United in third.

A four-club fight for the flag ensued in 1985-86. But as Aberdeen and Dundee United drifted out of contention towards the close it looked like **Hearts** were going to take the title. Unfortunately for them lightning can indeed strike twice. With seven minutes remaining and the Tynecastle faithful ready to party, the Edinburgh side's dream was cruelly shattered as two late strikes from Dundee's **Albert Kidd** saw Hearts leave Dens Park defeated. **Celtic**, meanwhile, were winning at Love Street, their 5-0 win over St Mirren handing them the title on goal difference. For Hearts it was 1965 revisited. And, even more wounding, had the goal average which had cost them so dearly then still been in effect, Hearts would have won the League. But which club had led the campaign to force the League to change from goal average to goal difference? Why, Hearts of course?

And, as if to prove that just when you think things at least can't get any worse, Hearts fans received another metaphorical kick where it hurts the hardest seven days after losing the League when Aberdeen beat them in the Cup Final.

Still, the new League had, after a difficult start, proved that it could foster genuine competition with about half the clubs looking like title contenders. Naturally, that had to change.



The nearly men - the Hearts squad of 1985-86

The Old Order Restored: 1986-2004

Scottish football was revolutionised in the summer of 1986 with the appointment of **Graeme Souness** as player-manager of **Rangers**. The Ibrox side had been in the doldrums since their last League success in 1978. For once, the cliché of sleeping giant hardly seemed appropriate. Comatose colossus would have been more accurate.

Souness sprung into action immediately. Big-name signings from south of the border like keeper **Chris Woods** and England skipper **Terry Butcher** helped spark off the Rangers regeneration. The huge, latent, support stirred from their slumber as growing numbers returned to watch their team. The commercial opportunities which had lain dormant for so long began to be exploited and the huge cash advantage the Old Firm had always enjoyed over the others became an obstacle too great for anyone else to challenge.



Enter Souness - Scottish football changes radically

Perhaps **Alex Ferguson** could have maintained a threat to Glaswegian supremacy but in late 1986 he left Aberdeen to take up the reins at Old Trafford. And with **Jim McLean's** best days now behind him, the meagre resources available at Tannadice meant Dundee United couldn't rise to the occasion. The 'New Firm's' day was over.

Rangers surged to the title in 1987 but there was a renewed challenge from Celtic in their centenary season which saw the flag flutter over Parkhead in 1988. But Celtic, rattled by the Rangers renaissance, were a club deep in internal turmoil. For the best part of a decade they represented no threat to Rangers.



MARK HATELEY was just one of the big-name big money signings to appear for Rangers in the new era.

For Rangers the domestic goal was clear. Equalling or bettering Stein's nine-in-a-row. The first two titles were taken in 1989 and 1990 with Aberdeen trailing in a distant second. 1991 was on course for a repeat when Souness dropped his bombshell. He left Rangers to take over Liverpool. Rangers chairman **David Murray** prophesied accurately that Souness was making a mistake.

But, in the meantime, there was a title to be secured. Thoughts of equalling Celtic's record seemed foolhardy as Rangers began to falter. With one game to go Aberdeen nosed ahead on goal difference. The final game was a reprise of 1965 with the top two facing each other. Aberdeen needed a draw at Ibrox but **Mark Hateley** put paid to their dream with a goal in each half to give Rangers their third successive title. For new boss **Walter Smith** it was confirmation that he could carry on where Souness had left off.

With Celtic virtually a non-combatant, Smith's Rangers edged towards their goal. Eleven points clear of Hearts in 1992, nine in front of Aberdeen in 1993 brought their tally to five. The sixth should have been relatively simple but Rangers let go a big lead to nervously cross the line just three ahead of Aberdeen with Motherwell a further point behind. Motherwell were runners-up the next season but at fifteen points behind were no real threat to Rangers' seventh success running.

With the target looming ever closer, Celtic at last began to fight back. They lost just one league game during the 1995-96 season and amassed 83 points, a total good enough to win the League most seasons. But not every season. And not this one as Rangers finished with 87 to take their eighth title in a row.

Celtic again made a dogged pursuit in 1996-97 but the writing was in the wall long before the end. By a five-point margin Rangers reached their nine-in-a-row and Parkhead boss **Tommy Burns** paid the price by losing his job. But if Celtic couldn't stop their rivals from equalling their record, at least they could prevent them from bettering it.

And they did. In his only season in charge, **Wim Jansen** stopped Rangers from winning a tenth title. The Rangers side was an ageing one, breaking up together. With the added pressure of a sustained challenge from Hearts, it became too much for the Gers. Celtic finished two ahead with Hearts five behind in third. The sacked Burns must have thought ruefully that Jansen's title had been won with fewer points than in either of the two previous seasons.

The establishment of the **SPL** in **1998** should have been the start of a new era but the first season looked remarkably like so many Scottish League seasons before it as Rangers, now led by **Dick Advocaat**, won by six points from Celtic with **St Johnstone** lagging fourteen behind that in third. And when Rangers won with a record 21-point advantage over Celtic and Hearts another fifteen behind that, there was renewed talk of ten-in-a-row.

Talk was it all it proved to be. Celtic at last found the leader they had been looking for in **Martin O'Neill**. Shrewd buys, coupled with a serious decline at Ibrox, led to a complete turnaround in fortunes as Celtic stormed to the title, only late defeats when the flag had already been won preventing them from becoming the first Scottish team to amass 100 points in a season.

But that was of little account to the Parkhead faithful as O'Neill not only led them to the Championship but to their first domestic treble since 1969.

O'Neill's Celtic retained their title in even more emphatic style in 2002. They amassed 103 points out of a possible 114, losing just once, at Aberdeen, all season. Celtic's success forced Rangers to replace Advocaat with **Alex McLeish** halfway through the season.

The 2002-03 title race produced one of the closest ever finishes as Rangers pipped Celtic to the flag by virtue of having scored one goal more than their great rivals.

No such excitement in 2003-04 as Celtic raced ahead of a Rangers side which had been forced to sell their top players as a response to their massive debt. Martin O'Neill's team had the flag won with six games to play. It was only after the championship had been secured that Celtic actually lost a game, so absolute was their domestic domination.



The all-seated 60,000 capacity Celtic Park

Scottish League Championships 1890-2004

RANGERS*	50
CELTIC	39
ABERDEEN	4
HEARTS	4
HIBERNIAN	4
DUMBARTON*	2
DUNDEE	1
DUNDEE UNITED	1
KILMARNOCK	1
MOTHERWELL	1
THIRD LANARK	1

* Includes shared title

Scottish League Runners-up

CELTIC	27
RANGERS	27
ABERDEEN	13
HEARTS	13
HIBERNIAN	6
MOTHERWELL	5
AIRDRIEONIANS	4
DUNDEE	4
KILMARNOCK	4
FALKIRK	2
MORTON	1