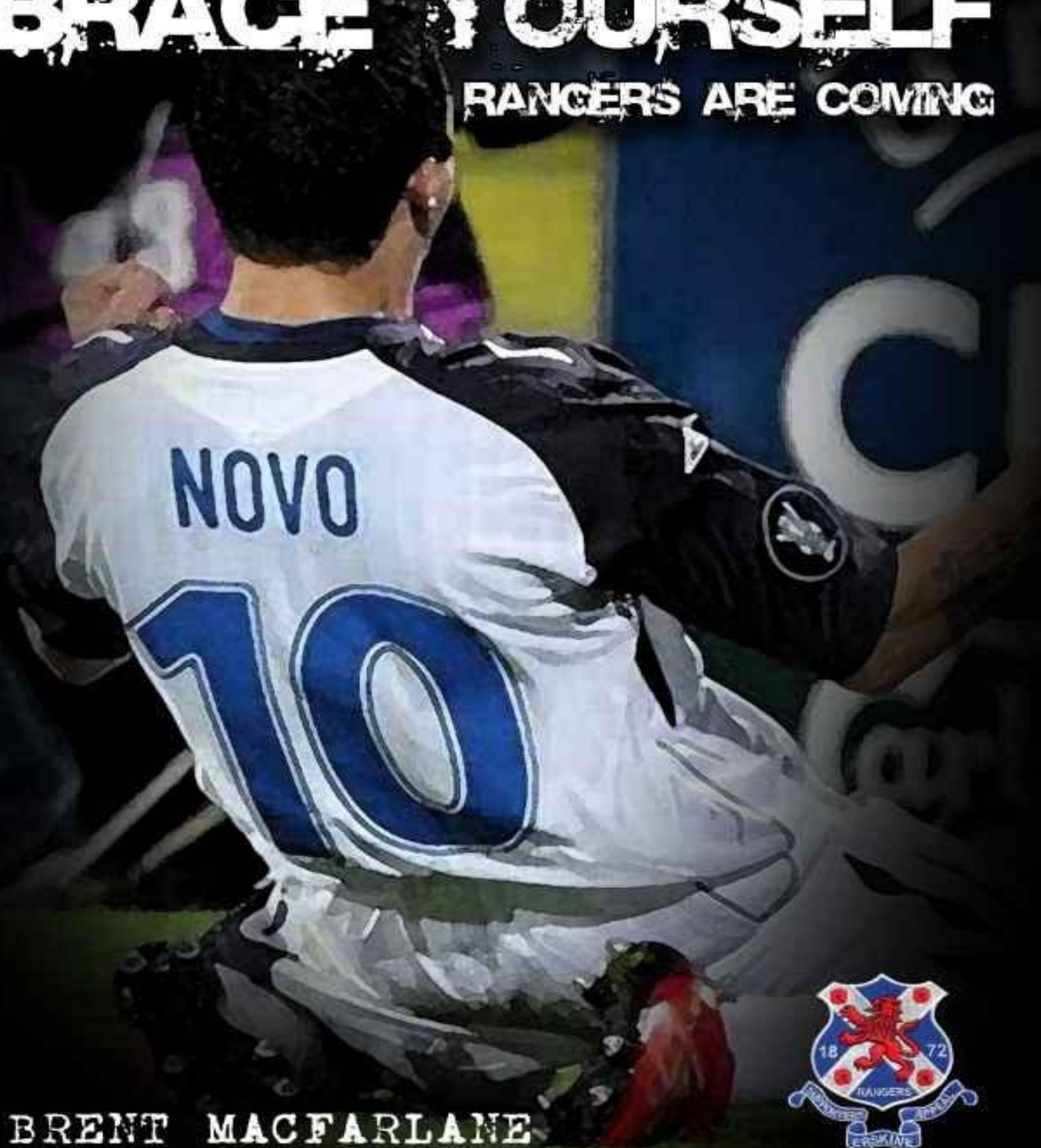


MANCHESTER BRACE YOURSELF

RANGERS ARE COMING



BRENT MACFARLANE



**MANCHESTER BRACE YOURSELF
RANGERS ARE COMING**

Brent MacFarlane

Copyright © Brent MacFarlane 2011
All Rights Reserved
The moral right of the author has been asserted

First published in Great Britain in 2011 by
BURGESS PUBLISHING (GLASGOW)

Reprinted 2012

This kindle edition 2012

ISBN-10: 0956460933

ISBN-13: 978-0956460936

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission from the author, except by a reviewer who wishes to quote brief passages in connection with a review written for insertion in a magazine, newspaper or broadcast.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British library

CONTENTS

PROLOGUE 5

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 6

R.S.E.A 8

INTRODUCTION 10

THE RUN - PART 1 14

THE RUN - PART 2 46

FLORENCE 69

TICKET! 98

THE BUILD UP 131

THE BLUE TSUNAMI 164

WHIPPIN' PICCADILLY 196

WEDNESDAY 14TH MAY 2008 240

THE AFTERMATH 288

END OF DAYS 354

For Leigh

(i)

PROLOGUE

Wednesday 1st May 2008

It was 10:22pm. Standing completely helpless, it felt like somebody had turned down the colour, muffled the sound and slowed down the moments. I can feel my heart beat hard and fast as I look over my shoulder to see my wife screaming whilst cowering in the corner of the hall; too scared to look too afraid to look away.

On my right a pair of petrified cat's eyes peek out from beneath the bed; I turn back towards the TV, close my eyes, take a huge breath and exhale, like the whoosh from a train entering a subway I'm sucked back into the here and now, noise, colours, screaming.

Behind me Leigh excitedly yelps '*oh my god this is awful*' and I hear the words Manchester brace yourself....

(ii)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are not enough pages in the world to thank all the people I want to so if I don't mention you, you're in my thoughts. I'd like to thank Brian Burgess for contacting me in the first place and seeing if I might have any ideas, I think you got more than you bargained for. I'd like to thank Andy Cumming for his interest, his passion and his knowledge of following Rangers abroad. Every word of yours should have gone in your own book and then you sent me pictures! You have to do it mate.

I'd like to thank Jason & Daryl Ness for the many many many trips to Ibrox and listening to me in silence prattle on about the game, I've loved them all and the drunken 3am txts (I trust you both know who did what). I'd like to thank Colin Sutherland & Crawford Boyd, it's never dull and you always keep me grounded (I like that jacket and those trainers thank you).

I'd like to thank my Mum and Dad for all their support over the years particularly you Mum, you let me follow my heart despite your own leanings, you slipped me money for my first game and you bought me my first Rangers strip, till the day I die it'll always be my favourite.

To my wife Leigh, I know writing is supposed to be a solo pursuit but you've lived it and I love you dearly for it, you put up with my obsession for the game, you've sat through Bundesliga relegation battles, been dragged to under 19 games, round premiership grounds, dreadful internationals and had to listen to my sporadic bursts on Rangers, players, managers and history, not only that you did it pregnant! And gave us the most beautiful child in the world (Spain, Italy and Griffin Park next I promise).

Finally and probably most importantly I would like to thank the Rangers family, there's a line in the book from a young fan who writes "*I was left alone with thousands of fans. I was in a strange environment with people I didn't know, but I felt safe, because I was a bluenose.*" It summed it up for me, without you, this book would not have been written or even possible, your story's had me laughing, crying, angry and nostalgic, you have no equal, so keep your chin up as you will always be the people.

Brent MacFarlane

April 2011

(iii)

R.S.E.A

The Rangers Supporters Erskine Appeal (RSEA) was formed in 2007 after a discussion between 'Twa Pals' in the Wee Rangers Club who had been disgusted at comments made by two Journalists who described a Union Flag and Saltire display at Ibrox Stadium as being reminiscent of one of Hitler's Nuremburg Rallies.

The "Twa Pals" decided to raise £500 to treat a dozen Residents of the Erskine Home (many of the residents having of course, fought under these two Battle Standards against Hitler's Fascists, in the Second World War) to a match at Ibrox stadium.

From there a meeting was held at Erskine and the RSEA was asked if they could attempt to raise £1000 as the home needed to buy a specialist piece of lifting equipment.

That was the first target set and with Rangers Legend Harold Davis recruited as Patron the target was soon realized.

Over the next 3 years numerous sponsored walks, hikes, runs, abseils, waxings and bike rides have taken place. Others have been tattooed and went without mobile phones for weeks to gather more funds.

Quiz nights, sportsmen's dinners, golf days, football tournaments and challenge matches followed. Many online auctions and raffles also took place through the Rangers fans forum Follow Follow.

Over 32,000 badges have been produced and sold as well as hats, scarves, patches & calendars. The Rangers Family has taken the Erskine Home and the RSEA to their hearts and in February 2011 the £200,000 barrier was smashed.

I cannot thank The People enough and my heartfelt gratitude also extends to the author and publishers of the book for their involvement. Donations can still be received by visiting www.justgiving.com/rsea2011 (or by changing the year to suit the time you are reading this publication).

God save our Queen, watch over Her Armed Forces and God Bless the Rangers.

Russell Nash
Secretary RSEA

(iv)

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes I think I'll just chuck it you know. Sometimes I get so fed up with all the shit, the bickering and the infighting, the bitter little journalist taking pot shots at us, the perpetual merry go round of gloating back and forth, the moral high ground or the who is the bigger club (like that's ever a real argument) that I think 'who really needs this'.

I think to myself in these times I'm going to leave all this behind and go follow a proper football team like Brentford. I'm going to go experience the highs and lows of promotion and relegation, of giant killing and Wembley appearances, of Scunney away and Grimsby home but then I catch myself on as I'm about to throttle a cheeky rail guard because the trains late and I'm desperately trying to get home to watch us play away against St Johnstone.

The fact of the matter is I'm Rangers till I die, it's in my blood and in my spit and It makes me who I am. I'm up to my eyes in Struth and Souness. I'll never tire of lifting trophies, I'll never tire of the tingle I get when I see ibrox and I'll never ever get enough of our history and the foundations on which our club is built.

You know what the real problem is with following Rangers? The highs are too high and the lows are almost suicidal.

Season 2007-2008 had it all.

Walter Smith returned to Rangers on the 10th January 2007, at his first press conference he said "This club has always been in my blood and I can't wait to get started".

Rangers had endured two trophyless seasons in their last three campaigns as domestic dominance had swung to Celtic, who we're already 17 points ahead in the league and on course for the title under Gordon Strachan.

It would be Smith's second spell at Ibrox, after helping Rangers win nine successive titles before resigning at the end of the heartbreaking 1998 season.

I'll be honest right now, I didn't want him back. I didn't want him back for two main reasons, firstly as effective as his football always was, I hated it. I'm obsessed by the game and how other clubs do things, whilst I loved Walters's

tenure as Scotland manager, I saw us instantly being dragged back to a rigid dogged system of little flair and grinding out results.

The second reason was simple, I love and respect the man and feared if things didn't go well he would destroy his legacy.

Maybe there was one something else; it wasn't a big thing more of a bugbear than anything but despite his trophy laden years with Rangers his European record bar 1992-1993 (when we finished a point off a Champions League final spot behind eventual winners Marseille), was extremely poor.

Smith was not to blame entirely here; we've always underachieved in Europe. 3 European finals since European competition began in 1955 with one solo success in 1972 isn't really good enough for a club of our size and as the gulf between the leagues all over Europe got bigger that didn't really look like changing anytime soon, those big European nights looked like a thing of the past.

I hear people all the time saying 'get yourself up for an Old Firm game' or 'you have to see it' 'it's the greatest derby in the world', in truth, it's not and as much as I love them, as much as an Old Firm game can almost make me physically sick with nerves during it, turn me into a completely different human being and have me up and down like a yo-yo of emotions the week running up to kick off, for somebody that doesn't support either club I'm sure it makes very poor viewing, a game played at 90mph with rash tackles and not much action where the referee is usually the centre of attention before, during and after.

Now a big European night on the other hand is something different, there's a different energy, a different buzz, a feel an excitement, a something new, a something borrowed and a something blue. They are nights when we get to see and test ourselves against the best players the world has to offer and every year I pray for Real Madrid. It's ambition, its hope, its cruelty, it's togetherness, its family, and it's why I don't support Brentford.

In the very first scene, of the very first episode of David Simons utterly fantastic HBO series '*The Wire*' Detective Jimmy McNulty interviews a witness to the killing of one Omar Isiah Betts, known to friends and family as 'Snot Boogie'.

The witness explains, Snot Boogie played in the local craps game every week, and every week after a few rolls, Snot would grab all the money in the pot and try to make a run for it, '*He couldn't help hisself*' someone would chase him down, beat his ass and take the money back. Only this time somebody shot him.

McNulty, has to interrupt his witness' to ask what the obvious question is, to him and to us, but not the witness: *if they knew Snot would rob the pot every time out, why did they keep letting him play?* And the witness, confused by the very premise of the question, answers

"Got to. This America, man."

Well '*This is Rangers*', that's what we do, we follow in the footsteps of our team, we roll the dice in Europe season after season after season, (usually wallets first), in the hope that just one time we can make away with the pot or maybe at least not get beat up too badly.

On the 14th May 2008 all we had to do was roll the dice one last time and maybe just maybe we'd make away with the pot.

(1)

THE RUN - PART 1
UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

We talked of how that would probably be the biggest travelling Rangers support we would ever be part of. “Unless we made a European final” someone said, at which point everyone laughed and said “Aye Right.”

ANDREW HUNTER

Despite his trophy laden years with Rangers Walter's European record bar 1993 when Rangers win the treble and finish a point off a Champions League final spot behind eventual winners Marseille, is extremely poor.

We all wanted more...

Jamie Peters

Alongside marriage, births of children and other notable events, the run to Manchester 2008 will be an event that stands out as much as any.

Robert McTeer

In terms of entertainment and atmosphere, European away trips are unrivalled in terms of follow following your team.

Andy Cumming

No one should ever worry about travelling alone to a Rangers game in Europe or elsewhere for that matter as you'll be well looked after and meet some great people. I remember an overwhelming friendliness between Rangers fans where ever you met them on any part of this trip.

Robert McTeer

I had been to almost every domestic game that season but hadn't had the foresight to join the travel club; who could seriously have seen what lay ahead apart from the most optimistic and barmy of Rangers fan. It was a blunder of Gordon Brown-esque proportions looking back.

Andrew Hunter

The European run was incredible, I had given up hope of us ever making a European final. In Walter's first spell we had went close and I thought under Advocatt that we were in with a chance but alas it never happened. With the influx of TV money into Europe's major leagues and the change in the football

finances I had given up hope of Rangers even getting close to a European Final, instead:

Getting into the champions league was a success. Last 16 in the champion's league was overachieving. Dropping into the Uefa Cup and maybe getting through one round was a success.

Beyond that I saw even a quarter final as unrealistic yet awesome achievement.

Robert McQueen

It will remain one of the most remarkable in my lifetime as a Rangers supporter. It is a massive piece in the jigsaw that is the history of Rangers Football Club. I have grown up listening to stories of the Gallant Pioneers and the humble beginnings. Bill Struth. Big Jock Wallace and Barcelona '72. I had heard of heroes like Morton and Baxter. I had witnessed 9 in a row. The magic of the 92/93 campaign, seen Laudrup, Gazza and McCoist. But for me, as a young bear of only 22 years old, this was the story that I will grow up with and tell my grandkids about.....

David Hamill

I am a ST holder and a regular traveller to European matches. I had not missed many in the previous 9 years. However in June 2007 I was diagnosed with Cancer. I still managed to follow the Rangers while I received my Chemotherapy and Radiotherapy. I managed the CL qualifiers at Ibrox that season but was rushed into hospital suffering pneumonia.

My weight went from 13st down to 8st and I was in a very bad way. The Cancer and treatment had shown that I had other serious ailments and my life would be changed forever. As I was in Ward 23 of Glasgow Southern General (and I would be for quite some time) my only release was an old portable TV shared by about 6 patients and if this all wasn't bad enough, it turned out I was outnumbered by fans from the darkside.

Andy Cumming

I've been hooked on our European trips ever since the Eindhoven game in 1999. I've been lucky to have been able to visit a variety of places such as Monaco, Copenhagen, Livorno via the leaning tower of Pisa when we became the first Scottish side to win in Italy, Bratislava, Porto, Cyprus, Manchester

where we got thumped by United and Auxerre (where eventually, our flight had to abort take off) plus many others.

In 2007-2008 our European journey was unbelievable.

The Herald, 31st July 2007

FERGUSON TO RECEIVE SPECIAL ATTENTION

Janko Tumbasovic, the FK Zeta captain, admitted yesterday that disrupting Barry Ferguson's game is vital to the Montenegrin outfit's chances of success at Ibrox tonight.

Tuesday 31st July 2007

***Uefa Champions League Second Qualifying Round
Rangers Vs FK Zeta***

Stephen Macleod

It was quite simply epic, of course it all started with wins against Montenegrin minnows FC Zeta, the first of which I watched at London's number one Rangers venue, the Cock Tavern.

Robert McQueen

It started rather innocuously. Walter had returned midway through the season previous and delivered us 2nd place and a shot at the Champions League.

Andy Cumming

We played very poorly in the home leg yet managed a two nil victory due to goals from Weir and McCulloch with a helping hand from their goalkeeper who blundered badly at both. Boyd had hit the woodwork within seconds of the start and also missed a sitter but on the night we were very poor indeed.

The Evening Times, 7th August 2007

ZETA TO SWEETER WARNS COACH

***FK Zeta boss Slobodan Halilovic has warned Rangers
his team are ready to produce one of European
football's great comebacks.***

***Tuesday 7th August 2007
Uefa Champions League Second Qualifying Round
FK Zeta Vs Rangers***

Bruce McAuliffe

I started the Euro campaign with the trip to FK Zeta. This was a great wee trip. On the way from the airport to the city we were told by Kenny Scott, that they had received police intelligence reports that local hooligans were waiting for us!!

Andy Cumming

It certainly was a trip into the unknown. There were a few hundred Rangers fans in Montenegro and many of them were familiar faces as is the norm for trips like these. Some had made their way by plane, train and hired car but most had come on the official charter or “school trip” as these have become known in fans circles.

Bruce McAuliffe

The buses stopped at a café outside the town and we were treated to free beer. Once the situation was cleared up we were allowed into the town centre. The police had set up a cordon that we were not allowed out of. Nearer to the kick off we were marched up to the stadium. After all the scaremongering, I never even saw an angry local yet!!

Andy Cumming

We were treated well by the locals. The national stadium which wasn't up to much for what they were describing as the biggest game their nation had ever seen! Thankfully the match went well and Rangers kept the ball far better than in the home leg and won by one goal to nil thanks to DaMarcus Beasley's first goal for the club.

The draw for the final qualifying round saw us sent back to the Balkans and this time our opponents were Crvena Zvezda or Red Star Belgrade as they used to be more commonly known as. Again we were at home for the first leg and once again the performance wasn't a great one.

The Daily Record 14th August 2007

BIG GORD TELLS GERS:

RED STAR ARE THERE FOR TAKING

Former Rangers Star Gordan Petric last night told Walter Smith he'll be facing Red Star at exactly the right time.

Tuesday 14th August 2007

***Uefa Champions League Third Qualifying Round
Rangers Vs Crvena Zvezda***

Stephen Macleod

The first leg was taken in at a large conference hotel near Silverstone and was memorable, not so much for the football, but for a colleague from Glasgow introducing me to the wonders of watching games on the internet via wi-fi in the hotel foyer.

Gary Scott McGregor

My mum and dad had split up 4 years previous and my dad had moved out. For 5 years when I was younger I had a season ticket with my dad in the main stand rear. After that, I had to get a part time job and with my youth football, it was difficult to get to Rangers games.

I still managed to get to nearly every home European game since I was around 10. The only match I ever missed was in the 07/08 season, I had to work. The match was at Ibrox against Red Star Belgrade. I listened to it in the kitchen at work.

Robert McQueen

I can remember the feeling of frustration around Ibrox as we struggled to breakdown a strong Red Star. Not for the first and by no means the very last time

up popped Nacho Novo in the 89th minute. 1 - 0 to the Rangers. A lead to take to Red Star.

Stephen Macleod

Nacho's late winner bought us the luxury of playing a holding game in the return leg.

The Herald, 16th August 2007

I WON'T BE SUCKED INTO ANYTHING SILLY

Alan Hutton has warned Red Star Belgrade he will not be kicked into submission or retaliation after accusing the Serbs of deliberately targeting him with a succession of crude fouls.

Tuesday 28th August 2007

Uefa Champions League Third Qualifying Round

Crvena Zvezda Vs Rangers

Alan Adair

I live in a wee village near Luton, born in Luton of Scots descent; my Dad & 3 Grandparents were all Scottish. Hence the main reason I got into following the bears. The incredible journey to Manchester began for me in Belgrade. We had booked a 4 day trip, as the flights & hotel were so cheap.

Robert McQueen

I watched the away game in Belgrade on the TV. I desperately wanted to go, but feeling optimistic of qualification I opted to save my pennies for the Group Stages. A risky strategy!

Andy Cumming

The away leg was one I looked forward to immensely as I had heard about the Belgrade crowds being passionate. I wasn't to be disappointed with the support they gave their side.

Many had arrived the night before the match and were advised to stay in their hotels. That was never going to happen so the Bears went out and about and had

a good time and actually made friends with the police that were meant to be shadowing them!

Alan Adair

I thought Belgrade was a bit of a dump, but we still had some time there. On the Monday night before the game, had a nice meal & sitting eating in the same restaurant was big Mark Hateley & Andy Goram. We had a fine night, met up with some Peterhead True Blues lads & had plenty of the usual bevvying etc as we hit a few pubs/bars.

Upon passing one pub late on, we were greeted by a hail of bottles glasses & all sorts by the local hooligans. Within SECONDS the old bill were there & proceeded to escort us back to our Hotels.

One policeman did warn us to be on our guard & to be very careful, as he said Belgrade has a large proportion of nutcases.

Bruce McAuliffe

Belgrade was a beautiful city. We were dropped off in the City Centre and told to follow the police, who were taking us to a safe area.

They took us into a park and told us to follow them, after 10-15 minutes we realised that we were back to where we were dropped off!!

At this point the Bears decided to forget the escort and we made our way to the boozers. We had a great time in the afternoon, beautiful weather, beautiful women and cool lager...unfortunately this all changed at the stadium.

Andy Cumming

We were escorted to the to the Marakana Stadium very close to kick off time and after a heavy search where just about anything you could throw was confiscated with the exception of phones and cameras we got in. I was instantly impressed by the local fans that filled the place and were making one hell of a racket. Their banners were also impressive.

Alan Adair

I have to say in all my years of watching football (nearly 44 yrs) I have NEVER been in such a Hostile atmosphere. It was absolutely mind blowing.

Bruce McAuliffe

From the moment we got into the ground we were subjected to a nonstop barrage of bricks, bottles and coins.

Andy Cumming

Thankfully Rangers were not intimidated by the threats that the Red Star captain had made in the press or by the atmosphere in the bowl of a stadium that reminded me a bit of Hampden Park but with more noise!

Robert McQueen

My main memory from this game is one of resilience. I remember coming away and thinking we had put on an excellent defensive display. We looked very solid. On reflection, this was perhaps the performance which set the tone for our full campaign.

Stephen Macleod

An effective defensive performance was brought to an end by some masterful keep ball by Barry Ferguson and DaMarcus Beasley. Your eyes divert to the clock and the countdown comes in. We've qualified for the Champions League.

Bruce McAuliffe

After the game we were kept in for an hour and a half, the home fans also stayed in!! Eventually the police moved in to chase them out. Outside the stadium, thousands of locals were still waiting for us, and it was not to wish us well in the forthcoming draw!!!

Andy Cumming

We had qualified for the Champion's League again and as usual, Rangers fans all over the nation tuned in to radio broadcasts or logged on to any website that was showing the draw.

Robert McQueen

The Champions' League group draw is always very exciting. The prospect of whom you might get and waiting patiently to try and jump upon some cheap early flights.

Gary Scott McGregor

We were a team in form, with passion, with desire and with a real hunger to do something in Europe this year.

Stephen Macleod

I was in Tesco's car park, with the family in tow as I turned on the radio to hear 'Barcelona, Stuttgart and Lyon for Rangers'. A rush of excitement shot through me and I said to the Mrs 'well I've got to go to at least one of them, those are fantastic trips'.

Gary Tedford

I remember calling into a bookies on the way home from work to watch the Champions League draw. It is in a predominantly catholic area of Belfast and I remember the other punters smirking when they saw who we got. I was relatively happy with it.

Andy Cumming

Personally, I was happy with the draw in some respects as Barcelona should be special to all Rangers fans due to our success there in 1972 and this was an ideal opportunity to go there and see Rangers play in the stadium where perhaps our most significant victory was achieved and where legends were made.

Alan Slater

When it came out we had Barcelona there was an almighty cheer from all of us sitting in my dad's living room. The first words that I said to my sister were 'we need to get dad a ticket'.

Back in 1972 when most Bears were heading over to Barca my poor dad was sitting in the labour suite of the Southern General with a radio (and a half bottle I'm sure) listening to us win the cup and seeing his son being born.

Robert McQueen

I knew there was only one city I was going to visit - Barcelona. I had longed to go to the Nou Camp for a game, so to go there with Rangers, where we sealed the Cup Winners Cup in 1972 was always going to be a very special moment for

me. Outside of the big tie with Barcelona, I was happy with the group. Spanish champions, French champions and the newly crowned German champions. I think being an underdog sits quite well with the Scottish psyche.

Stephen Macleod

In truth the one I fancied most was France. I had been to Stuttgart with Rangers before and had taken in an El Classico at the Nou Camp some four years earlier. But tickets would be tight and my Travel Club points weren't up to much.

I had renewed my Travel Club membership annually in the wake of, and I'm sorry to have to bring it up here, the stories I heard some Celtic fans had to go through to get tickets for their final some five years earlier. I looked at it as a sort of Act of God insurance policy, if ever our inconceivable moment came.

Although I was a season ticket holder, and had been for nearly 20 years, I wanted more assurance that I would be at the dance when our tune was played. It was, and remains, the best £11 I have ever spent in my life.

Gary Tedford

In my opinion Germany is the best European country in which to watch football and France is relatively easy to get to. By the time I had completed my 30 minute train journey from Belfast to Portadown my mate Neil and I had pretty much decided that we would do all three trips. I got them booked that night and booked the time off in my work the following day.

The Daily Record, 18th September 2007

IBROX DIN CAN SET UP WIN

Neil Murray once played in front of a Rangers crowd that scared the wits out a team of world-class stars. Now he reckons the Ibrox roar could be the difference between three points and none as his former club prepare to kick off their Champions League campaign against Stuttgart.

Wednesday 19th September 2007

Uefa Champions League Match Day One

Rangers Vs VFB Stuttgart

Brent MacFarlane

We have a history at Rangers of special nights. Nights when legends are made and titans fall by the way side. As a Rangers Man I live for these nights, when the Blue Sea of Ibrox comes alive, when you can't even hear yourself think, when you'll definitely know us by our noise.

You see there's something unique about Ibrox at night. The smells, the sounds, the nip in the air, that little buzz of excitement as the butterfly's build in your stomach.

The way the building lights up the dark sky, that beautiful imposing red brick façade sucking you in, swamping your eyes, giving off an aura of strength, power, elegance, history and hope.

As I stood outside the main door with Innes and the Ness brothers savouring it all with a swig of Daryl's always potent Vodka and coke, Jason said nostalgically 'This feels a bit like Leeds you know'. He didn't need to say anything else.

This was Rangers back in the Champions League, the greatest club competition on God's green earth. For me it's the future, it's where Rangers belong. It may only have been two seasons since we were last there but it felt like a lifetime to me.

Match day One saw us take on the German Champions Stuttgart, we'd played them in the 2003 Champions League when a Lovenkrands winner with 10 minutes to go, had Ibrox literally rocking to very its core. The only players who remained from that night we're the Portuguese centre half Meira and the Brazilian born striker Cacau.

The night was also memorable for me for another reason, I'd recently changed seat from the club deck to the very front of the East Enclosure, as I entered my new gate and followed Jason round I saw my first glimpse of the grass and gasped 'Jesus Christ', Jason turned and laughed, 'you never seen that before'. I'd never been that close before, the noise was sharper, the lights shone brighter, the grass looked greener and the colours we're just magical, I vowed that night I'd keep this seat for life.

Then it began, Carmina Burana blared out from the PA system as the teams marched out and the crowd began to roar. With the teams in place facing the Bill Struth stand the moment we we're all waiting for arrived, the champions league anthem, 'these are our champions' we were back on the dance floor.

The first half flew by in a blur of noise and pace, the Germans like all German teams we're organized, quick and dangerous, their fans colourful and passionate, Gomez should have given them the lead after 5 minutes only to see his shot thankfully clip the post. Rangers backed by the crowd could have edged in front on the half hour mark when Darcheville spun his marker; before firing his shot at the German Keeper Schafer.

Just after a halftime Barry Ferguson goes down with a head knock and you could feel the fear in the crowd as he's taken off for treatment. In his absence the Germans take the lead but it barely registered on me, I was too busy watching the dugout to see if he would reappear, reappear he did dazed, stitched and bandaged, the crowd began to roar it's a ripple at first that spreads like a rallying cry round the stands.

Hutton picks up the ball at right back, he beats player after player as he races by the Enclosure, we're all on our feet, he cuts into the box, he squares it to Adam, who feigns before curling an unstoppable right foot drive past the diving Schafer, GOAL! the flash bulbs go mental as the crowd erupt.

But we're not finished yet, the game restarts and Hutton takes off again, players lie in his wake, as he reaches the box the fantastic Meira, hits him high, PENALTY. A hush descends upon the crowd as Darcheville places the ball on the spot; cool as you like he slots it home before saluting the crowd.

And then it happens, Derry's Walls fills the air with a gusto and passion I'm yet to feel or hear again, as the stadium to a man rise together and bounce, I take a second to stand and take it all in, as all around me bears celebrate and sing with pride and heart, it may not rank amongst the most important result we ever achieve in Europe but the rousing manner in which it was achieved will be.

Maybe just maybe this will be our year.

The Herald, 2nd October 2007

RANGERS PREPARE FOR STEP INTO UNKNOWN IN LYON

He is not an international man of mystery. Walter Smith will present few surprises as he unveils his side at the Stade de Gerland tonight. The uncertainty will be created by the other major players on what should be a dramatic night in the Champions League...

Tuesday 2nd October 2007
Uefa Champions League Match Day Two
Lyon Vs Rangers

Andy Cumming

Match day two in early October saw Rangers travel to face French Champions Lyon, who were protecting a magnificent home European record and most people gave Rangers little chance to return to Glasgow with anything to show for their efforts. How wrong these doubters were and this day will live with all Gers fans who attended and those who watched at home on T.V. for many a year.

Robert McQueen

That night is just one night of many on this European adventure that will be fondly remembered by all. Some even say it is perhaps our greatest ever result on foreign soil. The destination was Lyon. I watched this game in my home.

We sat with a few beers and got the tingles as the champions league music blared out our TV. Our talk was very much of 'keep this respectable'. Fortunately for us it didn't pan out the way we hoped. It wasn't respectable. We humiliated the French Champions in their own backyard.

Andy Cumming

Like Belgrade, the local fans in the smart Stade Gerland were a noisy bunch and welcomed the teams on to the pitch with a card display, not up to the standard of ones we have become used to at Ibrox but decent all the same.

The game started and a familiar pattern developed. Lyon had much of the ball and squandered a couple of half chances but Rangers were defending well. Just after the twenty minute mark, Hutton found himself up field and forced a corner. McCulloch sent the Rangers fans nuts when he headed powerfully home from Beasley's well delivered set piece.

Rangers held out until half time with their one goal advantage intact despite the superb Juninho's best efforts to draw his side level. A few minutes in to the second half & Hutton again powered forward to cross low to Cousin who turned and thumped an unstoppable shot in to the net. The fans went bonkers.

Stephen Macleod

The Lyon game took my squeals to another level. I don't often drink in the house, but when Daniel Cousin put us 2 up the tension was so unbearable that I thought go on a beer will ease the clash of pumping adrenaline and gripping tension.

Robert McQueen

I burst my Mum's lip in the course of a jubilant celebration as Cousin spun his defender to slam in the second.

Stephen Macleod

As I returned to the living room Beasley was running away with his arms up. 'It's three, it's three, ya beauty, it's threeeeeee!!' I informed the generally disinterested family females.

I think I watched the remaining minutes through my fingers and even as late as 88 minutes, I still found myself roaring at the ridiculously presumptuous commentators who were calling this a victory. Didn't they see there were nearly five whole minutes to go?

Two games, six points, and some top class positive football. This was way ahead of expectation, indeed hope.

Alan Adair

What a fantastic performance. In my opinion, this was Rangers best ever away result in Europe. 3-0 against a team who I believe had never lost a home Champions League tie and certainly not against a British team.

Andy Cumming

Strangely, the celebrations that night in Lyon centre were a little subdued, considering the enormity of the result. I think everyone just could not comprehend & take in what they had witnessed.

Bruce McAuliffe

I managed to bump into John McClelland (Former Chairman) and John Greig and they sent over a round of beers to us. A nice touch.

Gary Tedford

The result made the trip to be honest. Don't particularly like France or French people, so I was very proud walking around Lyon the following day with my Gers shirt on knowing that we had gubbed the best team in France 3-0 the previous night.

Robert McQueen

We were the headliners that night. It belonged to us. Sitting pretty at the top of the table on 6 points, the dream that we might emerge from this 'group of death' was slowly becoming a reality. *The Mirror*, 23rd October 2007

IT'S WAR; XAVI WARNS TEAMMATES:

WE MUST BE UP FOR A SCRAP..

Barcelona midfielder Xavi has warned his superstar team-mates to prepare for "war" at Ibrox tonight.

Tuesday 23rd October 2007

Uefa Champions League Match Day Three

Rangers Vs FC Barcelona

Andy Cumming

Match Day Three saw Rangers welcome one of the big boys of world football, Barcelona.

Robert McQueen

It was one of those European nights you dream of. I rushed over to Ibrox straight from work and caught a few beers in The District with my mate. It was getting darker and the European excitement was in the air. We walked along Paisley Road West and the Bill Struth main stand stood there, lit up, in all its glory.

The night was tinged with disappointment for me personally as my smartcard was rejected, only to find Rangers had moved me seat without notifying me earlier.

Stephen Macleod

The third game presented a little problem as I was on a weeklong caravan holiday on the Dorset coast. Surely Weymouth would have a bar that would show our game against the mighty Barcelona. I tried. It didn't. I was aware of most of the Rangers community in the South of England and knew that there was a RSC some 30 miles away in Bournemouth. I drove through and was welcomed to the Rangers specific venue where around 30 to 40 Bears had gathered to watch the game.

Andy Cumming

Both sides were welcomed on to the field by fifty thousand fans holding aloft cards to create a display that in the stands behind both goals replicated the Cup Winners Cup and showed the year in which Rangers triumphed in Barcelona, 1972 and in the Govan stand, facing the players as they came out of the tunnel a huge "more than a club" display which is Barcelona's motto but is the way the majority of Rangers fans feel about our club and the reason it was chosen.

Robert McQueen

I missed the big card display. I stood outside in queue at the ticket office, hearing the champion's league music and I was gutted. Shaking with anger and feeling dejected I was close to tears. I got in having missed the opening 10 minutes of the match.

Andy Cumming

The Barcelona side on the night was packed full of world class talent and household names Valdes, Thuram, Puyol, Milito, Abidal, Xavi, Gudjohnsen, Iniesta, Ronaldinho, Henry and Messi. However Cousin was superb for the Rangers as was the entire back line and at around eighty minutes we could sense that Barca were happy with a point.

Robert McQueen

And a certain Mr. Messi leaving the Ibrox main door that night via big Sasa's back pocket.

Stephen Macleod

It ended 0-0 but the Rangers put up a very creditable show and had late chances to win the game. Nevertheless our early good form had been maintained and we were getting national recognition for our commanding performances.

Gary Scott McGregor

After beating Stuttgart at home, Lyon away and getting a point from Barcelona at Ibrox, things were looking great.

The Daily Record, 25th October 2007

RANGERS PLAYED ANTI FOOTBALL;

MESSI BLASTS GERS' TACTICS

Whingeing Barcelona wonder kid Lionel Messi has vowed to wreak revenge after launching a scathing attack on Rangers tactics

Wednesday 7th November 2007

Uefa Champions League Match Day Four

FC Barcelona Vs Rangers

Andy Cumming

Match day four saw us up against Barcelona again. It was the away tie that really got many people myself included excited. I'd always wanted to visit Barcelona itself but also a huge dream of mine and most other Bears was to see Rangers play in the Camp Nou.

David Wilkinson

8 of us had travelled to Barcelona for 5 days for the champions league match at the Camp Nou we thought that was a great experience but what we didn't know was what was just around the corner.

Paul McMurray

Finally we get Barca in the draw! It was always been an ambition of mine to see the Gers in the Nou Camp. I had never been abroad with the bears before and arranged tickets through the 'Mallorca Loyal'.

Andrew Hunter

I think like most travelling bears we did Barcelona, the huge nostalgic value ensured huge numbers were there and it was great to see so many bears in attendance. Previously the biggest contingents of ranger's support I had been part of in mainland Europe was in Paris when we played PSG under the little General.

Some of us did hospitality; the Bonus was I managed to use my company to help support our hospitality attendance. Word had reached a colleague who was trying to secure business with some clients by getting them tickets for Barcelona. He contacted me and said could I help him (it was my belief the boy was a Tim and quite a rabid one). I decided I would make the most of it.

Knowing the company via his entertainment expenses were paying. I charged them double the amount of the hospitality cost and put the money back into the pot for my mates reducing the per head contribution we had to make.

Win for everyone, the two lads came to the game with us and were happy to get tickets paid for by my company, boy in work was happy he had improved his business relationship with the clients and we got hospitality at a heavily discounted rate.

Bruce McAuliffe

Barcelona was all about the support. There must have 20,000 of us in the city centre. A sea of red, white and blue and not a bit of bother, well apart from the odd pick pocket getting a doing!!!

Gary Tedford

The place was far too busy and full of a 'ned element'.

Andy Cumming

The Gers fans certainly had been short changed by the Barcelona authorities who were happy to take as much Euros in to their economy as we were prepared to throw at them but provided very little in return.

The thing that struck me was the lack of facilities such as toilets or rubbish bins and this wasn't lost on our own media who decided to report about litter and urinating rather than on the fact that around twenty one thousand Rangers fans had descended upon Barcelona and some hacks decided to omit from their

reports the fact that there were zero arrests, an amazing statistic considering the numbers that had travelled.

It did seem a bit ironic that Celtic played there later on in the season, took nine thousand less fans, had fan zones set up, bins and toilets in place yet despite benefiting from the Barcelona authorities learning from their mistakes from when we visited and providing Celtic fans with better facilities they still managed to get a handful of fans arrested.

John Punton

The supermarkets totally sold out of beer in Barcelona. Even the alcohol free beer pallet was nearly finished. Then at night time in Las Ramblas the locals had bought some beers and were selling it for 2 Euros a can. Not too bad a markup considering it was 1 euro in the supermarket.

Andy Cumming

It was a memorable day and despite several stories of people being pick pocketed and with some dodgy looking local characters or gypsy sorts milling around, we had a ball. Talking of balls, there was the customary football or two being launched into the air randomly as has become tradition on away trips and you need to stay vigilant or risk getting belted by one.

Robert McQueen

We headed over to the Nou Camp to chance our luck with tickets to no avail. The touts wanted crazy money. As kick off drew closer, our hopes began to sink. We all had around 200 euros left; the touts were looking for around 400 Euros.

I said to my 2 mates who were suggesting we just go for beers and watch it that I will probably never ever get a chance to watch Rangers in the Nou Camp again. I asked them for their Euros and I'd pay them back

We stressed and strained for a little while, and pestered the touts in the hope they would break. Eventually we got one tout who gave us 3 tickets for 360 Euros. It seemed like a bargain at the time. He led us away from the stadium down a shady backstreet, jumped into a sex shop and brought out the tickets. I was physically shaking.

Foreign countries, dealing with a dodgy character, down a wee lane and he knew we had at least 400 Euros on us. The deal was done though. We had our tickets. We were going in!!

Andy Cumming

A fear of mine was that we'd see scenes similar to those I'd witnessed in Villarreal and Pamplona where the police were ridiculously heavy handed and over eager to use their batons at any opportunity, incidents that the press in Scotland were only too happy to exploit against our supporters and club when, if they had cared to do some proper journalism would have discovered that Gers fans were being beaten in a crowded lane in Villarreal for nothing and in Pamplona, where after being enclosed without reason in some sort of holding area, the police marched us down the road towards the stadium taking swings at anyone they felt like hitting, be they women, old men or whoever.

Alan Adair

I had a ticket (one of the benefits of being in the Travel Club) alas my 2 Luton pals did not. After a wonderful day & I admit to being well pished, I started to make my way to the Nou Camp.

As many people will testify, a lot of the foreign turnstile/stadium operators just do not cope well at all with large travelling support. The Nou Camp was certainly no exception & because of previous experiences I got there well early.

The crowds were HUGE, after what seemed an eternity I got through & went up a never ending amount of stairways. They had put the Rangers fans at the HIGHEST point there was. Upon finally reaching the gate number on my ticket I asked a steward where my seat was (showing him the ticket) he just ignored me, so I went to another steward & repeated my request, he responded by telling me to Fuck Off. Bearing in mind it was only now about 5 mins to kick off I shouted to him - 'I JUST WANT MY FUCKING SEAT MATE' the next thing I am lifted upright by 4 Spanish policemen. Now bearing in mind I was at Villareal & Osusuna so I have witnessed the Spanish police in action. I thought I was about to be taken out & given a hiding.

Well they took me to an exit & THREW me down a flight of approx 20 Concrete steps & just left me there!!! I tried to get up, but screamed & I knew I was in trouble. Just then a mighty roar & Barca had scored already.

In fairness within a few minutes first aid boys were on the scene. They tried to help me stand up, but I was screaming in agony. They got a stretcher & took me to the first aid room. I was asked what happened & when I replied it was

almost as if they were saying ‘oh not again!’ They were certainly not shocked anyway.

These guys were great and took me down in a lift to a waiting ambulance where I was taken to Barcelona Hospital. After what seemed ages, I was inspected by a doctor. They did some x-rays & told me the results. I had broken my leg in 3 places. The doctor explained he would put my leg in plaster & that when I get back to the UK to go straight to hospital as this would need an operation.

I had managed to get in touch with my Luton pals who by now were back at the Hotel. They waited for my return by ambulance to the Hotel & managed with help to get me to Bed for the night.

The next day all sorts of things were going through my mind, I first of all had to ring my ex so she could let my 2 daughters know.(They lived with me) next I had to inform my work.

This was the Thursday; a doctor came to my hotel room to examine me. He told me if the airline were ok about me flying I might be ok to fly home on the Fri night. Thankfully I was insured & the insurance company were brilliant & sorted out all the arrangements about getting me home.

It was a good job, I had booked the Fri night flight to return, as I would not be allowed to fly for at least 24 hours after my leg was in plaster.

I got home ok & an ambulance took me to my local hospital upon arrival. Because this was now the early hours of Sat am I had to wait in hospital until Mon am before the surgeon could see me. He said to me I had broken my leg in 3 places, the femur, kneecap & somewhere else. It was one of the worst fractures he had ever seen. I had a 4 hour operation & was in hospital for a week.

I was to be off work for 4 months & obviously had to cancel Stuttgart. The nightmare continued, as I only got paid for 4 weeks sick leave & had to use all my 4 weeks 2008 holiday leave. The remaining 2 months was just SSPay about £28 per week.

The day I went back to work, they made me redundant (it’s not allowed when you are off sick, to lay someone off) 2 & half years later I still struggle a bit as the leg break caused Arthritis to set in both knees.

Andy Cumming

We were some of the first ones in our area and the huge stadium looked magnificent empty and lit up. It wasn’t long before the Rangers section was packed and several banners were displayed and many songs belted out. At kick

off, despite there being around seventy six thousand inside the ground, all the noise was coming from our fans who were in a party mood and after what happened in Lyon, you just never knew what was in store.

Stephen Macleod

Unfortunately what followed was 90 minutes of disappointingly turgid football. It served as a stark reminder that, although we had done extremely well to that point, we were still a long way off dining at the very top table.

Bruce McAuliffe

Total anti climax. Stuck up in the Heavens in an aging stadium with poor facilities!!

Gary Tedford

The game itself was pretty much an anti climax. Our supporters were stuck up in the Gods and it was difficult to create an atmosphere. Funniest moment was when a guy in the row in front proclaimed after we had got our first (and only probably) corner 'that's me fulfilled my ambition in football, seeing Rangers win a corner at the Nou Camp' and he promptly left. Not nice for those outside without a brief but that's his prerogative.

Robert McQueen

We were behind the goals to the left of the tunnel as you enter the pitch. We seen the bears partying up the top tier, but opted to stay in our seats. The locals were fairly welcoming to us, and as the results mattered not much to us we were able to show respect for their moments of great football.

Andy Cumming

Unfortunately for Rangers, Barcelona scored a scrappy goal after only seven minutes when Henry forced home with what looked like his arm.

Paul McMurray

Henry handball but nobody complains.

Robert McQueen

Certainly wasn't as funny as the second time it happened.

Andy Cumming

After that there was only going to be one winner and Barcelona enjoyed most of the ball and Rangers seemed to play with either a fear about them or with a damage limitation policy enforced. We showed our illustrious hosts far too much respect on the field and it was no surprise when Messi made it two nil just before half time.

Andrew Hunter

The Barcelona fans were in stitches at us as we did oles in the first half when we managed to hold onto the ball for around 10 or 12 passes.

Robert McQueen

There was mocks of our shouts, at one point in particular as I got excited at a Stevie Naismith break away and exclaimed "Go On Stevie!!", he mucked it up and a few responded with "Go On Stevie!" shouts in their best attempts at a Scottish accent.

Andy Cumming

The second half was much the same with the play generally flowing towards the Rangers goal but we held out well. We only threatened the Barca goal late on and Darcheville hit a decent shot from distance and Novo had a fine effort brilliantly saved at the death by Valdes.

Stephen Macleod

I wasn't too downhearted as I returned home; there was no shame in a 2-0 loss to such a top drawer side.

Andy Cumming

The fans drifted away on to their coaches, either back to costal resorts or to the airports to catch one of the estimated ninety six planes that had brought us and the Barcelona adventure was over.

Scott Jacobs

There was a smashing article written by a Manchester Utd supporter defending the twenty odd thousand Rangers fans in Barcelona and the lack of facilities laid on for them. It's a pity Manchester's City Fathers didn't have a gander at that article to at least give them a glimpse into what was coming their way.

Andrew Hunter

On the way back home we talked of how that would probably be the biggest travelling rangers support we would ever be part of "Unless we made a European final" someone said, at which point everyone laughed and said "Aye Right."

Little did I know what was to come?

The Independent, 26th November 2007

FOUR-GOAL RALLY FIRES UP STUTTGART FOR RANGERS

The defending Bundesliga champions, VfB Stuttgart, prepared for tomorrow's Champions League encounter with Rangers by following last week's 3-1 win against Bayern Munich with a come-from-behind victory at Frankfurt, scoring three second-half goals to win 4-1.

Tuesday 27th November 2007

Uefa Champions League Match Day Five

VfB Stuttgart Vs Rangers

Andy Cumming

Our penultimate match in Group E was in the Gottlieb Daimler Stadion which is actually now called the Mercedes Benz Arena against bottom of the group VfB Stuttgart. Unfortunately for me, work commitments ensured that I missed an away European match for the only time during our momentous season. I was saddened that I couldn't go and am a hopeless armchair fan.

Gary Tedford

I came home from working overtime on the Saturday, took a Lemsip as I could feel a cold coming on and went to my bed. I 'd fully intended to get up again to watch Barca v Real Madrid at 9pm but slept like a log until 6 the next morning. Went down stairs and realised I hadn't locked the front door the night before. Turns out I had been burgled, car keys were missing and car wasn't in the driveway.

I borrowed my mum's car to go down to the boat to pick up a few Scottish mates who were travelling down to Dublin with us to catch the flight to Germany. Came home to pack and realised that the pricks had also taken my passport (it had been sitting on the mantle piece the night before). My mate from Lisburn picked the two Scottish boys up at my house to take them to Dublin and I had to wave them off. I was absolutely devastated. Numerous phone calls on the day of the game from fellow bears asking me where I was (knowing full well the situation) we're not nice.

Bruce McAuliffe

Stuttgart was a nice trip. I like Germany as it has a great football culture. It is also a great laugh seeing them with the scarves tied on their wrists.

Andy Cumming

Sadly Rangers never managed the victory that would surely have seen them progress to the knockout stages as they lost by 3 goals to 2 with Adam and Ferguson scoring for the Ibrox side. Lyon and Barcelona played out a two each draw in France in the group's other match.

Stephen Macleod

The subsequent tight loss in Stuttgart set us up for a shootout with Lyon at Ibrox.

Robert McQueen

A draw and we were there.

The Sunday Mail, 9th December 2007
BEARS WILL GROWL IF LYONS ROAR

Walter Smith has been back in the job 11 months. You would defy anyone to say he hasn't turned Rangers on their head. If he doesn't take the point he needs from Lyon on Wednesday, though? Listen for the bears starting to growl. Fickle? You bet. But that's what the Ibrox boss is up against.

*Wednesday 12th December 2007
Uefa Champions League Match Day Six
Rangers Vs Lyon*

Andy Cumming

A defeat would see us get a consolation place in the UEFA Cup. Lyon showed their intent by fielding a very attacking formation.

Robert McQueen

Ibrox was nervous. You could sense it that night. Govou gave Lyon an early lead and silenced the bears.

Andy Cumming

We huffed and puffed until half time without really looking like scoring. Just when it looked like Lyon would double their advantage in the second half when the terrific Benzema rounded McGregor only to shoot straight at the covering defender on the line, Rangers broke up field and created their best chance of the game and possibly their best chance of the season, Ferguson crossed low to Darcheville...

Robert McQueen

Open Goal, inside the six yard box, to send us through to the last 16.....over the bar. I think we all collectively fell to the floor.

Stephen Macleod

Wafer thin margins change football games and late in the game, it was one of those close range misses that you disbelieve more with every TV repeat.

Robert McQueen

It was over. Two late strikes from the pacey Benzema ripped the heart out of us and gave Lyon revenge for the earlier game. We were out. We had achieved a lot to be proud of in the campaign, but it didn't feel like it that night.

Andy Cumming

There was a sense of dejection as the fans filtered out the stadium that night however if they knew what lay in store later in the season they'd have been far happier. The Champion's League campaign had ended poorly after a fantastic start but when the draw was made many of us would have accepted the seven points we ended up on and UEFA Cup spot that was heading our way.

Stephen Macleod

Had we drawn that game our euro final destiny, which we were all blissfully unaware of, would have taken us to Moscow rather than Manchester. Well, maybe! Our future was in the UEFA Cup.

(2)

THE RUN - PART 2

THE UEFA CUP

As Steven Whittaker danced through the middle of the park bearing down on goal, clamed up in my tiny flat we rose in unison roaring at the television, 'Pass, pass, pass the fucking ball!'

STEVEN CLIFFORD

David Hamill

Rangers were now in the UEFA Cup and the matches started to come thick and fast, I decided that a new flat screen TV was required for personal use in the ward, permission was given and 1 purchased.

The Doctors and nurses were brilliant and I soon offered my Season Ticket so that the seat would be full in my absence. My big mate Davie who I travel to the away matches with was a rock of friendship and brought me up the Rangers News and kept me updated with everything Rangers.

Then the run started, as the games started it was just good to be sitting on the bed watching, taking a few slaggings about being negative. I just gave as good as I was getting. As the games progressed the more animated I was becoming. The staff was quite positive that the Rangers were going to the final.

I realized that I need to get out of here I need to start to get organized just in case we did the unlikely. I got measured up for a wheelchair as I could not walk more than 50yds due to lung problems. My big mate Davie informed me that I would be sorted for a ticket probably Hospitality.

Gary Scott McGregor

This year was the last year of the Uefa Cup, which was to be renamed the Europa League. Rangers were drawn against Panathinaikos, who had finished 3rd in the Greek Super League, the previous season.

Del McDuff

Home of broken plates and armless statues (no wonder the plates were dropped).

Robert McQueen

European football post Christmas, a decent wee run and we would all be happy. I remembered with fear the 3 - 0 drubbing they had given us at Ibrox a few years back, particularly the rocket of a goal scored from what must have been all of 30 yards. My memories of the home leg are pretty much blank, which tells you all you should need to know.

The Daily Record, 10th February 2008

THE PAN HANDLERS

Steven Naismith admits shattered Rangers players needed breathing space to get over their Champions League heartache before they could even think about the Uefa Cup. Now he reckons they are up for the fight and warned Panathinaikos the fixture chaos that hasn't given the Ibrox side a spare minute will not dampen their determination to revive their Euro fortunes.

Wednesday 13th February 2008

***Uefa Cup Last 32 First Leg
Rangers Vs Panathanaikos***

Andy Cumming

Just like the Champion's League qualifiers we found ourselves at home for the first leg. Rangers played reasonably well and Nacho Novo in particular was denied on several occasions by the visitor's goalkeeper Galinovic. The game was also notable as it was Steven Davis' first game since his loan move from Fulham and it saw Rangers play in Europe without Alan Hutton who had departed to Spurs. The game finished goalless and set up a testing game for the return leg in Athens.

Robert McQueen

I can remember arguing with people about this result. They stated we should be going for it at home, not playing 4-5-1. My point was that we should do the opposite. Preventing the opposition from gaining an away goal gave us a unique advantage. It meant the home team was anxious to attack as they were aware that a counter goal from us would leave them chasing 2. This would become a staple of our run.

The Daily Record, 21st February 2008

GERS WILL WORK LIKE TROJANS TO AVOID A GREEK TRAGEDY

Rangers missed many chances in the first leg at Ibrox, but achieved the primary objective of most European sides in two-leg games - keeping a clean

sheet at home. Under the away goal rule, if they can sneak a goal in Athens, Panathanaikos will need to score twice.

***Thursday 21st February 2008
Uefa Cup Last 32 Second Leg
Panathanaikos Vs Rangers***

Andy Cumming

We didn't have long to wait for the return match in Greece in the Greek capital. I'd been there before in 2003 the ground hadn't changed much from 2003, it was still a dump but there seemed to be fewer missiles thrown at us by the Greeks on this visit.

Gary Tedford

I couldn't make it as I still didn't have my passport sorted. I watched it in the house.

Bruce McAuliffe

The 1st time I travelled to Panathinaikos it was quite intimidating, this time it was very quiet. I headed up to the stadium, the night before the game, to try and watch the training session. I managed to find a gate open only to be told that the game was in doubt due to a burst pipe!! Eventually I found a pub to watch Barcelona hump Celtic. Craig Patterson and Billy Dodds were in the pub and both were cheering when Barca scored.

Stephen Macleod

The return leg was to be shown at 5pm on a day I was working in Crawley. I snuck out at 5 and found a venue just a few minutes later with the game on. There was one solitary fella watching the match so I sat at the next table and struck up a conversation. He was an exiled Bear like me. I hope he enjoyed my company, as I certainly did his. Rangers are a language in themselves. Finding one, who was so fluent, in such a random spot, was a stroke of luck.

Andy Cumming

Rangers started brightly enough but the home side took the lead in the 12th minute in sensational style. Centre half Goumas struck an unstoppable volley from around 30 yards that McGregor couldn't get near. It was a stunning strike. McGregor and Cuellar kept Rangers deficit to one with some great saves and timely interventions and Novo had a fine effort saved before the break.

Stephen Macleod

We were 1 down and it wasn't looking inspiring.

Robert McQueen

I can remember the away game clearly. I was working in Hamilton that day. I was out on site and had purposefully made the effort to get home early for the 5pm kick off. I left at 4.30 only to be stuck on the M74 on my way home and missing the entire first half. I had the commentary on and my misery was compounded when Panithinaikos scored. I got in, in time for the second half starting and settled in feeling pretty dejected. Time was ticking on and we weren't looking very likely to score.

Del McDuff

In 2008 I finally after a long, long, long wait, I got to see my heroes, Rangers in a Euro final, oh and I got hitched to Angela in Vegas. I was driving past Ibrox with my future wife, returning from taking a Gekko Lizard to the Cessnock vets!!!! Listening to the Pana away leg, sadly panning out for a 1-0 aggregate defeat, we badly need a match winner, step forward...**SUPER NACHO NOVO**, who else!! I start screaming and jumping in the seat, the wife keeks her breek, Gekko near croaks it.

Robert McQueen

From nowhere.....up he popped again, running away with his two hands pumping towards the sky above. Wee Nacho had done it again.

Stephen Macleod

It was one of those tension bursting goals, the kind that get spanked into a gaping goal.

Gary Tedford

I feared the worst when we were 1-0 down with 10 minutes to go, we had missed a few chances but wee Nacho came up trumps. I paced the living room begging for the final whistle and it duly arrived (my new passport arrived a few days later and it would be put to good use).

Robert McQueen

I wished I was in Greece that night.

Stephen Macleod

Hands that were fists punching the air just moments earlier were shaken heartily. Another adventure waited.

The Evening Times, 5th March 2008

BARRY REACHES 77 . . .

AND HE'S STILL GOING STRONG

Rangers captain Barry Ferguson will make his 77th European appearance against Werder Bremen tomorrow night - a Scottish club record. And manager Walter Smith presented the player with a commemorative plaque at Murray Park today to mark the occasion

Thursday 6th March 2008

Uefa Cup Last 16 First Leg

Rangers Vs Werder Bremen

Gary Scott McGregor

Next up were Werder Bremen in the last 16, they had won the German Bundesliga 3 years previous.

Del McDuff

Home of oversized sausages and cracking helmets (ooh er matron).

Stephen Macleod

Werder Bremen presented an undoubtedly sterner test. While the previous round was certainly within our reach, this was a stretch.

Andy Cumming

Many knowledgeable Bears feared the worst as they were a good side which was full of decent players. Yet again the first leg was to be played at Ibrox and this game was played on March 6th.

Stephen Macleod

But again when expectation was lower, our performance was higher.

Dougie Dickie

In Europe, I had travelled to Stuttgart, but had limited myself to the home games. Ironically, I hadn't seen a single goal scored in the UEFA Cup run. I don't often have to work at night, but I did on March 6, 2008, meaning I had to be content with watching our fine display against Werder Bremen on the small screen. Perhaps fate was trying to tell me something; maybe it would have been better if I never made it to Eastland's after all.

Robert McQueen

Ibrox was absolutely rocking that night. A magnificent performance aided by two goalkeeper blunders gave us yet another famous victory.

Andy Cumming

Rangers almost scored in the first minute but as the game developed both teams seemed intent in not getting men behind the ball rather than attacking. Just before half time Daniel Cousin let fly from 25 yards. The powerfully struck shot was straight at the German goalkeeper Wiese who somehow managed to help the ball in to the net.

Two minutes after the restart we doubled our lead when the hapless keeper could only palm another Cousin effort in to the path of Davis who made no mistake from close range for his first goal for the club.

The Germans should have been dead and buried near the end when a mix up saw McCulloch presented with an open goal but he dithered and allowed a

German defender to put a saving challenge almost on the goal line. It was a horrible miss and one that would give our opponents a bit of hope that they could overcome their two goal deficit.

Stephen Macleod

A resounding 2 0 home victory, which included some top class football, put us in command of the tie.

Gary Scott McGregor

With the Blue Sea of Ibrox right behind them. They then travelled to Bremen to defend their 2 goal advantage.

The Herald, 13th March 2008

BREMEN TEAM-MATES STILL AT WAR OVER IBROX 'ATTACK'

A bitter row between two Werder Bremen players flared again last night on the eve of the German club's attempt to rescue a two-goal deficit against Rangers in the last-16 tie of the UEFA Cup.

It was revealed yesterday that Brazilian playmaker Diego and Aaron Hunt, the 21-year-old German forward, had clashed after the defeat at Ibrox last week. The argument started on the pitch and ended with claims that the Brazilian punched his team-mate in the dressing room.

Thursday 13th March 2008

Uefa Cup Last 16 Second Leg

Werder Bremen Vs Rangers

Andrew Hunter

I decided that Bremen was a must attend, I have always enjoyed visiting Germany for European games the fans/locals are hospitable and knowledgeable, they always seem willing to talk to you and appreciate the fact that fans travel significant distances to watch the football, they seem to identify with the rangers fans passion for football. I have also found the police have a very common sense approach to policing football fans; they actually treat you with respect.

Bremen was interesting as due to the ongoing negotiations and possible relocation I was travelling up and down to London on a weekly basis for meetings and handovers of certain pieces of work. I had been speaking to a London based colleague of mine an hour or so after the draw and was saying I would like to go as per reasons above etc but it could be difficult as I had a meeting on Friday morning at 9.30 that would probably be one of my last as I would be officially handing over the remaining piece of my work and confirming I would not relocate.

My colleague, a Millwall man with Rangers leanings was saying surely you could work it and get back from Germany in time. I went off the phone and thought let's look into this. Some internet checking and I found a way. True what they say 'where there is a will there is a way'.

So my colleague books a meeting with me on Thursday at 8am, so I need to be in the office on Thursday. I fly down on the red eye from Glasgow, thus the company pay my flight up and down the road from London going out from Glasgow on the Thursday and back on the Friday after my 9.30am meeting. I book return flights from Heathrow to Hamburg returns. I visit the office for 10 minutes and disappear. The Director I reported to was out of the country and no one else paid any attention to what I did, that was very helpful as me not being in the office was not missed by anyone and my London mate would confirm I met him.

I had already stated I would stay with a friend in London saving lodgings all bases covered. My flights were something like £70 return to Hamburg, booked on the Steincolin bus from Hamburg to Bremen (which I caught with 5 minutes to spare).

A woman I worked with said her husband was working in Belgium at the time and when she heard I was going said her husband would love to go. I managed to get him and one of his Belgian work colleague's tickets to the game and they drove down to Bremen to meet us.

The Belgian boy loved it and is now a dyed in the wool Rangers man; he loved the atmosphere and could not believe how our fans sang constantly. He continually commented on the number of fans who had travelled and was a definite ranger's man by the time we left him that night.

Gary Tedford

I Arrived in Cologne about mid-day and went to an Irish boozer, where I watched Aberdeen holding out for a draw at the San Giro against the reptiles

before going to my bed delighted. I got the train through to Bremen the following day but ended up absolutely steaming and my memory of the game is pretty sketchy.

Stephen Macleod

The second leg was an exercise in torture. Our backs were so against the wall that bricks would have had an imprint on them.

Andy Cumming

We we're hitting on the break when we could but too often we gave the ball away cheaply and one or two players including our captain didn't have their best games. Huge effort was made by our side though and Cuellar, Davis and Papac but the performance of McGregor eclipsed everyone else's and one save in particular was amazing. That incredible save seemed to take something out the home side and their support.

Stephen Macleod

It was perhaps the best single save I have ever seen a Rangers goalkeeper produce. As the ball bulleted to the net, Allan McGregor dashed at lightning speed across the goal to palm the ball onto the bar and to safety.

Andrew Hunter

Being at the other end of the ground very few of the bears realised McGregor had actually saved the ball so when it came up on the screen there was a huge "what a save" uttered in unison by the bulk of the bears. It was a surreal moment.

Del McDuff

It will be *the* performance of McShaggers life, in a barrage Rommel would be proud of!

Andy Cumming

In the 57th minute Diego, Bremen's little Brazilian, scored a fine goal and the pressure on Rangers intensified.

Andrew Hunter

We managed to hold out for longer than I expected but I feared the worst when that goal went in.

Andy Cumming

The Rangers fans were giving their team fantastic backing and there was a mass of Gers flags on the track behind the goal nearest to where we were situated.

Robert McQueen

Again I sat at home itching to be there, I watched the last 20 minutes through the spaces in my fingers. It was edge of the seat stuff. Absolute heroics from Alan McGregor.

The final whistle went and I think for the first time, it hit me that something very special could be unfolding here. We were in the Quarter Finals, the last 8. Suddenly Manchester was the place on everyone's lips.

Stephen Macleod

Dizzy with tension, fear and hope I chose to watch the last 15 minutes from the bottom of the stairs. This would obviously make it all better. It did! The whistle blew and we were in the quarter finals – still much too early to even check where the final would be though.

Bruce McAuliffe

It was after this game that I decided to text the wife and get her to book a hotel for Manchester.

Del McDuff

At this point Mhankies in my work thought it funny to compose a fake Coach booking to Manchester for "Buckfast Rangers tours" and leave it on my desk (I smelled their fear now). I told them I would keep it and it was now my lucky charm. I also said we're destined for final since all teams in our path had vowels in their name....remember the "V" pish from Se-vile?

Andy Cumming

Putting out a side as good as this was no small achievement. We had lost one nil but had made the UEFA Cup quarter finals, a remarkable achievement and it was time to celebrate.

Andrew Hunter

After the game there was a problem for some reason the bus driver had decided to head home and we were essentially marooned in Bremen.

I had experienced this before while in Auxerre but on that occasion the consulate had helped out. I was thinking oh no how do I explain this I was supposed to be in London but could not make this meeting I was thinking taxi to Hamburg if required.

However who needs the British consulate, to their immense credit Stencolin and their friends from Hamburg managed to conjure up a replacement bus and we made it back to Hamburg. I considered going with everyone to celebrate our victory but with a meeting at 9.30 commonsense prevailed, I headed to the airport to sleep on the floor till my flight was leaving.

The meeting finished by 10, airport by 11 and home by 1, result and all for only £70 return.

Gary Tedford

I remember trying to get a beer from a machine on the platform of Bremen Hopbahnhof where we were waiting to get the sleeper back through to Cologne. It got stuck in the machine and for some unknown reason I broke into a rendition of 'please release me, let me go'. About 20 people, mainly Germans, joined in.

Got on the train and my mate and I jumped into a first class cabin. I used a large union jack as a duvet and my scarf as a pillow and went into a drunken but contented sleep. I was woken up by a couple of my pals as we were approaching Cologne. I was too slow getting my trainers on and the doors had automatically locked shut.

I couldn't get them opened and had to stay on the train as my 'mates' buckled with laughter on the platform. I had visions of the next stop being Munich but much to my relief and surprise it was actually Cologne airport! the guys all had to pay for a taxi and I got first digs on a bench to sleep on at the airport, he who

laughs last laughs longest and all that!! I also met Jorg Albertz on the flight home.

I got back to Whitburn just in time to see the draw for both the quarters and semis. Portugal in a fortnight...bring it on.

Del McDuff

Portugal. Home of Eusebio and Willie Waddells UEFA rulebook.

Brian Carrick

My girlfriend and I decided to have a break and go somewhere hot, Barcelona was mentioned but after the bad press Rangers fans had with not cleaning up after ourselves I said I was not going there. We then looked at the usual suspects but we couldn't decide between Madrid and Rome.

I looked at the teams still in the cup and saw Sporting and Benfica were still in so I suggested Lisbon. We booked our travel and hotel plans and I hoped for the best. The day of the draw I was at work but never had access to a radio. I got a call on the phone and my boss said we had Sporting and it was the away leg the week I was there. I phoned my girlfriend and told her (to me) the good news.

For the next 5 minutes I couldn't get a word in as she said I had planned it (nearly) and I loved Rangers more than her. After she calmed down I told her we had 5 days together before the day of the match.

The 5 days dragged in until the day of the match

Gary Scott McGregor

Memories of the 1972 Cup Winners Cup would come flowing back to the older generation of Gers fans.

Stephen Macleod

Bloody Sporting Lisbon. I don't like Sporting Lisbon. Nothing to do with the penalty farce of '72. More so because I went with a couple of pals to see them at Parkhead in the early 80s with the absolute expectation that they would dispatch Celtic from Europe. But Sporting capitulated spectacularly and I got a punch in the face from the guy in front of me.

The Daily Record, 2nd April 2008

LISBON WON'T BE SCARED OF THIS;

PACK IBROX TO THE RAFTERS & YOU STILL CAN'T WIN SAYS AGUIAR.

Bruno Aguiar last night tipped Sporting Lisbon to send Rangers tumbling out of the Uefa Cup.

Thursday 3rd April 2008

Uefa Cup Last Quarter Final First Leg

Rangers Vs Sporting Lisbon

Andy Cumming

It was the first European quarter final draw we had featured in since 1988 and it was relatively kind to us with Sporting Clube de Portugal or Sporting Lisbon as their commonly known as, would be the third team in a row to face us in this competition with a green strip.

Perhaps playing against the green fired up our side, perhaps it was just a coincidence but if you were superstitious then the omens were good in terms of us progressing. Yet again the first leg was at Ibrox but by now we were used to this and it seemed to suit us this way.

Robert McQueen

The routine had been defined through pervious successes. Finish work, get changed and head straight over. Few beers in The District or Loudon, whichever was the less busy of the 2, and then a wee saunter down Paisly Road West soaking up the atmosphere.

Andy Cumming

The home leg was a cagey affair and pretty forgettable to be brutally honest. Walter Smith went with his usual one up front and chose Darcheville on this occasion as but the closest we came in this match was from two efforts from McCulloch towards the end of the first half. The second half was worse than the first and we had to settle for a goalless draw.

Robert McQueen

The same argument reared its head again. I was adamant 4-5-1 with a 0-0 home score was good enough. Others remained unconvinced and were disappointed we failed to capitalize on home advantage.

The Daily Record, 9th April 2008

DON'T TURN THIS INTO A BEARPIT

Sporting Lisbon last night urged their fans to snap up any remaining briefs for their clash with Rangers so that travelling supporters without tickets will be shut out. The worried Portuguese club are trying every trick in the book to give their side the advantage over the Ibrox men in their Uefa Cup quarter-final clash in the Jose Alvalade Stadium.

Thursday 10th April 2008

Uefa Cup Last Quarter Final Second Leg

Sporting Lisbon Vs Rangers

Andy Cumming

I'm fast running out of annual leave but look forward to our European adventure 2008 continuing for some time yet. We'd now have to produce yet another decent away performance if we wanted to progress to the semi final of the tournament.

Andrew Hunter

By this point I had taken my redundancy and decided not to relocate to London. We had taken the decision to use some of my severance pay to visit my Aunt in Boston, she had been diagnosed with cancer and it would give her the chance to see us and the kids. It was also my daughter's birthday, so we would visit Disneyworld for her birthday whilst there.

Of course the game was on during my daughter's birthday dinner in the crystal place in Disney world so I have this surreal experience of Winnie the pooh floating the tables as I am refreshing my phone to see the match updates via a text commentary (that cost me a fortune, but worth it) My American cousins and parents were with me and I had already explained in some detail the importance of this match.

Andy Cumming

The club took the unusual step of buying match tickets for all of our travelling support as a gesture of thanks for following them to so many away European matches already that season. Our support travelled to this match in healthy numbers but seemed to be spread out over the city during the day.

Gary Tedford

I started a new job on the Monday and had asked to get the Wednesday, Thursday and Friday off. My new employer would only give me the Thursday and Friday so I ended up having to fly from Dublin with Aer Lingus on the morning of the game. All my pals had gone the previous day.

Bruce McAuliffe

In the town centre we we're met by hundreds of Looky Looky men, selling everything from Fake Armani Sun Glasses and dodgy clothes to Hash, Cocaine and various other class A drugs. We spent the day in the square; there was a feeling that this was our year. Confident but not over confident.

Kenneth White

I drove home from work and stopped at the shop to get some beer for the 2nd leg of the tie against Lisbon that night. All my superstitious tendencies came to the fore. 'I've just jinxed us by taking those tickets; we'll never get there now'. Football fans and reason. Like oil and water.

Robert McQueen

I settled in at my home to watch the game in Lisbon on TV. I was sick I wasn't there. The cameras panned the crowd and the guys I sit beside were there in full party mood.

Andy Cumming

Some of the home side's fans displayed impressive banners and the most eye-catching of all was a "Real Lions of Lisbon" one.

Robert McQueen

The real business began and I can vividly remember the first 5 minutes of play and thinking, whoaw, we are up for this. We played some magnificent football that night.

Del McDuff

Earlier in day I stuck £2 on JCD 1-0 & £3 on JCD 2-0, odds of 200 & 300/1 respectively.

Andy Cumming

Darcheville should have scored after three minutes. Sporting's best chance of the first half saw them strike the post but we were defending superbly as had been the case in the vast majority of our European games during the campaign. The hosts started the second half strongly but Rangers held firm and took the lead with a great counter attacking goal finished by Darcheville after being set up by Steven Davis.

Gary Tedford

We went ballistic when JCD scored the first; I kept thinking to myself they wouldn't score two past Greegs.

Stephen Macleod

When a goal comes you cannot sustain that placidness. A goal for your team makes you more of a nervous jibbering wreck than one against your team. We had something to hang onto and we were doing it well. Our approach was now evident for all to see. Doing your business away from home is more valuable than doing it at home.

Andrew Hunter

When I got a text from my mate saying we had scored, I was almost hugging Winnie the Pooh by this point the texts are flying in from all my mates knowing I need updates being in America. I announce to the table that we are one nil up the table went mad hand slapping, hugs and then it was a nervous wait.

Andy Cumming

The home side threw everything and everyone at Rangers to try to equalise but our counter attacking play was always a threat, in the 2nd half. Cousin could have wrapped it up but Steven Whittaker soon did so...

Gary Tedford

I was shouting 'run to the corner, run to the corner'.

Steven Clifford

As Steven Whittaker danced through the middle of the park bearing down on goal, clamed up in my tiny flat we rose in unison roaring at the television, 'Pass, pass, pass the fucking ball!', showing tremendous composure he ignored our advice and calmly steered the ball home and we were in the Semi finals.

It was in that moment, just like McGregor's save in Bremen and Novo's strike in Greece, that I knew we were destined for Manchester and the Uefa cup final.

There was something about the whole run which somehow just filled me with the most unbelievable confidence in the team to do the job and send us to Manchester.

Robert McQueen

That Steven Whittaker goal will live long in the memory. This wasn't 'Anti-Football', this was Rangers going into Lisbon and proving we deserved to be in the last 4 of European competition.

Del McDuff

When Stevie Whittaker decided to win the ball, then go all Pele on us. Jings, I must have jumped 10 ft when that ball hit the net. A goal still to win the credit deserved. Oh and a goal that bumped my £200 up to £300. Not bad for a fiver stake. The Bears were now in the Semi Finals, as a famous man from Trinidad once said "Believe".

Andrew Hunter

The second goes in, delirium. I got conformation we were through and I was straight on to the phone to say rangers semi final of Europe we will never see

this again, book me and I will square you up, I trust you money no object if you need money I will pay lets be there.

Brian Carrick

I was a wee bit apprehensive with being up the back row with the riot police behind me but when we scored the second they all went away. A happy if wet return to the hotel and dreams of winning the cup.

Gary Scott McGregor

Everyone was ecstatic, could be go one better than Celtic in Seville and win the Uefa Cup?

Gary Tedford

Florence was booked before we left the game that night the wonders of Iphones!!

Jamie Steel

I have been away with Rangers since I was 14 and I am now 27, this was the most successful away game I have been to and I enjoyed every second of it. After the game we were kept in for an hour but we did not care, I think we sang the Carlos Cuellar song for that full hour solid.

Gary Tedford

I met the first team at the airport in Lisbon the next morning and had a chat with Lee McCulloch who was almost as delighted as I was. Packie Bonner was on our flight home. One of the guys told him 'thanks for making a wee boy very happy' when he threw that one in against the Dutch in the 1994 World Cup to be fair to him he took it in good spirits'.

Douglas Dickie

Our run had been bizarre to say the least. After Panathnikos, I merely commented that Walter Smith would be annoyed with another two games to get out of the way. I thought Bremen would be the end of it. I thought Lisbon would be the end of it, and I certainly thought Florence would be the end of it. By then I was openly celebrating 0-0 draws at home.

Who needs to attack when you had Davie Weir and Carlos Cuellar in defence? To this day I still maintain we could have been more defensive in that run. There weren't enough men behind the ball for my liking!

David Hamill

That was me I was on a high and still a couple of games to go, bye bye Sporting and I'm bouncing on the bed by this time, I am now being a pest to the Doctors, I tell them I must get out in time for the final. To a man/woman they tell me I should be out in time. This is all I think about while in the hospital, family tell me I'm nuts and my well being is more important. Aye right I say.

Steven Clifford

It is difficult to describe the emotions of that glorious run. The sense of overwhelming nerves but at the same time excitement and most of all absolute confidence in the team. Somehow I always sensed that we were destined to make it to Manchester and bring that trophy home, defeat on that run for me just never came into the equation

Stephen Macleod

I was losing grip on my calm and beginning to entertain thoughts of 'what if'....

My euro pals had been in Lisbon en masse and called me the next morning at work. "What a night, this is our season, we got the matchball, we're unstoppable, we're going to Manchester" Oh God, we could, but we might not, but what if we do, don't think about it, it'll break your heart.

My mind was racing. I couldn't work and chose instead to think up a little ditty that I honestly can lay claim to. Based on a rather annoying 5 year old song I made it so much more palatable (though I think the last line wasn't my original).

*"Tell all the tims you know,
We're Manchester bound and you're no,
We'll be having such fun,
In the Rovers Return,
While you're singing that Strachan must go"*

Andy Cumming

The draw for the semi final had already taken place at the same time as the quarter final draw and we were to face the winners of PSV Eindhoven v Fiorentina with Rangers at home first yet again.

Fiorentina prevailed by winning three one on aggregate and like Rangers had done so the hard way by winning two nil away from home thanks to two great goals from the dangerous Adrian Mutu.

Kenneth White

I could nearly see us sitting in the City of Manchester stadium. Only the mere formality of a game against Serie A Fiorentina to negotiate!

(3)

FLORENCE

“Stevie, something special is going to happen tonight”. I believed him.

STEPHEN MACLEOD

The Sunday Mirror, 20th April 2008

DONATI: IBROX MEN ARE SO DULL...

AND THEY WILL LOSE

Massimo Donati has launched a stinging attack on Rangers and backed Fiorentina to dump them out of the Uefa Cup.

Wednesday 24th April 2008

Uefa Cup Semi Final First Leg

Rangers Vs Fiorentina

Robert McQueen

The first leg saw us at home again. I followed my same routine. Leave work, few beers with my mate and onwards to the game. I remember walking down Paisley Road West and the sun was splitting the sky. It felt different this time. There was no darkness. A European game played in broad daylight. It was a new experience.

There was a real nervousness around Ibrox. It wasn't as vociferous as usual. It was as if even the crowd were over-awed by the situation we had found ourselves in. The game ended 0-0 and by this point, I had managed to convince myself that this was no bad result.

Douglas McIntosh

I remember coming away from the first leg against Fiorentina thinking "oh well, it's not to be – no way we will contain them over in Florence." But you always hope, you keep believing.

Rangers have always had that ability not only to build you up, but in the same breath knock you down again. It's like the old Simpson's line; "Aim low, aim so low that even if you succeed, no-one will notice!" I guess that's what we were doing after that game; my expectations were just to hold them to a 3 or 4 nil score line over there!

It went to show how wrong you can be though. The night of the game I arranged to go round to a mate's house (he is a Thistle fan, but I don't hold that

against him). His brother who has more sense is a bear, was there too, we were like cats on a hot tin roof.

Stephen Macleod

I admit I didn't know a great deal about their current team so it was hard to judge the balance of dreamland versus doom. But why worry, we had a plan, a strategy that could work against anyone. Wattynaccio. Choke them in the first leg, (yet again at home, isn't that meant to be a bad thing!) and kill them off in the second away leg. The first game left us none the wiser as to whether we could beat this team or not.

The Daily Record, 29th April 2008

WE'D NEVER LIVE IT DOWN IF WE LOST TO A TEAM FROM SCOTLAND

Argentine Mario Santana says Fiorentina are playing for the honour of Serie A against Rangers and dare not fail against a team from the SPL. The 26-year-old is convinced Scottish Football cannot hold a candle to the top flight in Italy and wants his team to prove this on the big stage.

Wednesday 1st May 2008

***Uefa Cup Semi Final Second Leg
Fiorentina Vs Rangers***

Del McDuff

Florence. Home of Dolmio and Big Amo.

David Hamil

My progress is looking good, then bang, an infection breaks out it in the hospital and I get caught, another chest infection and MRSA. The area gets sanitized and I am back on the intravenous antibiotics. My dream is shattered and I realize I will not make the final, we still have to beat Fiorentina and that looks unlikely after the 1st leg.

The 2nd leg arrives and we all sit down to watch the game, on a bit of a downer, but still shouting on the Rangers, by this time 2 more bluenose patients

are in attendance.

Nigel Patterson

It was my wedding anniversary that day and much preparation had to be done with the good lady.

My youngest son although excited about the prospect of possibly reaching the final was strangely muted compared to all of us, the reason was simple, if we won he would be unable to go to Manchester as he sat his English higher at 2.00pm the day after the final and his mother was having none of it.

When my mate John arrived he asked what was wrong with the boy, I told him the story and his eyes lit up before shouting the good lady through, the conversation went along the lines of '*so the wee man's not going to Manchester because of his exam*', yes she informed him emphatically, so if someone had to travel back after the match that night to Fort William he could go, maybe was the reply, John reminded us he was teacher and had to be back for the same exam, the wife agreed reluctantly & the wee man's whole persona just changed like flicking a switch.

Alan Spiden

We'd gone along that night to Craig and Maureen's house in Macmerry to watch the semi in hope rather than expectation and I don't think that any of the members of the Prestonpans Rangers Supporters Club could believe we'd got as far as we had, even a Euro semi final was something none of us thought we'd be witnessing just a few months before during the ill fated Paul Le Guen reign.

As we sat down to watch the match and the Jack Daniels started to disappear down my throat with alarming, but not unexpected speed, the nerves began to build and by the end of the game I was just about out on my feet as well as completely stocious.

Steven Clifford

I remember feeling no nerves, only excitement, and armed with a massive carry out we once again packed my tiny flat full as we cheered on the Rangers.

Andrew Hunter

What a night, my greatest night following Rangers. I was just delighted I could say I had seen Rangers in a European semi Final. I had never imagined

that would be something I could say, though I had no expectations of qualifications, this was for me just too big of an ask. How wrong was I?

Alan Wilson

The day of the semi-final away leg against Fiorentina in Florence was the day I was booked in for my vasectomy. I arrived at the hospital early doors, having heeded all the advice from guys that had been through it, “aye, it’s painless”. “it’s a breeze”, “I was back at ma work in the afternoon” and all that male bravado.

Well I had the operation, and it wasn’t too sore...then the anaesthetic wore off. I left the hospital to go home, to tell the truth I had been worrying more about that night’s game than getting the snip. As the day grew later and kick-off time approached I was faced with a dilemma, take painkillers and go through the whole nerve-wracking experience dry or get a wee carry-out to calm the tension.

I went with the lager option...

Stephen Macleod

I banned talk of the game at work, I simply couldn’t order my thoughts into an analysis of the footballing contest nor meaningful expression of my locked down emotions.

I declined the Boss’ offer of a bet on the game on the basis that he was on a long streak of wins and he wouldn’t let me put my betting curse on Fiorentina. I headed to the pub with a fellow Bear and a couple of English well wishers.

At the time there was no ‘Rangers venue’ in Reading or anywhere in Berkshire (there is now). So rather than watch it in one of the sports bars in town we headed to my suburban local pub. This place has always been Rangers friendly, after the landlady’s mother went out with a Rangers player called Minty Miller in the 1950s! ‘*I have the champagne ready Steve*’ said the barman. ‘*Okay, if we need it I’ll be in no fit state to order it*’. He understood.

About an hour before the game I took a call from a good friend who was in Italy. Alex Logan, travelled to all but one of our away games that season (Belgrade apparently has the best looking burds) and knew how to read a vibe like few others. ‘*Stevie, something special is going to happen tonight*’. I believed him.

Alistair & Ross Gourlay

Fiorentina then' my Dad says, 'fancy it?' I reply.

A couple of weeks later we were on the unofficial day trip with Deek and Wee Eddie, all ticket less (except Deek and his 10 Travel Club points) and not too much of a hope of getting one either.

The papers had been telling us that they would crack down on away fans in the home end, you need a passport to buy tickets and there will be no touts what so ever. So we were there to enjoy ourselves first and foremost.

Bruce MAuliffie

Fiorentina must be one of the best European trips I have ever been on. Flights on time, nice weather and met up with a lot of old friends but this was the 1st time I felt nervous during the campaign.

Robert McQueen

6 of us travelled down to Birmingham (Me, My Dad, My two Uncles, My mate and my Uncle's mate) all season ticket holders and lifelong bears. We boarded our flight to Pisa at 9am having driven through the night.

We arrived in Pisa and had a couple of hours wait for our bus through to Florence as we waited having a few beers in the airport the rumor spread through that the players had just arrived! We ran outside, and there they were, we caught the last few stragglers heading on the bus and got wee thumbs up from Walter and Ally who sat proudly in the front two seats.

Alistair & Ross Gourlay

The bus in from the airport was taking ages, midday on Mayday bank holiday, traffic was hoaching. Eventually some less patient Bears forced open the doors at the sight of a city-centre type area with a few bars around a grassed square. It only took 1 group to start then 3 busloads spilled onto the street looking to find some entertainment.

Andy Cumming

We arrived in good spirits and full of hope but the coach trips from the airport had eaten into the time available to us so rather than explore the historic city

many just headed for the many café bars dotted around. We bumped in to some locals, a couple of which had been to Glasgow for the first leg.

They explained that visiting fans are not normally made to feel welcome in Italy, it was part of their mentality and culture however they had been treated remarkably well in Scotland and that the word had been spread that we were to receive the same hospitality in return.

Gary Tedford

We flew from Dublin to Pisa. Had a few drinks there the night before the game and got the train through the following morning.

After some scrum in Florence we then headed to an English pub away from the main drag to watch Liverpool v Chelsea in the CL semi-final, the place became swamped with Aussie students. Still don't know why.

The twenty or so bears thought we would welcome them by singing 'Waltzing Matilda' but after a few verses this was promptly reworded to 'Walter and Ally, the Aussies loved it or at least I think they did!!!

Robert McQueen

We explored Florence that day in the glorious sunshine. We walked around whistling the 'Carlos Cuellar song' as it echoed down the narrow side streets. The people of Florence were the friendliest and hospitable I have encountered on a European Trip, I still plan to pay a visit there one day when I am not on Rangers duty.

Alistair & Ross Gourlay

A couple of mates had text me saying they were in Amoruso's restaurant with party tunes and were going to watch the game in a basketball arena not far off the ground. Not for us we decided, if we're here then we have to try for tickets.

After arriving and spending some time in the centre, we found a taxi and asked him to take us to the Stadio Artemio Franchi to try our luck and get a taste of the atmosphere. He took us the tourist route and showed us the cathedral and a few other sights on the way, 'That'll keep Ma pleased', Dad, Ross and I agreed on.

It was quite early and so we headed to the ticket office only to confirm our fears that we wouldn't be allowed to purchase home end tickets. We went for a

walk around the stadium where we were approached by a couple of touts offering tickets at €100 each now all we had to worry about was getting in.

The crowds began to build and all I can say is the Fiorentina fans were exceptional. A kilted man was getting all the attention from the Italians, excited to get their photo taken with him as the singing and chanting began.

I remember coming across this huge lad at the bar in his Fiorentina top and he stared me down. I thought the worst as he leant into me, only for him to shout "FUCK CELTC", so I replied as well I could with a big "FUCK JUVENTUS" the big guy smiled & shook my hand as the chants rang out 'Fuck Juve, Fuck Celtic.....

With everyone chanting that, a Fiorentina fan thought he would wind us up by wearing a green and white rag. He was booed by his own fans who ripped it off him leaving it in the gutter (where it belongs).

Robert McQueen

We were just a few hours away from the biggest match of our lives. The buses to the stadium left from just outside our Hostel. We all crammed in. The atmosphere on the bus was unbelievable. I still hear people talk about them to this day. I really don't know how the driver kept it on the road during the bouncy. We got to the stadium; swapped scarf's with the locals and sampled the atmosphere.

Andy Cumming

A fan zone had been set up and some basic food and cartons of water laid on free on charge which was a nice touch as a historical band marched up and down, dressed in colorful traditional outfits to provide some pre match entertainment.

Alistair & Ross Gourlay

The next test was getting into the ground. As match time approached we headed for the Fiorentina end (the end beside the goals adjacent to the Rangers fans) and the thrill (and fear) of trying to get in began to mount as Eddie who had gone up ahead was being turned away. Nightmare!

The 3 of us started to get nervous. All Italian fans were required to have their passport for entry into football stadium due to the recent hooligan troubles and of course ours would give the game away to start with so when it came to the

steward, wearing Fiorentina scarves that we had swapped with the Italian fans we faked (a rather pathetic) American accent and pretended to just be tourists wishing to take in the game.

Fortunately it worked and we were in. As we reached our seat, the idea was to be low key, however my brother (a little worse for wear) began speaking to the locals (a fine lady in particular) and she cottoned on immediately who we were but didn't seem to mind.

Andy Cumming

We were soon inside our rather bizarre enclosure at one corner of the stadium. We were surrounded by huge transparent plastic fencing. The home fans were another noisy bunch and they held up thousands of violet and white chequered flags as the teams came out.

Alistair & Ross Gourlay

We noticed to the right of us a small crowd of Gers fans gathering and so we upped and stood beside them, we even managed to find Wee Eddie who used the crafty technique of trying the next steward over. Despite being a small band of Gers fans in the home end, we partied and sang and celebrated as loud as any other bear in the ground that night.

Robert McQueen

The atmosphere was electric and the Fiorentina fans were much better than the 80'000 odd we had encountered in the Nou Camp earlier that year.

Andy Cumming

The Rangers fans also made a right din and the usual array of flags and banners were on display and the array of color on display within the stadium added to the spectacle. The game started and from the off the home side looked dangerous and retained the ball well. Rangers, who were wearing their white away shirts, were wasteful in possession early on and someone comment that we were playing brilliant one touch stuff. One touch and Fiorentina had the ball again!

Robert McQueen

There was real sense of occasion before the game but after the initial 5 minutes, it became like any other game and we were just determined to give the players our backing.

Andrew Hunter

It was the most never wracking, stressful night I have ever had watching football. As the game went on it got worse as the possibility of us prevailing increased. Not helped by my mates who after 60 minutes were convinced it was going to be our night, I was certain the confidence would backfire, so glad I was wrong.

Kenneth White

I watched the 2nd leg of the semi final alone in the house. My wife Mairead was working. I had an offer to go to my local pub in Co Meath to watch it, but to be honest I couldn't have taken the stick if we had lost.

This was my chance to see Rangers qualify for a European Final, and sitting as the lone Bear in my local didn't appeal to me. Phone off. Beer opened. I sat and endured the most nerve wracking 120 minutes of my life, bar none.

The dog was getting very agitated, poor Jake thought I was shouting at him. Jake had become something of a lucky mascot since we got him from the local dog pound the night we knocked out Werder Bremen. Every time he was in the living room, we seemed to do well so he was staying, agitated or not. Football fans and reason?

Cousin off. 'Fucking Idiot!' I screamed at the TV

David Wilkinson

When Daniel Cousin was sent off my heart sank and I thought that's it they will score now, but as we had done so many times that season we managed to hold out with some heroic defending.

Douglas McIntosh

Wave after wave of attacks came from the 'Viola' hoards! Still we repelled them, still we held them off, working hard for each other, fighting for each other (Cousin taking it a bit too far) and knowing that while the tie was all square, there was a chance, just a chance that we could do something.

Then I remember Steven Whittaker hitting a curler and it was arrowing for the top corner.

Steven Clifford

We all rose to cheer the goal but Frey somehow turned it away and we were denied that crucial away goal, but while Christian Vieri & the Italians proceeded to waste glorious chance after chance, it seemed destiny was only ever going to be denied temporarily.

Douglas McIntosh

In the moments after though, you could see in the faces of the ‘Gigliati’ that they were actually worried about getting through the tie. They must have been thinking “What do we need to do to win this game – who are these upstarts but we were a team, a team in the truest sense of the word.

Stephen Macleod

The game was tense we were thwarting them, yet seemed too timid to ask any questions of them. 90 goalless minutes were followed by 30 minutes of me asking all and sundry if away goals still counted double. I think that even if Sepp Blatter had given me an answer I still wouldn’t have believed him. The answer proved irrelevant. In fact I’m not sure I know the answer to this day.

Steven Clifford

The shrill peep of the referee’s whistle and penalty’s had arrived and with that shrill peep, my arse also well and truly collapsed!

Douglas McIntosh

Thinking back now, the game seemed to go in a bit of a flash. One minute I remember us kicking off the second half, the next I remember begging the ref to blow for full time in Extra Time then I remember feeling physically sick as the whistle blew for penalties. This was it. It had all boiled down to this.

The dreaded penalty shootout.

You want to be confident that your team has the metal, that your team has the inner strength to pull it off. In reality, it's just a lottery. That thought kept going through my head as we got ready for the penalties. Rangers were shooting into the goals closest to us...

Stephen Macleod

This was a toss of the coin, black or white, do or die. What a cruel situation. All that hope, effort, anxiety and day dreaming and we were only a paltry 50% of the way there. Apparently they lasted six and a half minutes but if I confess they are a real blur.

Steven Clifford

All talk of composure went right out the window and I paced the living room as Fergie prepared for the first kick...

Robert McQueen

Fergie, our captain, surely no mistake. C'Mon!.
I looked away, I couldn't watch, then massive roar.

He'd missed it.

Andrew Hunter

I thought At least Barry will get us off to a good start, given some of the penalty takers behind him, when he missed I said to my mates, that's it.

Gary Tedford

Same old Rangers.

Douglas McIntosh

I stood for the whole shootout. But I remember screaming (actually proper screaming like a girl) when Fergie missed.

Stephen MacLeod

“Ah don’t worry, lots of teams who miss the first penalty go on to win”, possibly the last coherent sentence I blurted out that night

Steven Clifford

Fiorentina suddenly led by 1 goal to nil having converted their spot kick. At was at this moment that my wife suddenly said to me ‘What is Cammy doing?’ Cammy was my football and life long mate, positioned next to me in Ibrox in our season ticket seats, he had lived every moment of our Uefa cup run and many other Rangers matches during our 10 years traveling Europe to watch our club.

Cammy had turned on the laptop computer and was surfing the internet apparently untoward to what was happening in Florence. When asked what he was doing he replied simply ‘I am booking our flights to Manchester’. Calm as you like and with no fear he seemed ultra confident...we were 1 nil down!

Kenneth White

I’ve since watched that shoot out many many times, and the exact same feelings come rushing back:

Ferguson up first...Saved.

No way, this can’t be happening. Not this close. Fiorentina easily slot home their next 2.

The mere sight of Sasa Papac up at the penalty spot nearly tipped me over the edge.

Robert McQueen

Whittaker, Hemdani and Papac, Each one was greeted with a sigh of "aw no him", but credit to them. They had the heart to step up.

Kenneth White

Cool as the proverbial, he strokes it home. Never doubted you Sasa. Alexander then saved from Liverani to puts us right back in it! Hemdani slots home and then Christian Vieri lumbers up to the plate.

No offence meant to lumberers, but he was an absolute shadow of the world class striker I remember. I have never been so certain of a player missing a penalty in my life.

He just looked..... *wrong*.

Robert McQueen

Vieiri had to score...he's blazed it over!!!

Andrew Hunter

When Vieri missed, we went totally tonto; it seemed like the longest wait ever for the deciding penalty, I do not think I have willed a penalty as hard as I have willed the next one in.

Robert McQueen

The bears were in a daze, many were unsure and there was much confusion before we had worked out for definite, if we score we are through to UEFA Cup Final. We were looking to see who was taking it.

Kenneth White

I was frantically trying to do the numbers. Adrenalin pumping, I actually thought I was going to pass out. I hunched down and put my head in my hands.

Del McDuff

It came down as it always does, to one man having balls bigger than the entire stadium, we needed a match winner to reach the Holy Grail, step forward....SUPER NACHO NOVO.

I think that's the 1st time in my entire Rangers life I couldn't watch a penalty. In fact it still gives me the jitters even now, will he score won't he score?

Stephen Macleod

Perhaps I retreated into my own world for a while but following Vieri's miss I was a man with a message for all. *'If he scores we're through, if he scores we're through....* (Repeat).

Bryan Polland

The penalty shoot-out was probably the most nerve-wracking few minutes of my life and when wee Nacho stepped up my heart felt like it would bounce right out of my chest,

Dougie Dickie

It didn't seem possible that it had come to this. Ten months on from the night I dragged myself to Ibrox to watch the Rangers take on a team of unknowns from a country whose name now escapes me; we were just one kick away.

One kick from glory, one kick from Manchester.

It seemed fitting that it was Wee Novo had been given the responsibility. In our drunken haze following the Crvena Zvezda game that saw the Rangers qualify for the Champions League group stages, myself and several friends had hailed him the "£10 million man". Now he had the chance to be the immortal man, the man who sent Rangers to their first European final in 36 years.

Alan Wilson

The drink was flowing and the nerves were even more shattered by the time it came round to Nacho, it was beyond belief. Here we were one kick away from a European final. I never thought I would ever see this in my lifetime, but we were now in position.

Stuart Cooper

1066 miles away in Larkhall, I stood shoulder to shoulder with my dad watching events unfold on TV.

I can't remember ever wanting anything more than for that penalty to hit the net. And I knew my dad was thinking the same. I had never seen him so nervous but, after 120 nerve-shredding minutes watching Rangers repel attack after attack from the Italians that was understandable.

Indeed, the nerves had got to him so much that, when Christian Vieri blazed Fiorentina's fourth penalty over the bar, he grabbed me and hugged me, screaming almost as wildly as Vieri's effort. He thought we were through! I had

to explain to a man who has played football all his life, that we still needed one more.

The camera showed Novo taking his last few steps back to steady himself for the run up, my dad's grip on me tightened. I couldn't look. I looked to the left of the T.V. I realised I couldn't miss what could be an historic moment. I returned my gaze to the T.V just in time.

Douglas McIntosh

Nacho could put us into the final. I was shaking.....I couldn't watch....no I could....no I couldn't. Oh get hold of yourself...just watch the thing.

Kenneth White

'Christ, if Nacho scores we're there!'

Robert McQueen

It had to be wee Nacho. There were no mutters of "aw naw no him" this time. He placed the ball on the spot. Has to replace it. Couple of steps back. Deep Breath. For Manchester. This is it.

Bruce MAuliffie

I remember clasping my hands and praying he would score. It was like slow motion ...

Kenneth White

I looked up just as Nacho started his run up, and stood up in anticipation.

Peter Dury ITV 4 Commentary Team

Manchester, brace yourself...

RANGERS ARE COMING!!!

Scotland will have its big night aswell.

The Scots are heading for Manchester and you know what Manchester may not be big enough.

They won't need visas, they won't need passports but the battle for tickets starts now.

Brace yourself Manchester, they are on the way.

***Walter Smith has guided them to their fourth major European Final.
In track of their second major European trophy and 5 years after Celtic
swamped Seville...Rangers will maraud all over Manchester.***

Douglas McIntosh

We had done it....actually done it! We were in the final.....I remember shouting and screaming for around 30-40 seconds.....just standing there screaming!

George MacDonald

The better half came in and told me to be quiet as she'd just gotten our new born daughter to sleep so when Novo put in that magical penalty I'm sure she was ready to throw me out.

Alan Spiden

Nacho ran to the Bears in the corner of the stadium and I roared myself hoarse, jumped 6 foot in the air, experienced the worst, and best, head rush of my life, buried my head in my mates sofa and started bawling like a wean.

Andy Cumming

The players and management team were going mental and that was matched by the Bears in the ground. Grown men reduced to tears, strangers hugging and some people jumping about mad and just looking bewildered.

Bruce MAuliffie

Total bedlam!!! People screaming, falling, dancing, cheering and crying!! I have never seen so many people cry (myself included) at a football game.

Kenneth White

The dictionary definition of the word 'frenzied' is *wildly excited or out of control. Characterised by uncontrolled activity, agitation or emotion.* Frenzied is therefore the perfect description of the 5 minutes of my life after Nacho Novo's penalty hit the back of Sebastian Frey's net.

I can remember running in circles around the coffee table, lying on the couch face down screaming, hugging the dog who had been forced to go through the emotional wringer with me, and being on my knees in front of the TV crying tears of joy.

Connecting those moments is something I doubt I'll ever be able to do. If there was a sporting heaven I was there for those 5 minutes.

Mick Bradley

All remnants of the sciatica forgotten as I, along with the whole pub kissed & hugged, fell over tables, hugged some more, spilled drinks over other punters, hugged again & we were on our way to Manchester. As with most Rangers fans, excited phone calls were being made & received all night long, & I was no exception.

Bryan Polland

Watching the game in the Sergeants' Mess and I was the only Rangers fan there. I had sat with my laptop beside me all night as I found a site selling tickets for the final at £350 each. I decided that if we went through I was going no matter how much it cost me, my mate also wanted a ticket so I added two tickets to my basket with my fingers at the ready to press commit. When he slotted it away I simultaneously hit commit on my laptop and ran around the Mess bar like a school kid shouting and screaming my head off, all the English boys thought I was insane.

Raymond Gordon

8 weeks earlier my partner and mother of my 3 kids suddenly passed away. Still in shock the first time we all smiled was when Nacho scored that penalty to book us a spot in the final, we hugged, we danced and it pulled us all closer together.

Chris Thorburn

I never for a moment thought we'd get to the final. There I was sitting in a board room in Auckland, NZ, watching the semi in disbelief as Novo stroked the ball home. There were around 20 others workers in an open plan office but I just couldn't contain my delight as I jumped around in celebration.

Jamie Peters

I believe I was one of few, if not the only Ranger to watch the ball hit the back of the net that night in Florence whilst in Santa Marta, Colombia. Despite that fact I think every fan around the world was connected in that literally indescribable feeling of celebration.

Watching on ESPN as the commentator and his co-commentator, Mario Kempes, rounded up what must have been a fairly mundane semi-final for them, my emotions were the polar opposite of theirs. I had achieved the impossible whilst celebrating that penalty from our little Spaniard: sounding more excited than a South American football commentator.

Stephen Macleod

That eruption of noise, excitement and complete and utter disbelief had me flat on the floor of the Clifton Arms in Reading. While others cheered, I screamed. This was delirium to the max, and the max cannot be bettered by anything conceivable whether a lottery win, world peace or the come on from Heather Graham. Jumping, hugging, punching the air, and laughing to the point you don't know if its sweat or tears on your face but something colossal had happened. The champagne was duly delivered and quaffed. The Rangers were in a European final. And I wasn't missing it for the world.

Gary Tedford

We went wild. The guy behind me started shouting 'they've still one more to take, they've still one more to take' – priceless. Didn't even have a beer after the game – was emotionally drained. Drank champagne the whole way back to Dublin the next morning – had to keep pinching myself to make sure I hadn't died and gone to heaven.

Andrew Hunter

I was in tears as I thought of the people who were not here who would have loved to have experienced this, my Grandfather who introduced me to the Rangers and took me to so many games. My mate's brother who passed prematurely, It was brilliant that I shared this trip with my best mates John and Kenny who I had undertaken my first euro trip with many years previously.

Robert McQueen

Pandemonium. I was in floods of tears. At that moment in time it is hard to put your emotions into words. Personally it was the best moment of my life so far.

Others put it up there with the birth of their children. A lot of things went through my head in those moments of celebration. I thought I was so lucky to be there with My Dad and My 2 Uncles. I shared moments with my dad that night that nobody could ever take away from me.

It was he who had brought the Rangers to all 3 of us who were there that night. He instilled his love for the club in all of us and I will be eternally grateful to him for that. I thought about my Mum back home, celebrating. I knew like me she would be in tears somewhere it was extremely emotional, it was extremely joyous.

Alan Spiden

Once I'd managed to prise my head from between the cushions, all I could think of was the stories of Barcelona '72 that I'd been brought up on and here was MY Rangers team going to a European final. Emotions ran through my head one after the other, joy, panic (will I get a ticket?), but most of all, complete and utter pride As I celebrated with another "cheeky Vimto" I finally began to relax and enjoy the knowledge that we were on our way to Manchester.

Stuart Cooper

Me and my dad turned to each other, hugging each other like never before, screaming who knows what at each other. My legs lifted off the ground and the tears began to come. We were going to Manchester to the UEFA Cup Final. After years of throwing good money after bad in pursuit of European success we had achieved it when we expected it least, with a team, cobbled together by Walter Smith, whose sum was by far more valuable than its parts.

Finally, me and my dad let each other go and I started dancing about his living room singing some hastily made-up, tuneless song about sticking Seville where the sun doesn't shine. It was a terrible song but I didn't care. I was in shock, shaking like a leaf. My dad handed me a can of lager, which I had consistently declined during the game due to not being able to drink it because of my nerves, and we toasted the Rangers.

By this time I had more texts and missed calls than ever before and I realized just what this meant to everyone. Being Larkhall, there were fireworks going off and car-horns making lots of noise outside. God knows what you must have thought if you had work the next day and football meant nothing to you.

By this time my brother and some of his friends had come round from the house where they watched the game and a hastily arranged Thursday night party began. After some time, my dad pulled me aside, and said that the best thing about the whole night was that he had watched the game with me. That meant almost as much to me as Novo's penalty. Almost but not quite!

David Wilkinson

To this day I have still never seen the penalty kicks that took us to Manchester. That night I sat in the kitchen of my friend's house and just listened to the cheers and groans of my mates in the living room. The feeling when Nacho scored the winning penalty was unreal I sank to my knees and burst out crying I honestly couldn't believe that we had done it, we were in the Final of a European competition in my life time! The party that night went on long into the night; let's just say that I was a tiny bit rough for work on the Friday morning.

Andy Cumming

The occasion had got to many Bears, Jim Wade who's followed Rangers for around forty years and has traveled abroad since the game v FC Köln in the 70s, reckons Florence was his proudest moment as a Rangers supporter and he's had many wonderful moments such as nine in a row, helicopter Sunday and seeing a good few trebles being won, still he isn't ashamed to admit the tears were flowing on that memorable evening in Italy.

Dougie Dickie

Mere words on a page can hardly do it justice. There was a lot of shouting, hugging, running into the street, phoning now ex-girlfriends screaming: "we're going to Manchester, we're going to Manchester." You know the size of the achievement when even she, so often openly hostile to my devotion, seemed genuinely pleased for me.

Jumping in a taxi, the driver seemed a little less enthused when I told him to "take us to Manchester," before opting for Glasgow City Centre instead.

Robert McTeer

In a jam packed Glaswegian pub (now sadly and ludicrously shut down) the joy when Novo slotted home that penalty was up there with any feelings of ecstasy I've felt in my 25 years supporting Rangers. Eclipsing even Scott McDonald's goal for Motherwell that clinched us the title in such dramatic fashion.

I partied the night away with fellow bears still not quite believing that we had done it and awoke the following morning groggy and generally worse for wear. The illness lasted a mere few seconds before the realization again flooded back that we had done it, we were going to a European final at long last in my time supporting the bears.

Steven Hogg

After I had cheered and screamed and ran about the house like a madman, even kissed the wife and the dug, the dug and the wife again and again, I headed down the pub with my Rangers top on. Now that may not be a big thing where most people live, but I happen to live in the ROI!

I sat in the pub smiling, drinking, and with phone continually ringing with calling friends from back home, shouting down the phone. They were singing songs, chanting, shouting...it was mental, and my thoughts turned to how I was going to get to Manchester. No actions to be taken now however, because this was celebration time.

Drink followed drink, and phone call followed phone call, as every Bear I knew wanted to share in the glow of the moment. The Irish barmen were even congratulating me on Rangers' great achievement

Douglas McIntosh

Never in my lifetime did I think we would be in a European final. Sure in 92/93 we effectively played in a semi-final in the Champions League, but it wasn't the same. This was it. We were in a proper European final. An actual, real European final! I started to text and phone everyone I knew – I called my brother and all I could hear was screaming! I called my mate Gary, he just screamed down the phone. All the emotions, it was bazaar. Nothing like that feeling had come close in my 25 years or so since I went to my first game at Ibrox.

Bruce MAuliffie

The players and staff came over to us and I was overcome with pride and emotion. The atmosphere leaving the ground, in the buses to the airport and on the plane home was incredible.

Craig R Morton

It was just an instant realisation that something big just happened. We all agreed that we just HAD to be in Manchester that day.

Robert McQueen

My thoughts hadn't even turned to Manchester yet. I was just in the moment. We went from the back of the stand down to the front to party with players from behind the big glass screen. As I stood down the bottom of the stand and looked back up towards the support, you just saw a large outpouring of emotion from everybody. It was a special moment.

We walked out of the stadium that night absolutely drained. Physically and emotionally. We headed for the buses to take us back into the town centre. We thought the atmosphere on them on the way in was something special, on the way back....deary me!

It turned out that the four of us had been spotted on the TV celebrating after the penalty. Full screen, clear as day. It topped it all off for us. It means that forever more, when we watch that penalty from wee Nacho we will be able to look back and have conclusive proof 'That we were there!' That will definitely be a video to show the grandkids.

Robert Hastie

That night in Fiorentina was just unbelievable, up there as probably one of the best nights for me being a bear along with Helicopter Sunday.

From the Spirit of the team to the passion of the fans it was unrivalled. One minute I was jumping about with a few thousand mad looking baldy nutcases doing the bouncy then the next everybody was crying and kissing each other when wee Nacho stuck that sweet, sweet penalty away.

But it was the bus back that was rather funny and you could see just how ecstatic and delirious our fans were when we were all on the Buses, waiting to get took to where ever we were going. There must of been about 15 other buses in my eye view and every single one of them looked as though they were going to tip over for the amount of Bears still bouncing on the bus. It was a bit of a

surreal sight seeing fifteen big buses literally bouncing at the same time but magical in its own way all the same.

So I have no shame in saying to this day that's one of the best nights of my life. Thank you Walter Smith, Thank you Super Ally, Muchos Gracias Nacho! W.A.T.P

Andrew Hunter

We eventually left the ground and having a 2 hour wait to get our train (which left from a station a couple of minutes from the ground) we decided to hit to a local pub. I walked in first (bear in mind we are all as high as kites, decked in Rangers scarves and huge grins I reckon the positive endorphins wore off weeks later).....wall to wall Fiorentina fans.

It seemed like the whole pub stopped to watch us. I walked in and ordered and while at the bar this boy comes marching over, he could have been going anywhere but I knew he was coming over to us, I braced myself (in my head I am thinking, how could my greatest night watching Rangers be about to go so horribly wrong).

The boy extends his hand and says congratulations and best of luck in the final – I thank him and respond forza Fiorentina, I give him a Rangers badge and we go to sit down, we are hyper but still trying to hold it in, to their credit many of the Fiorentina fans made a point of coming up and shaking our hands as they left, I really appreciated that as they must have been gutted. I doubt I could have been so magnanimous.

As I understand it this gesture was matched by the players who I believe stood to applaud rangers up the tunnel, a wonderful club fans and a team I will always wish them the very best.

Andy Cumming

I've got to mention that the beaten Italians formed a guard of honour as the Rangers players left the field, a wonderful act of sportsmanship as they must have been gutted. We were heading to Manchester for a European Final the first in many of those present's life time and something many of us never thought we'd live to see. Perhaps it would also put the stories of Seville and the two billion people that traveled there to bed once and for all?

Alistair & Ross Gourlay

Again the Fiorentina fans were gracious in defeat and clapped us as they left. I honestly can't praise them highly enough. Due to the extra time, the airport we were flying home from had stayed open just for us, the media and the Rangers team, I don't think I'll ever be through an airport as quick as that night, it took literally as long as the walking time between the front door and the plane. I remember when landing back in Glasgow, the bears and media had turned up in numbers to greet home the Rangers players (who were just coming behind us) it made us feel like celebrity's as the customs officer smiled and gave us a "well done lads" it all added to that night in Florence being one of the greatest nights of my life.

Andrew Hunter

Our train journey flew by – bologna was surreal as hundreds of Rangers fans had based there and they got off the train still singing – the rangers tunes seemed to resonate thought the train station for hours. We did not sleep on the way back to Milan – we were just too excited and spent the whole trip reliving the game, the celebrations and looking ahead to the final.

Alan Wilson

I don't know what noise a ripped scrotum makes because I never heard it pop in the celebrations. All that night it was drinking, phoning, laughing and crying, just amazing. I got to bed around 3am and slept like a log. With the alcohol, the adrenalin rush, the whole evening actually I was feeling no pain. Vasectomy? Ha! Nothing to it, the guys were right. Then I woke up. I was in excruciating pain and ended up off work for a week.

Was it worth it? You bet your life it was!

(4)

TICKET!

After all the hysteria, it sunk in...Ticket!!!

STEVEN CHALMERS

The tickets for the final would be divided as follows; 13,000 per club (later adjusted to 17,000 for Rangers and 9,000 for Zenit due to the Russians not taking up all their allocation). 11,000 went on general sale to fans worldwide via UEFA's ballot on Valentine's Day 2008. 7,000 went to the corporate side of things with finally around 4,000 going to sponsors.

The most basic seats that retailed for £35, £55, £75 and £95 we're changing hands on websites for around £881 a time, with deluxe hospitality tickets retailing at a jaw-dropping £1,562.50.

People easily got round eBay's ban on selling tickets by simply auctioning Rangers items which just so happened to have free match tickets included in the deal.

Rangers announced that everyone who had joined the travel club at the start of the season would be getting a ticket. It was then announced that season ticket holders on the continuous credit card scheme would be balloted for the rest. All remaining season ticket holders and those under sixteen would not be eligible to be included in the ballot.

The Guardian, 11th May 2008

TOUTS SCORE £10M OFF FINALS FANS

Ticket touts will make more than £10m in the next week by cashing in on the success of Britain's football teams in Europe and at home. With Glasgow Rangers set to take on Russia's Zenit St Petersburg in the Uefa Cup final on Wednesday and Chelsea playing Manchester United on 21 May in the Champions League final, sellers are offering tickets for up to 2,000 per cent above their face value.

Ross Marshall

During the lead up to Christmas 2007 I was in the house having a few beers, the Gers were still in the Champion's league at this time and I was on the UEFA web site when I noticed the UEFA cup final was in Manchester in May 2008, so I called my mate and said "fancy Manchester for UEFA cup final?" Of course he did.

As the Gers got eliminated from Champion's league they entered the UEFA cup, 3rd round. I'm a superstitious football man and watched every game of that run from the same seat in my flat, consuming three cans a lager each game (I still don't know why only 3). When Novo stuck it away, my girlfriend came through to see what the noise was as I was on my knees in tears of joy clutching my third empty can of beer (which was finished around the 60 minute mark but no way would I open a fourth).

Then it suddenly dawned on me, I have a ticket. This never even entered my head throughout the whole run, fate or what, bought a ticket to my first ever European final when my beloved Gers were not even in the same competition!!!

On a side-note my mate never even made the final, he got sent to Pakistani for two weeks to train people in a call centre (the first time he has ever been asked to do this for his work), I was gutted for him, but he was good enough to give the ticket to my cousin, he could have got £2 grand for that ticket but he refused....I had been to a lot of big games with my cousin over the years, so maybe this was fate again?...

Murdo Euan MacLennan

I entered the Official Uefa Ballot for a Uefa Cup Final ticket in January 2008, which was to be drawn in mid April. I still have the confirmation email when they announced the draw and I had a Uefa Cup Final ticket for Manchester – now all I needed was for Rangers to get there, and they did.

You see The Isle of Lewis is a massive Rangers supporting area. Every man and their dog support the Rangers. My sister kept telling me in the days leading up to Manchester that my old man was very proud of the fact that his son was going to the game. Infact they had workmen in the house at the time and my old man took great pleasure in telling them I had one.

Kenneth White

It was the 10th April 2008. I was sitting in work as usual talking about all things football when a workmate mentioned he had secured tickets for the UEFA Cup Final in Manchester through the UEFA ballot, but wasn't going to use them. He asked if I would be interested, as Rangers were still in the competition. Playing it cool, but nearly bursting inside, I replied 'Aye, I suppose so. How much you wanting for them?' 'Just what I paid for them' he said. 'Fair enough' I managed to squeeze out before running out the door and phoning my pal and

shout down the phone ‘Guess who’s got two tickets for the final!!’ He didn’t need to ask which final because even at this stage the dreaming had started.

True to his word, my workmate gave me the tickets for face value, and even in the face of much provocation from others, didn’t ask for another cent despite the money he could have made by selling the tickets elsewhere. Legend!

Craig Kirkwood

After jumping about like loonies for about 10 minutes after Novos goal, my dad runs upstairs, and when he comes back down he has 2 tickets in his hand. I looked at him in disbelief. He had 2 tickets for the final in Manchester!!

My 15th birthday was coming up on the 29th May and as the final was in Manchester on 14th May, he had decided back in February that it would be a perfect birthday gift for us to go the UEFA Cup final.

He had sent an application in via the UEFA website and by the beginning of March he knew that the tickets were ours. All the rest of the family knew about it but they hadn’t told me so that it would be a surprise nearer the time.

The hotel room was all booked and dad had even contacted Man Utd about doing a stadium tour of Old Trafford on the morning of the game. Everything was already organised and planned out for our trip to the final in Manchester and it seemed like fate that Rangers had got there.

There was just one snag. My 12 year old brother David didn’t have a ticket.

Andy Cumming

The day after Florence the deluge of phone calls, emails, private messages and texts began for thousands of us and didn’t stop until the big day. People that you had not spoken to in years would call you out the blue to enquire about tickets and these were to eventually prove to be like gold dust.

Christine Sommerville

I was concerned when I read that the capacity of the City of Manchester Stadium was only around 48,000 but I thought about the contacts I had and that I had had a season ticket since 1974 and thought that I’d be able to get a ticket. As time went on though, I became increasingly worried.

Douglas McIntosh

The next day I remember trying to phone Rangers to find out if we would be

likely to get a ticket for the final. No information yet as the allocation was not finalised. Follow Follow was full of rumours that only people in the travel club with 2 or more points would get a ticket! This worried me as we all only had one point following our first 'official' away trip to Barcelona. We were in a panic.

Steven Hogg

I had told the wife there would be no discussion on the subject...that I'd be going. I needn't have worried on that score anyway, as even though she is Irish, she knew what The Rangers meant, and no argument was to come from her, actually, she told me I was to go.

Almost immediately adverts were placed, people were phoned, every web site / newspaper scoured in the hope of someone selling tickets.

As I live in the ROI, I kind of thought I may have a better fighting chance of getting tickets as opposed to those living in Scotland, and as it turned out I was proved correct. I had asked workmates to keep a lookout, but every lead we got for tickets quickly evaporated as everyone was snapping them up.

Jordan Dallas

I had forgot to send my travel club form in before the beginning of the season and I was therefore up against it for a ticket, my phone was red hot with texts and phone calls, congratulations being offered, travel plans being talked about. The real challenge was getting hold of tickets now. Phone calls were made but to no avail.

Craig Kirkwood

We're all season ticket holders but that didn't guarantee a ticket and over the next few days we discovered that unless you were in the travel club or on the continuous credit scheme then you wouldn't be getting one.

As the days leading up to the big day counted down we started to realise that getting another ticket was virtually impossible.

Alistair Gourlay

I met a guy in the lift of my flat. We got talking about the football and he mentioned the search for tickets, I told him I should be fine, I'm a season ticket holder and not missed a domestic away game this season. Even if I didn't get a ticket then I should be able to find one.

I soon found out no amount of connections were going to help me. So as Rangers put out all these tickets and it seemed every season ticket holder apart from me got one, I had resigned to going along to Manchester ticketless.

Andrew Hunter

I have to say this was without a doubt the hardest game I have experienced for tickets, normally I could rustle up a few but on this occasion it seemed most people I knew were struggling to cover themselves.

Complete strangers would ask you, you going to Manchester? How you getting there? You got a ticket? What options do you have for getting tickets?

Robert McTeer

The grin on my face was quickly wiped off with the realization that I may not get a ticket started to hit home. I wasn't a member of the travel club so that was out the window. My only hope of obtaining a ticket through official channels was that as a member of the Lefroy Loyal, RSC's may get an allocation of tickets and I might be lucky enough to have enough points to secure one. So like everyone else I imagine, I logged on to the various Rangers forums to see how exactly the tickets would be distributed.

What followed of course was complete bedlam, everyone having different opinions on how the official allocation could be fairly spread out. In the end, those on the continuous credit card scheme shouted loudest and got their way. That spelled disaster for me as I didn't have a credit card so obviously wasn't on the CCCS. The hunt for a ticket on the black market started...

Fraser Munroe

So that was it, the race for tickets was on and I know this is where it gets a bit 'heated' with some fans views. It was obvious that the City of Manchester Stadium was not going to cope with the demand for tickets and there were going to be a lot of people who fail in their search for the treasured briefs for the game!

So who should get tickets? Season ticket holders, people who travelled to all the previous rounds? Me and my family don't fall into any of these two categories and living in Portugal didn't make me any less of a fan, so was I going to let that stop me trying? No chance! So how do you start looking for tickets when so few will be knocking about?

Dougie Dickie

Some had already bought tickets months ago - obviously they were a lot more confident than me that we would get there. I didn't even take the time off work until after Fiorentina, limiting myself to a curt "if Rangers get to the final, I'll not be in." To his credit, my Aberdeen-supporting boss said he would keep that week free from holidays.

Rangers made announcements, ballots came and went and nothing, not a word. Folk spoke of paying extraordinary amounts on Ebay for tickets, but quite frankly my wallet wouldn't stretch that far. I knew I was going to Manchester - that wasn't up for debate. The only thing I didn't know was where I would be watching the game.

My dad didn't have a ticket, (he didn't care he's always the most nervous man in the ground, one would probably have been wasted on him) and it wasn't looking good for me ticketwise either.

Christine Sommerville

I knew that Rangers were doing a ballot for tickets but I heard nothing. A couple of times I read on websites that more tickets had been acquired but still I heard nothing. None of my contacts had managed to come up with a ticket for me. I waited until two nights before the final to try a couple of higher profile contacts but was told, if I'd only asked earlier.

Thomas Barrie

The weeks that followed our historic victory in Florence were among the most anxious and most stressful of my life. I wasn't a member of the Travel Club and had no luck in the ballot for season ticket holders; I was left ticketless for a game I never thought I would see in my lifetime. Rangers in a European Final? It was the stuff dreams were made of, but it wouldn't feel the same if I wasn't there to see it.

Robert McQueen

The ballot was agonising. Talk of this happening, that happening and when the news came that the money was coming out of the accounts, I knew I had been unsuccessful. My Mum and Dad however had both been successful. Talk about mixed emotions.

My mum said to me "don't be daft, you're getting my ticket". I couldn't believe it, I had just been handed the prize ticket. On the other hand my mum was missing out and making that sacrifice for me and she wouldn't take no for an answer.

My agony proved to be unfounded as over the next few days my dad managed to procure an extra ticket for my mum and all three of us were going.

George MacDonald

I had no hope of getting a ticket for the game as although I had been in Lyon for the Champions League game going through a supporters club, there was obviously no way anyone was giving their seat up for this one.

The Daily Record, 14th May 2008

GIVE FANS CHANCE OF MY TICKET

Peter McCloy gave up a ticket for the Uefa Cup Final because he felt other Rangers fans we're more deserving of the brief.

The Iborx club offered each of their 1972 Cup-Winners' Cup Team a gold dust brief for the Zenit St Petersburg clash but McCloy knocked his back because he doesn't watch the team as often as others who are struggling to get to the game.

Adam Ross

In days like this people who have never been to games or not for a while or who have no interest in football always seem to have a friend who gets them a ticket. This is the way of the world and although not right what can you do?

My anger I feel stems from the fact I knew people-fellow Rangers fans, who got tickets from Rangers who had barely went to an away match in Scotland let alone a European home match until the semis. They were fortunate and I bear them no grudge as I think if I was in their position at this once in a lifetime for many match that I would not have felt any guilt either.

This, I feel, was Rangers fault who decided on tickets going to those who had ticked priority semi and final box. My anger was with them.

There were not enough briefs to go round. I had ticked the box and was unsuccessful. However I had also ticked every other box-apart from European away as work, family and finances prevents this.

Taking away European away games I was at every other competitive game home and away apart from 3 or 4 matches if I recall. I think I attended 57 of the 68 fixtures that season. To be at so many matches and find myself on the outside looking in at the party as RFC gave tickets to people who had been at 50% of the matches I had attended washed over me in a sea of self pity time and time again.

Robert McQueen

It was sad that so few had tickets. I knew plenty of good bears who love the club and travel through thick and thin and had done so for many years that hadn't got a ticket. It was one disappointing aspect of the final, but that was always going to be the case with the size of the Rangers support.

Jamie Peters

A few calls to friends and family had resulted in the possibility of a ticket for the final. Living abroad for a fair time the only game of that European campaign that I had attended was the Lyon defeat, so I felt fairly guilty at the possibility of getting a ticket. (I was however one of the very few left in the stadium at 3-0 that night, so used this as comfort if I did get one!).

I am told that a Good Samaritan had given a ticket he received, from the legendary Jimmy Millar of all people, to a family member who had in turn given it to me. Eternal thanks to each of them! Everyone connected with the club will know the utter joyous feeling that each issue related to the build up to that final gave them. Finding out you have a ticket was up there with any of them.

Stuart Cooper

All that was left was the ticket. As a long-term season ticket holder, who had ticked all the boxes on the renewal form, I felt I stood a decent chance of getting a ticket for the match in the ballot. However, for whatever reason, I never received one. I then decided I had to try every method available to me- even going as far as asking the Celtic Chairman John Reid, who my girlfriend's dad knew. Unfortunately it wasn't to be, and I ended up ticketless for the biggest game of my life.

Mick Bradley

I tried all my usual sources for tickets but to no avail. I was sickened that guys I knew who hadn't seen the Rangers in years were able to get their mitts on tickets, were going to be there & I wasn't. So I resigned myself to the fact that if I was going, it would be as an "outsider" & just go along for the atmosphere. I decided to take my 2 sons, Darren & Glenn (& set about making arrangements to get there & get digs.

Steven Hogg

Incredibly I had the chance of another couple of briefs. This one wasn't as friendly as the other lad, but crawling over broken glass wasn't going to be a problem and dealing with some miserable paddy wouldn't put me off.

I arranged to meet him in a railway station on the other side of Dublin not far from the docks on a Saturday morning, and I head there on the back of a sicky from work. Of course getting through Dublin is a friggin nightmare, just like all big cities, and I began sweating as the arranged meet time came and went as I sat in traffic.

He phoned a few times asking where I was, obviously panicking (but not as much as me), but eventually I get there and he didn't look as shady as I had imagined, but he did bring a pal with him. Need to watch this one, I thought, but although he hardly hid his dislike for Rangers, the deal was done without incident. The lad said he was a Chelsea fan, which I thought was funny with him not being Brit friendly, but maybe I misread him a bit and he was also a bit nervous at meeting me.

Anyway, with small talk kept to a minimum, and him not budging on his price as he said another Rangers fan had just phoned him and offered him more money, I promptly examined tickets and handed over the money.

We now had four gorgeous tickets for us to go and see the Rangers, ya dancer!

Robert McTeer

I'd vowed to myself that I would not pay an exorbitant amount of cash for a ticket. As much as I desperately wanted to see us in that final I wasn't prepared to put myself in debt to do so and my temporary contract was nearing its end.

Like thousands of others I started searching various ticketing sites hoping to find a ticket on sale for a reasonable price, it was hopeless. 800 quid seemed to be the going rate even if I wanted to I didn't have the funds in my account. A few

days later and getting more frustrated and desperate I got offered one from a bear in Edinburgh on Rangers Media for 500, a fee I thought just about doable, only problem was my wages weren't due till the following week.

I bemoaned this fact on Follow Follow and to my utter astonishment received a PM from a poster called 'Spin City' offering to put up the money for us until I could pay it back. I had no idea who the bloke was, I couldn't even remember if we had discussed anything previously on the board so was completely overwhelmed, gob smacked at the generosity and trust a complete stranger would put in a fellow bear. It might be considered a *cliché from rival fans* but that offer is just another example that proves 'we are the people'.

In the end, I missed out on that offer, and any others I seen were upward of 700 so I informed Spin City that I wouldn't need that temporary loan and thanked him for the wonderful offer. I had accepted my fate that I would have to watch it some other way in the city of Manchester.

Not long after I had giving up the hope of securing a ticket I got a call from my little brother. The smugness in his tone was nothing unusual as this is someone who takes satisfaction in telling people he's going to the loo (the weirdo). "Guess what I've just been offered" he asked, it hit me straight away.

He works for a company that have corporate seats in the Carling lounge, I had been fortunate enough to be taking as a guess for a game up there in the Club Deck, so I knew he wasn't winding me up when he went on to say he was going to the game. I couldn't believe it, I was scunnered that my wee brother although a Rangers fan had barely set foot in Ibrox that season was going to see our club in perhaps our most important game in our life time while I'd be stood outside, it didn't seem fair.

In all honesty though he was the one invited so it wasn't his to giveaway and I was secretly chuffed that he would get to see it. Not that I've ever let any of that getting in the way of having a dig at him whenever its brought up in conversation.

Thomas Barrie

I got a call from my best mate a couple of weeks before the final. His first words were, "Alright mate, I've got you two tickets for the final". The joy and relief were incomparable. Then came the bad news, "but the folk are wanting a grand for the two tickets".

Two Man City fans that his Dad knew had a pair of tickets and were wanting as much as possible for them to fund a summer holiday. Touts? You bet they were but that didn't really come into my thoughts such was my desperation at this stage. As it turned out, my mate Minty and I offered £350 each for them and that was agreed. "At least I'll be there now" were my thoughts, Manchester here we come!

Gordon Cubie

I've been going to Ibox since 1970, been a season ticket holder since the early 80s and haven't missed a domestic cup final since 1977.

I watched the semi final at my parents' house and was on the edge of my seat when Nacho strode up to take "that penalty". After celebrating wildly, I hurried home and got onto the Travelodge website. The rooms were quickly filling up but I managed to get one at Wigan.

I was highly confident that I would get a ticket as I always had but, as the days went by, there was no news. I was on the internet all the time checking news about new batches of tickets being available or checking my credit card on-line to see if the payment had come off yet.

The final got nearer. Travelodge phoned me 3 times to check that I definitely wanted the room. The ladies I sit beside at Ibrox had their tickets. The daughter had got them from the bank.... where my own brother works! I got straight on to him to ask if he had got a ticket. No, "the other building, but I'll check". He called back, "All gone!"

The day before the final, I had to accept that there was no ticket with my name on it. I called Travelodge and released the room. I guess they re-sold it for many times what I had been going to pay.

Andrew Hunter

I was disappointed every time a bear told me he was still looking. It really brought home to me how lucky I was to have a ticket. Bears were genuinely pleased for you that you had a ticket and I loved swapping stories on the Novo Moment, everyone had a story to tell, all personal but unforgettable and everyone can tell you where they were the night novo scored.

Iain Munroe

I was one of the lucky ones. I had spent weeks scouring eBay and forums for a ticket for me and my cousin. Eventually we got two from a wonderful Spanish bloke who has become a good friend through the sale. He is a big Nacho Novo supporter so we had something in common. I paid £1,750 for the 2 tickets, I know but there you go. I wasn't going to miss the biggest game of my life.

About a week before the game my cousin phoned me to say he could not go, I was gutted. Fortune was to change though and only an hour later I got a call from a friend who had managed to secure A CORPORATE BOX and there was a place for me.

This ended up cheaper than the tickets I had bought from eBay. Food and beer included - result. I was elated and sold the tickets I had bought to a fellow Bear and his son for exactly what I paid for them. I gave him my PAYPAL receipt as proof of purchase. My own ticket was kept in my shirt breast pocket for 4 days solid and under my pillow at night.

Andy Cumming

May the 14th drew closer and the scramble for tickets continued as did the constant enquiries for help or "see what you can do" texts. My nephew decided he didn't want to go and I'm sure that in years to come he'll regret that decision however a friend of mine was the glad and deserving recipient of his ticket at face value of course.

The fact that Rangers fans had only acquired twenty five to thirty thousand tickets from various sources including Rangers, UEFA ballot, EBay, foreign fans, Spurs and Everton fans who thought they might get to the final, touts and any other source imaginable hadn't dampened anyone's enthusiasm and plans had long since been made by many to travel, ticket or not.

Fraser Munroe

With or without tickets we were going to be there. If nothing else to soak up the atmosphere and join the thousands of other bears that were all planning to converge on Manchester for the day. Now you would think that flights should be easy to come by! But as per usual on the back of any European draw, prices soar and availability of flights lessens! However I did get it booked and £250 later I knew I was on my way!

Jordan Dallas

My head was constantly turned with thoughts of how to get tickets and studying for university finals. My father and I were within 5 minutes of paying £750 each for tickets online. The only reason we held fire was due to Zenit St. Petersburg sending back a few thousand of their allocation, so we gave the second ballot in the ticket office one last try.

I had my head buried in the books at the library, thoughts still drifting to the following week, when I got a phone call to say I had been successful in the ballot. I jumped for joy and couldn't hide my delight, despite getting told off for making a bit of a scene in the library, I didn't care, this time next week I was going to be in the City of Manchester Stadium watching Rangers.

Adam Ross

I still feel they could have handled it better and fairer but the way they handled any attempt at merchandising at the time left me in no doubt they were pretty hopeless.

As the day and many false dawns with the hopes of a ticket got closer my feelings of despair intensified and I knew I would be losing out. What made it worse was I was one of three people who were going down without a ticket on a full Supporters bus.

Andy Cumming

The distribution of balloted tickets was an utter disgrace and the club had put many people to much trouble without thinking of a proper way of sending these out. They should have all gone out by post where possible with perhaps a small amount available for uplift in certain circumstances and fans charged for the postage as I'm sure they'd have rather been charged a fiver than messed around and stood in a queue for hours.

People couldn't get time off work to go and uplift tickets, the queues were absolutely massive and people stood all day only for the windows to close at the advertised time and the remaining fans told to come back and join another queue the following day.

It's safe to say that it was a shambles and I'm glad I paid to have mine delivered although I did have to go and uplift my dad and nephew's and joined a large queue at 8am on a Saturday morning to do so. Thankfully someone had went up far earlier and got me a spot near the front.

Rangers were at home that day and the fans were told that the ticket windows were closing during the match and that didn't go down well either as the queues were still massive.

Iain MacLeod

on the Saturday before the game just before kickoff at Ibrox my wife phoned me to say that a letter had arrived from Rangers saying that I had a ticket (one of the ones returned from Russia) and could pick it up mid-week.

Dougie Dickie

I knew there were guys who had earned their right of a ticket before me, but I didn't think there were too many if I'm being honest. In the course of the year I had been to almost every domestic game, home and away.

It was nine days after Florence, and I remember it so well. I had given up hope. I was preparing myself for the big screens. I never even thought of it as I got changed to play in the Tommy Marshall Shield quarter-final with my Saturday morning football team. That game incidentally, went well for the team, not so well for me. A 5-0 win was tempered slightly by a rather rash tackle on me. I knew then I would probably miss playing in one final, and would end up hobbling to another. But my pain was tempered when I got back to the changing room.

I received a text message from the friend I sit beside at Ibrox. We and two others are in the friendship scheme together, and all three of them had received notification that they could pick up their tickets on the Monday. Excitement turned to panic. "What if I haven't got one or the letter has been lost, or worse, nicked?" I couldn't even go home. I was going straight to Ibrox to watch the Dundee United league match, massive limp and all. I phoned home, no-one there. I phoned my mum, she's out. I'm shaking with nerves; I just can't get rid of the feeling that something has gone wrong.

Two goals up against United (Wee Novo, who else?) has eased my concern a little, but the fantastic atmosphere is almost lost on me. I don't know what changed that day. I never, ever answer my phone during the football. But when I felt the distinctive vibration, I actually reached down. Perhaps I knew in my heart of hearts what was happening.

The screen flashed up "Mum", bless her, she had dropped everything and headed home to see if my letter had arrived. I answered; she replied "Rangers FC

are pleased to inform you that you have been allocated a ticket for the UEFA Cup Final." All of a sudden the anxiety lifted away and I was swept along in the general euphoria of the day. It was sunny, the Rangers were winning and I was heading to Manchester.

David McMullan

My colleague and I were searching online for anyone with a ticket when we found a mobile number of a guy in London selling a pair.

He was an Arsenal fan called Bob Buss who had bought two tickets on behalf of a couple of Spurs supporting friends when they thought they were getting to the final.

We agreed a price of £1200 for the pair and to be honest I was delaying as I was trying to get tickets elsewhere. There was some discussion about how to get the tickets from London to us without getting my sister who lived in London involved in a dodgy cash handover.

Sadly the brother of one of Bob's Scottish mates died before the final so his mate was due to fly up to Glasgow on the Sunday. We arrange to meet in the airport bar following his arrival to make the exchange. I had text him to say I would be there in a bright orange tee shirt with my mate in a Royal blue Fred Perry.

As it turned out the airport bar was wall to wall Celtic fans decked out in the green and grey flying back to Belfast & Dublin after their game that afternoon.

We were getting fairly uncomfortable when we got a text from the guy with the tickets to say he was off the plane. As we walked into a bar infested by them we were met by a small guy with a Celtic 1967 European Cup final tattoo on one arm and a massive crucifix on the other who loudly insisted on having a pint with us as we thought about getting out of there ASAP.

We exchanged the money and tickets (I got the torch out to check they were valid before handing over the cash) and left without any problem so credit to Bob the Arsenal fan, he had other higher offers for the tickets but kept to the original agreement.

Steven Hogg

After a couple of weeks of basically thinking of nothing but getting tickets (spending the whole day at work and my spare time just searching the net), I got a message from one lad with whom I'd left a message. He phoned to say he had

two tickets, and I immediately made arrangements to meet him at a service station just outside Athone not far from Galway (I was travelling from Dublin).

I was a bit nervous as he had said on the phone he was from Tuam, which is just outside Galway, and if anyone knows Tuam, it's famous for the amount of knackers that live there (knackers – Irish for thieving gypsy bastards...sellik supporters, if you will..). However, it does have some nice parts as well and decent folk, although to be honest, I kind of half expected him to arrive in his car, accompanied by a load his of gypsy friends in transit vans.

As it turned out the guy was brand new, and we talked of the football and Rangers. He told me he supported some English team but I can't remember who. Then he showed me the tickets, we made the transaction, and fair play to him, he wished us well and said he hoped we'd win. He even dropped his price for the tickets slightly.

Fraser Munroe

Now just a four man search for tickets. Well I say four man but I think my mum spent as much time as us looking for tickets for the four of us! After spending hour after hour and day after day looking online and speaking to people we knew, we weren't getting anywhere fast.

The problem with the internet is that there are so many people out there to try and con you out of a few quid and a game in such high demand as this, it's a lethal combination. So it was a question of who can you trust?

Bryan Polland

A few days after Florence I realised the ticket site I had used was a con. I was absolutely gutted but I still decided I was going to Manchester no matter what and would try my luck for a ticket for anywhere under £1000!!!

Imagine my shock and sheer elation when I received a letter from Rangers confirming I had been successful in the CCS ballot and I was to get a ticket for the princely sum of £35, I was absolutely over the moon and attached the letter above my desk to wind up the two green and grey fans in my work.

Fraser Munroe

Eventually I managed to track someone down through the web who claimed to have 2 tickets for sale. She was an Everton season ticket holder who claimed to have got the 2 tickets in the ballot. I remember my dad telling us all to apply

in this ballot around the quarter final stage, we did but none of us had any joy! After numerous emails going back and forward, some photos of the tickets and then a few phone calls, we managed to come to an agreement! £800 for EACH ticket! One hell of a lot of money but in times like this I didn't give it a second thought.

Now here was where the slight problem arose. I was obviously still in Portugal, my dad live in the Highlands and she was in Chester! She wanted to meet in a bank down there to swap for the tickets.

After speaking with my dad though, he wanted to go through with it. Although I think my mum was a little less pleased. So the two of them made the 10 hour journey down there and I have to admit I was absolutely crapping it in case something never went right. She never turns up, fake tickets or god knows what else. I would have felt 100% responsible as I had initiated the contact. They met in the agreed place and thankfully everything went as planned. So then it was the 10 hour return journey home with 2 tickets firmly in our grasp. 2 found, 2 to go!

How those 2 tickets would have been divvied out between the four of us would have been anyone's guess! We just had to make sure it never came to it. My brother came up trumps and managed to get his hands on 2 more tickets. These came through a friend of his who had a relative who works for Manchester City at another pricey sum of £600 each, although cheap in comparison to the ones I had managed to find us.

So that was it, we had the 4 tickets in our grasp. Don't get me wrong we were £2,800 poorer off for the pleasure or should I say my dad was! Fair play to him, he paid for it all and wouldn't take a penny back and for that I'll be eternally grateful to him.

Just when the search for tickets ended, I was offered ANOTHER one! During my search for tickets I had sent off a cheeky email to the CEO of the company that I work for. They have a big sponsorship with Rangers so I thought if you don't ask, you don't get.

I never expected to hear anything back, never mind actually get offered a ticket. So of course I took this ticket too as it was at cost price of £75, which then meant we could sell on one of the more expensive tickets to one of my dad's mates for exactly what he paid for it.

Claire Thomson

We came out the Travel Club a few years back due to not once being able to secure tickets as independent travelers. Despite signing up for, and attending, every domestic game home and away we were not successful in getting tickets for the Final from Rangers (and were seriously disillusioned at the way the allocation was distributed).

When Bayern Munich got put out, I went onto German eBay and low and behold two tickets came up for sale for 399 Euros. After much debating with my other half, and arguing that he loses more in the bookies periodically; I decided to make an offer before our result was even known. As the night unfolded it appeared to be the best money I've ever spent.

Next morning I got a mail from the seller, Alexander Schwinning, which said;

*'I was just checking eBay...Tickets are currently at 1200 Euros. Why do I feel a little stupid now? ;-)*Alex'

Cue me in a state of panic that he would renege on the sale and make a great deal of money from someone else. However, after what seemed like an eternity, the tickets duly arrived about 5 days later, Alex keeping to his word.

I still have all the e-mails and look back and reflect at the range of emotions I went through that night from elation at qualifying, not having a ticket, securing a ticket and then being petrified that he would change his mind and sell for a much higher price.

The irony is, the Saturday before the game we got letters from Rangers to say we had finally been allocated tickets (on I think the 3rd and final ballot - still sticks in my throat!!) Needless to say the EBay ones were sold onto friends for exactly what was paid for them.

Douglas McIntosh

An email pinged into my mailbox....it was from Manchester City.....I forgot.....about 2 months before we had applied for tickets for the final through Manchester City.

Never thinking for a minute that we would make it to the final....I opened it hoping that.....oh SHIT.....rejected! Then my mates email pinged (we work in the same office) – Holy Shit....he got two. And he is the Thistle fan! HE DOESN'T NEED THEM – WE ARE GOING TO THE FINAL!

Less than an hour later though, there was an email from Rangers.....my brother and I both had a ticket through Rangers anyway! I thought the feeling of getting to the final could not be beaten but knowing that we were actually going was close to it! It was at this point I decided to tell my brother that I had actually booked us into a hotel after the Sporting match. I think he thought I was taking the Mickey but I knew, I just knew after that game that we would make it and here we were. 3 days in Manchester awaited us! Oh and the small matter of a European Final to take care of too.

Steven Chalmers

After all the arguments and fights with my brothers, phone calls to Big Arnold who runs the bus there was no joy, I was still heading down to the party though by train the very morning of the game leaving from central, the night before we set off the phone rings, it's the big man from the bus, well my heart was in my mouth, he'd got me one, I was like a kid at Christmas.

Steven Wilson

That night I got a phone call on my mobile from a source to say he had 2 tickets albeit it wouldn't be cheap. I cannot begin to explain the feeling of sheer joy dancing round the living room like a lunatic. Living and working in the North West of England, I must have made over 50 phone calls to contacts in order to source tickets for the biggest match in a generation. Until the night before the game I had virtually resigned myself to the fact that I would need to watch the game at the very least in Manchester city centre with all the rest of the bears.

After agreeing a hugely inflated price we went into Manchester armed with a ruck of notes and hooked up with my contact and did the deal. Ouch!!!! £££!!!!

Raymond Gordon

I'm a member of the Linwood no1 bus so went down on one of the 2 buses they organized. I took my 15 year old son down, we didn't have any tickets. Who cared, this was rangers in a European final and we had to be there.

Chris Thorburn

As we didn't have any tickets we jumped up first thing and headed into Albert Square.

I had brought our KTBRSC club banner which I fired up in the corner of Albert Square and this was our base camp for the day. Around 9am and there were maybe 100 or so fans milling around.

Carry out was bought and we looked around for tickets. My brother was approached by two wee skinny neds in Rangers tops offering a ticket. We all thought it was a fake but the guy assured us that he had got an extra ticket from his club ballot and he wanted 500 pounds.

My brother paid the 500 and that was that. Looking back it still annoys me. I'm old school and would never have sold a ticket for more than face value to a fellow bear. Anyway my brother was happy and I resigned myself to watching on big screen as there was no way I could have paid that amount for a ticket after splashing out on flights etc.

Mark Gourlay

In Albert Square, 80 degree heat, never ending flowing beer, never ending singing and all this in company of likeminded bears and more importantly close family and friends.

We never thought in our wildest dreams a day like this would ever come and it may never come again so we weren't in any mood to let it pass us by and partied like there was no tomorrow. In the group of around 15 of us there were around 6 or 7 that had tickets. One of my best mates then received the ultimate gift that I'm sure all were praying for that day. A TICKET!

His Dad gave him his ticket so he and his brother could go. Later I questioned his dad on it

"You're a fair age big man and you might never see this again!" He replied "It means the world to me to watch the Rangers on TV in a major European final knowing my two sons are there."

I thought that was an amazing gesture and one that still gives me a lump in my throat as I sit here and type this.

Christine Sommerville

It was a beautiful, sunny day and everyone was really happy. Everyone I was with had a ticket apart from one young couple and me. I was trying not to show

how I felt but as it got to about 4 p.m. I knew that pretty soon they would all be leaving to go to the match. The tears just started up and I couldn't stop them, I was sobbing uncontrollably.

Around 4.30 p.m. a friend we were with, Graham Hardie, made one final phone call. He came to me and the other ticketless couple and told us to follow him. We walked for about 10 minutes and we came to a hotel. Inside was a guy who was selling two tickets at £450 each. I knew that this was my mortgage payment for that month but I didn't care.

Graham was a bit concerned when he looked at the tickets as they were slightly different from his. His tickets had the teams on them but these ones didn't. I said to him that these could be tickets issued by UEFA before the teams were known. It looked authentic enough to me and, in the end, it was my call.

It was clear that there were only two tickets and there were three of us but the girl said I should have the ticket. She had witnessed the state I was in earlier.

Adam Ross

It gnawed away at me my anger and disappointment at not getting a ticket is I suppose better explained by this: I had been to couple of cup finals before the 1980 riot game.

However since that final I have never missed another final. I have been fortunate in that I have managed a brief for every single final Rangers have been at, even after Manchester I have kept up that record. I suppose the kick in the teeth for me was that this was the big final, the one we all hope for, like a golfer waiting for that perfect round. It was there and I missed out.

The other thing that reminds me now of Manchester was that within 1 minute of stepping of the bus I met a mate from 5 a sides and my Saturday morning team. John and his brothers are big Rangers fans but he didn't really go to games as he played football and had a relatively new family. John had a ticket. TBH I would have liked to try and ease the look of guilt and sorrow he gave me when I answered his question of "did I have a ticket?" Like I said...it wasn't his fault.

I was always going to make the walk to the stadium. I didn't expect to suddenly get lucky with a ticket it was maybe just a journey that had to be made if you know what I mean?

It was also the site of a superb act of kindness and gratitude that would have been hard at the time but the person knows he made the right decision.

My mate didn't have a ticket but his two sons did. His eldest had told him that he could have his ticket if he was unsuccessful. His dad suffered the same fate as me but right there with the stadium only a few hundred meters away I watched a son give up the greatest ticket he might ever have to his father who both knew might never get another chance of a night like this. Powerful and emotional stuff.

The son and I watched them walk towards the stadium then merge in with that mass of Rangers colour and disappear. After what seemed like forever we turned and headed back to the city centre.

Alan Spiden

My brother Mark and his nephew Rory, just arrived over from New Brighton on Merseyside, and preceded to hand me the best birthday present I've ever received. A ticket for the game!

This had cost him well over the asking price and I was truly dumbstruck that he'd managed to get it for me. After several minutes I finally calmed down enough to give him a bear hug, forgetting all the years where a handshake had been quite enough!

It turns out that I hadn't really been ok with missing the game, after all, all of my mates had got tickets and I was feeling decidedly left out. I'll never forget that ticket and I hope that when Mark reads this he'll know just how much it meant to me.

Scott Jacobs

We were in the zone and the hunt for the Follow Follow bash and match tickets was on for real. My bruv did a little jig in the middle of a street as he received a phone call from Mark telling him that there were two tickets awaiting us when we entered said bash. Which was nice? Or so I thought.

Said nightclub (The Ritz) was found and a bouncer who looked very much like Mark greeted our wee party. The conversation went something like this;

Mark

How you doing lads, safe journey I assume?

Bruv

*Where's the f**king tickets!'*

A to Z in naught point 3 seconds, I think the Yanks refer to it as a charm

offensive. Anyway, the conversation resumed.

Mark

I've only got one ticket on me at the moment; the other ticket is with a punter in the hall who asked for you, Allan, earlier today. (This gentleman knows who he is; and thanks once again)

Me

I'll take this ticket off your hands just now, anyway, thanks; I'll square up with you next year.'

My brother wasn't there to hear this part of the conversation, as he was in the main hall desperately looking for someone he didn't know. The conversation between us siblings now took on a touch of farce that Brian Rix would have been proud of as we scoured The Ritz dance hall

Bruv

Is that him?

Me

Naw

Bruv

Is that him?

Me

naw

Bruv

Where the hell is he?

(Pointing at someone else)

Me

(I knew the script by now)

Naw

We scoured the bottom part of the dance hall two or three times and still we couldn't find this blue clad pimpernel, and he was wearing a skip hat apparently.

Me

Where the feck can he be?

Bruv

*How the f**k do I know, I don't know what he f**king looks like!*

Me

Calm down, calm down

Bruv

*Calm f**king down, ya bastard, I notice you sneaked in and got that bloody ticket from Mark.*

Me

Let's look up the stairs.

Up the stairs.

Bruv

Is that Him?

Me

Naw

Bruv

Could it maybe, be her?

Bruv

Naw, that's Salome Maloney

Bruv

Who the fuck is she?

Me

Doesn't matter, she still doesn't have your ticket

Bruv

*F**k you and John Cooper Clark*

Me

Let's go back down stairs

Back to the front door.

Me

Mark, that guy isn't in there.

Mark

Yes he is

Bruv

He's not in there.

Mark

Maybe he's gone out for a bit of fresh air?

Bruv

*Why didn't he leave the f**king ticket with you?*

Mark

I don't know why, but he expressly said he had a ticket for you, he won't let you down.

Back in the main hall, we two siblings philosophized over a drink

Bruv

Mark said this guy had a ticket for you, so that means the ticket Mark gave you should be for me, then, am I right?

Me

Naw

Ten minutes later.

Odin

Did you get that extra ticket?

Me

Not yet

Bruv

*And we're not going to f**king get it either*

Odin

Calm down, calm down

I do believe steam came out of my bruv's ears on hearing that expression once again.

At this point I should add, that Odin is one of the mates we meet up with every other Saturday before home games and he knows the lengths my brother will go, to provoke an extreme reaction.

For example on the Saturday previous, before and after the Dundee Utd match, he was talking about the lengths he'd go to getting a ticket in Manchester.

I'm pretty sure the phrase 'spit and swallow, and maybe even both' was mentioned.

Well, here we were three days down the line and my brother wasn't remotely interested in spitting or swallowing, he was hell bent on castrating someone, even me, his brother, to get his mitts on a brief for the final.

Anyway, sometimes stories can have a happy ending and this one did; our intrepid pimperl, came back into The Ritz, handed over the ticket and my brother was off and running to the Promised Land. Think Homer Simpson with free coupons for a pork chop BBQ Restaurant and you get the picture. We could all have a fun day now.

The above conversations weren't strictly verbatim, but they do describe hopefully in a light hearted way just how antsy my little bruv was on the day. I'm not into taking the piss with my own, publicly, but if you read this bro, and I'm sure you will, take it from me, that was a tough 'ticketless' couple of hours for the rest of us to endure.

Anyway our company, which had grown from initially five, (well four and a fully sprung human Vesuvius) into something like twenty, all decided to head their separate ways and my brother and I made our way back to the hotel to freshen up for the main event.

This was possibly the most surreal part of the whole extravaganza. It's around 5:00 pm at this point, he's lying on the bed, I'm on a chair, there is this constant buzz, and honking of horns outside, that must have reverberated across the city.

We just looked at each other, looked at our tickets, shook our heads and smiled. It was at this moment maybe, finally, it had dawned on us, we were actually going to this game. The biggest Rangers game for a generation and we'd be there.

(5)

THE BUILD UP

"Has someone died?"
"No, it's worse than that", I replied,
"I can't go to Manchester".
MICK BRADLEY

The Daily Record, 3rd May 2008

'READY' TO WIN

THE Rangers players have done their club and country proud by reaching the final of the Uefa Cup. All roads lead to Manchester and the team's date with destiny in just 11 days against Zenit St Petersburg.

As many as 100,000 Rangers supporters will turn Manchester into the party capital of Europe for the night.

Steven Wilson

Within minutes my dad was on the phone. "We are going ticket or not, we may never see this again in our lifetime" he said. Then my mate Fraser was on the line from Florence. To this day I have no idea what he said due to the sound of ecstatic partying Bears in the background.

Iain Harding

10 seconds later my brother and my best mate were on the phone asking if we were going. Obvious answer was hell yes. I'd missed out when the pair of them had gone to Barcelona earlier in the season but there was no way I was missing this.

Brian Taylor

I felt like a Proud Bear again. The Rangers in a European final in my life time - now that's something you don't see every day.

Colin McHarg

There was a realization even at that early stage where we knew something special was happening.

Douglas Dickie

The next day's hangover barely registered as I bounded into work, but the serious business had really only begun, for me at least.

Steven Hogg

I arranged through Follow Follow to meet a lad whom I'd never met before, and share the taxi costs to and from the airport and have airport drinks with. I still keep in touch with him today.

Murdo Euan MacLennan

I graduated in the summer of 2007 from Aberdeen University and started work in Edinburgh & I was able to purchase my first ever season ticket in the Govan Front.

What a 1st season I had. The highs and lows of the champions league, coming so close in the SPL (and being robbed of a title in that run in btw) and now of course the journey to Manchester, quite a lot to take in for a young lad from the Western Isles.

It will live with me for a long time.

Alistair Young

On the Friday morning I was dropped off at my office my mobile started ringing at 8ish, 3 hours later I was still in the foyer making and returning the calls I was receiving.

My boss cancelled my meetings and posted a note on my forehead telling me so (regrettably I missed out on 2 tickets by taking the wrong call).

On the Saturday morning I sat online watching my credit card to see if any transactions were pending – at 1.00 Rangers FC made a transaction – and I had a ticket

It now seemed like an eternity till the 13th but the party was assembled with military like precision.

Mick Bradley

One call I received the next day was from a work colleague to confirm that I would be back to work next week. "Aye". Says me, "but I'll be putting in for holidays for Manchester, ticket or no ticket".

The reply I got made me sick to my stomach & brought me right back to earth. Everyone in my department had put in for the "Manchester Day" off & it was my shift & I "HAD" to cover it.

Turning off the phone & turning a very sickly shade of pale, my other half asks me what was wrong. "Had someone died"?

"No, it's worse than that", I replied, "I can't go to Manchester; there's no one in the work to cover for me".

Fuck it, I thought. I don't care if they sack me. I'm going. My father had been in Barcelona in '72 & I remember as a 10 year old, him being brought home steaming drunk early the next day, ripped sombrero (blue of course) & singing in the back of a police panda car. He regaled me with all the tales & excitement of the journey & the game. I wanted some of that & no one was going to stop me.

I needed an excuse & I had one.

Arriving home, first thing I did was call the doctor. Appointment made, I limped off to report a sudden relapse. The sciatica was back. "Worse than ever, doctor, think I need another month off." "Yes!!! Sick line duly signed I almost done a cartwheel out the health centre, but checked myself just in time. I'm going to Manchester.

Andy Cumming

In the next few days the club went out of their way to make the usual pleas through Kenny Scott, "if you've not got a ticket, don't travel" and "come and watch the game at Ibrox on the screens".

These sentiments were echoed by the Manchester Police Force who eventually changed their tune once they realized that asking people not to travel was a waste of time.

They seemed to forget that the majority of Rangers' fan base came from central Scotland which was not much more than a four hour bus ride away and to think that people wouldn't travel just because Rangers had asked them not to was incredibly naïve.

Fraser Munro

Following Rangers has lots of highs and it would be fair to say a few lows, but this was a day that NONE of us wanted to miss and to get the chance to spend it with my brothers and the 'old man' as a family is something I will treasure forever. He showed us right from wrong at birth and made sure we grew up in a football mad household where there was only one team to 'follow, follow'!

Without a second thought we were planning our various routes to get to Manchester.

Now you would think that flights should be easy to come by! But as per usual on the back of any European draw, prices soar and availability of flights lessens! However I did get it booked and £250 later I knew I was on my way!

Murdo Euan MacLennan

I had mates from the Western Isles coming down to the game, in fact 2 busses and scores of cars left the Isle Of Lewis for Manchester, so there was going to be a strong island contingent amongst the 200k + on the day.

Stuart Cooper

The thirteen days that followed between the Semi Final and Final were an incredible experience. Everywhere you turned, people were talking of Manchester. Were you going? Had you a ticket? Did you know anyone who had a spare? It was a high that no drink or drugs could ever give you. Even my mum was excited by it all. I went to visit my cousin's new baby and my uncle, who had just become a granddad, could talk of nothing but the Final. It was incredible. Everyone seemed to be Manchester-bound.

Jordan Dallas

Those two weeks were unforgettable, the papers were filled with Rangers build-up to the Final and fan stories about how they were getting over, Supporters Clubs in my town of Coleraine in Northern Ireland were booking minibuses to head over and they estimated there were between 10-15k Ulstermen and women descending upon Manchester.

Paul Dunnachie

The thing that got to me was the number of well-wishers who support other clubs. Neighbors and folk in my work who I didn't really know that well but knew I was a Gers man were stopping me, calling, texting or e-mailing just to wish Rangers good luck.

Steven Macleod

There was a buzz about all things Rangers. This was our moment in the spotlight and the whole Rangers family was giddy with anticipation. My ticket was secured without much fuss. I also managed to buy Reading's entire stock of Rangers jerseys (all 5 of them) for friends up north who just couldn't get a jersey for the big day.

David Hamil

I watched every news bulletin, keeping up to date, feeling proud to be a Rangers fan, being amazed and the efforts Rangers fans made to get to Manchester. I even shed a tear watching SSN on the morning of the final when I learned how many had travelled and watching them all in party mode, brilliant.

Andrew Hunter

I wasn't starting my new job till June so I could really enjoy the buildup. Every day I bought the papers and went on the websites determined to milk the experience and enjoy every second of it. Looking back I really loved the whole anticipation to the big day, Manchester was giving me a zest for life.

Honestly those 2 weeks were just wonderful, bears were so blatantly noticeable for the big smiles they were sporting; everywhere you went there were Rangers tops everywhere. The other noticeable, was the lack of Celtic tops anywhere they just could not handle it and disappeared, bliss.

Craig Kirkwood

School was absolutely buzzing. The majority of football supporting kids at Kilwinning Academy are Rangers fans and the final was all that was being talked about. I was the envy of everyone because I had a ticket.

Dave Croall

After watching the semi-final in my flat in Sweden, the joy soon turned to panic as the worry set in, I was studying at the time, had limited funds (severely limited) but knew deep down I was never going to miss it, having been a season ticket holder for around 24 years I had to be there.

Gary Scott McGregor

I had not long turned 18 years old and was in 6th year at high school. I had my Higher English exam on the 15th May 2008 at 9.00am. The final was the night before and I knew it was around a 4 hour car journey to Manchester, The earliest I could be home was around 2am.

My mum was not pleased at all with the idea of being in Manchester the night before a big exam. I can freely admit now that I was not the best studier in the world and hated exams.

Word got out in my English class that I could be going to watch Rangers in the final, the night before our higher, classmates were astounded that I would actually do this. At the time I felt confident, in not only my ability to pass my English Higher exam, but in my team winning the Uefa Cup.

Willie Menzies

I was only 12 in 1972 and couldn't get anyone to take me to Barcelona. Made up for that in 2007 right enough but that's another story. Anyway when I missed out in 72 & I swore if the bears ever made another European final in my life time nothing on this earth would stop me going.

Also decided my youngest son Neil who has inherited the Rangers genes would be there as well. Oldest lad Iain who is more into the golf made his 'away debut' in Seville in December past right enough but again that's another story for another book!!

To cut to the quick Neil, like a lot of young bears that night had his English Higher exam to sit at 9am next morning. Needless to say 'her' indoors had me warned that if he missed it my life wouldn't be worth living.

Without going in to any great detail we made it, he sat it, and got a C pass. Probably would have got an A if he hadn't had to ask for a drink of water and almost had to insist that they let him out to be sick, but managed to keep it down.

Sad as it may seem to some in this world but I could never have forgiven myself if he hadn't made Manchester but I could have lived with him missing his exam!!!!

Therefore from that point of view frigin' good job the final was in the UK and within striking distance of home or we could have had a few issues.

Laurie Spence

I have been a member of the travel club for 4 years so I got a ticket for Manchester but my son Laurie was too young although he had been with us on various trips abroad and always managed to get a ticket. Like others the final was on the day he was sitting and his mother would not let him miss it.

So what I suggested was sit the exam which finished at 2pm my mate runs a taxi business in Perth so he could pick him up from school change in the taxi and head too Edinburgh airport, get the 4.55pm flight and be in Manchester at 5.55pm, get a taxi from the airport to the ground and I will meet him at the stadium (our supporters bus was leaving Perth at 4 in the morning) his mum reluctantly agreed so it was all go.

Cost me a bloody fortune because I gave him my travel club ticket which cost 50 quid, 110 for a single flight to Manchester, a 40 quid taxi from Perth to Edinburgh, 30 quid from the airport to the stadium PLUS 600 QUID I HAD TO PAY TOO GET MYSELF ANOTHER TICKET.

Jamie Peters

I believe I was one of few, if not the only Ranger to watch the ball hit the back of the net that night whilst in Santa Marta, Colombia.

The thoughts after that immediately turned to Manchester. Not quite the “How can I get a ticket?” that every other bear on the planet was thinking but “How can I get to the UK?” was my initial concern. (It is over 5000 miles as the crow flies from Bogota it seems).

The plans to get back to the UK and perhaps if I was lucky, to secure a ticket were pretty much central to my life at that point. Every bear makes sacrifices for Rangers and I just have to add traveling around the world for one game another of those.

John Macaulay

I, my son and his mate attended every away game in Europe that season.

Gradually as the ties progressed you begin to get the feeling we could actually go all the way, there was a slight ‘fly in the ointment’ my 60th birthday was the 5th of May and months before we had booked an all singing all dancing trip to Las Vegas (10 family members and a close friend who is also a bear and was travelling from Manila in the Philippines), which meant we were in Vegas the week of the final.

I will never forget that night in Florence having slightly mixed emotions mainly incredible joy but with a weird feeling of discomfort when Nacho put the penalty away. Although I had said to my wife if we got to the final we had to go, it was suddenly reality. We did not even have an issue with tickets because we were guaranteed them as travel club members. Can't say my wife was overly impressed but she accepted the game could not be missed.

William Watt

My wife and I made page 5 of the Sun, with a full page photo in front of Blackpool tower. We had booked a holiday in Portugal long before even the semi final, and of course were in Portugal on the day of the game, so I booked a flight for both of us out of Faro to Manchester on the Wednesday arriving 3 hours prior to KO and flew back out on the Thursday morning to finish off the holiday, at an extra cost of around £600.

Iain MacLeod

I was determined to go until the wife pointed out that the next day (Thursday) we were flying out to Lanzarote at 9:30 am, and had to be at Glasgow Airport at 6:30 am.

After much soul searching and trying to convince my wife I could make it for the flight by driving straight home after the game, she realized what the enormity of the occasion meant to me and the chance I would have to see the Gers in a European final, she relented, especially when I agreed we would try and fly out on a later flight at my expense if we missed the one we were booked on.

Del McDuff

I had the small duty of a secret wedding in Nevada to my lovely fiancée to deal with. Me & Mrs McD arrived back to the UK on 11th May, where to? Manchester of course.

I drove us up the road chinned from jet lag, arrived in Glasgow Sunday evening, visited family, broke the news about marriage and then duly couldn't sleep through nerves. Monday, I ran about like a maniac getting 2 new flags stitched onto my previous 4 flags. 34 going on 10 year old, buying badges galore for my COWBOY HAT!

Andrew Hunter

We had been let down on a couple of flags for the side of the mini bus, so I decided to get the train into Bridgeton to go the Orange shop. I ran down to get the train and just caught it, I asked for a return to Bridgeton, the conductor noted I looked harassed and I explained what I was doing, he was a fellow bear, so the usual questions are you going? You got a ticket?

He was saying he finished at 2 on the Wednesday and driving straight down as you just had to be there, at this point two guys in the carriage who had heard the conversation started to join in and we all started talking, 4 strangers united by the Rangers.

I was admitting to being hyper this was just huge for me seeing rangers in a euro final and being part of history etc the other two of the other guys, who were going were just as bad. One of the guys had not said much, he was in his 60's but had said he was going down his local to watch it, he then goes on his mobile phone and asks do you still have room? Count me in see you tomorrow'

The guy turns to us and says "thanks lads, thanks, I going to go, you've really brought home how much this means, I thought I was maybe too old, but too hell with it."

Turns out old boy had lost his wife and had drawn back from things like the football, it had hit him hard he added " you guys are so excited, this is fulfilling a dream for you guys and it made me remember how excited I would get about the football and how much I love the Rangers."

"My wife would have wanted... expected me to go" At that point old boy had to get off the train, he shook all our hands and thanked us before saying "come on the rangers"

It really brought home that we were not just a support but a family.

Nick McAusland

I had just become a father for the first time, only 6 weeks prior and was leaving the missus at home with our new son. She was new to parenthood as well and this was the first time we had been apart since the wee man arrived. She understood though. She knew how big this was for me, and why I had to go.

Murdo Euan MacLennan

I was due to be doing an audit of a company down in England somewhere on the day of the game. I went in to see my director about getting taken off the job as I wanted to enjoy the day of the game more (i.e. have a few drinks).

That was the most nervous I had been at my work. Audits are booked months in advance, travel, staff etc all planned out. Thankfully my director at the time took pity on me and I swapped jobs with another junior. So it was official, I had the time off work and a match ticket.

My best mate who I had gone to games with throughout uni had booked a holiday to Australia to see his girlfriend months in advance (thinking that Rangers wouldn't get a European Final, and who did to be fair) so I couldn't make arrangements with him.

John Hendry

Despite my father (Gallowgate born) supporting Celtic his family (brother in particular) fortunately ensured that I have follow followed since 1963 - our constant 3-0 wins against Celtic at that time don't count so my first big game was vs Real Madrid @ ten shillings a ticket somewhat higher than the nine (old) pence I paid if I didn't get "lifted over" the turnstile.

In 1969 I moved to London/Kent but continued to support and attend as many games as I could, indeed it is only a couple of years since I gave up my ticket in the East Enclosure. For some 44 years my mum lived within touching distance of Hampden - the stories I could tell about the Celtic fans coming up Bolivar Terrace and us coming along Stanmore Road - bedlam.

Just before Christmas 2007 my mum sadly passed away. A direct result of this was a much closer bond with all of my family in Scotland especially my much younger brother. We went to many of the big games together. As a special treat I decided that I was going to get us 2 tickets for the final, money no object.

Chris Thorburn

As soon as I arrived my old dear told me the BBC had been on the blower. They had phoned my house in Auckland to ask what our club was doing and my wife told them I was en-route to the final. Not really keen on BBC Scotland with their obvious leanings towards the green and greys but as I had a ticket draw to make it was the ideal venue for a live 'above board' on air draw.

ORSA had been given six tickets so it meant that each ORSA RSC had one ticket per club. We had 5 paid up members either in the UK or en-route, all without tickets, so this seemed the fairest way to make the draw.

I made my way from my folk's house in Clydebank to the BBC studios by train. After the long flight I could hardly keep my eyes open and I could have

done with a few strategically placed match sticks. The interview was done by John Beattie (the big rugby bloke) and Katie Stills – after doing a quick search it's still on line till this day. Anyway I didn't get the ticket but I was glad it was all over as this was a huge burden for me to ballot the ticket fairly. Anyway, interview done, over to Ibrox to try get a Dundee Utd ticket.

Andrew Hunter

I took my son over to Ibrox for nothing more than to see what was happening, when I reached Ibrox it was pandemonium, as I drove up I could see there were a lot of cars parked all over the place and people everywhere. There were literally thousands there. People wanted to get their ticket asap and were paranoid they would not be there.

Douglas Dickie

It was chillier than it had been. The splitting sunshine had been replaced by early morning cloud. By the time we had reached the front of the queue the sun had started to peak through. It wouldn't stop shining all week, in a literal if not metaphoric sense. Not even the fact that the price had been penned in after the ticket had been printed was any real concern. I knew what I had in my hand. £55 worth of pure football gold.

Andrew Hunter

The superstore was heaving and everyone was just hyper. I actually stood back in the shop and it was akin to a match day, the noise levels were incredible. The gear was flying off the shelves and I must have spent an hour over there just soaking up the atmosphere.

Chris Thorburn

The place was mobbed with bears picking up tickets and needless to say the Dundee Utd match was sold out. I did however manage to get a kindly donated season ticket. What struck me were the street vendors doing a roaring trade on merchandise. Rangers, as per usual, had missed the boat and had not one single Uefa cup item in their store.

Douglas Dickie

The District Bar was also packed that day, and there was only one topic of conversation - what we were all wearing to Manchester. Grown men, some in their 40s and 50s, mulling over their fashion choices for the biggest game of our lives. It was surreal to say the least.

I had plumped very early on for my replica 1973 Centenary Cup Final top. The forecast was warm and the long-sleeved cotton number was probably the wrong choice, but I didn't care. I ditched the idea of the 1972 top on the basis of tempting fate.

Robert McQueen

I remember the feeling as we left the stadium having beat Dundee United at Ibrox the weekend before the game. Nacho Novo had scored a screamer. I had never felt Ibrox like it. It was a completely different atmosphere from a big European night or an Old Firm game.

Steven Macleod

The best explanation of the enormity of the event came from a friend who answered his fiancé's complaint that he was more excited about the game than the wedding '*but babe, this is a once in a lifetime event*'. I trust he spoke for us all!

Steven Clifford

All we had to do now was wait the two weeks until the trip of our lifetimes! The excitement and everything else that surrounded that trip was unforgettable until finally the clock alarm went off at 05.45 on the Tuesday morning.

Andy Cumming

Flights were booked by overseas Bears from Australia to North America, South Africa to New Zealand and many far flung places besides; they just wanted to be there and would go to great lengths and expense to ensure that come May the 14th 2008, they would be in Manchester.

Jordan Dallas

Upon arrival at the airport it was nothing but Rangers fans flying to every possible venue close to Manchester; Blackpool, East Midlands, Liverpool, all

these flights were packed with excited Bears.

Fraser Munro

Now in my family it would be fair to say travelling is in our blood. With me living in the Algarve at the time, one brother living in Atlanta, Georgia, another brother living behind enemy lines in Boston, Massachusetts coupled into the fact that my father is up in the highlands, it was always going to be a challenge for us all to get to Manchester.

With or without tickets we were going to be there. If nothing else to soak up the atmosphere and join the thousands of other bears that were all planning to converge on Manchester for the day.

A few days later I'm leaving my house in Albufeira, wearing my Rangers strip with 'Manchester 08' on the back and my bar scarf proudly on, I was all ready for my 3 day trip back to the UK and our date with destiny.

Once checked in I made my way through to departures where I had my first beer in the shape of a pint of 'Sagres'. OK it was only 8am but I was ready for the adventure to begin.

On board my flight I had a few people wishing us well for the game, and even met another couple of bears on their way back to the game, not to mention the normal token gesture spotty tarrier in the green and grey shouting 'Zenit' looking for a response. A wee blast of 'There's only one Nacho Novo' by me and the two other bears on board was enough to shut the soap dodger up and get a wee laugh from a few around us too!

Jamie Peters

Within a couple of days the flights home were booked. (The fact I was taking my girlfriend of two years back to meet my family for the first time had paled into insignificance as soon as Nacho had secured our place in Manchester).

I said farewell to friends there and received their good luck messages for 'Los Rangers' with thanks.

Fraser Munro

4 or 5 days after that great night in Florence, getting a hotel in Manchester was like trying to convince the Greater Manchester Police that more than 60 thousand teddy bears were making the trip..... impossible! I've still got the newspaper cuttings from the day of the game with the English media claiming

60k was attending and the Scottish media claiming 200k would be there. For once I think the Scottish media were correct!

The Daily Record, 6th May 2008

GERS NO ROOM AT THE INN FOR FANS

Stunned Rangers fans have had their hotel bookings cancelled a week before the Uefa Cup final on police advice.

Cops have told guesthouses and B&Bs across Manchester they will not respond to possible flashpoints around the time of the game.

Worried owners have been advised to draft in their own security around May 14. But gutted supporters were yesterday told that bookings had been scrapped after hotel bosses refused to pay for stewards.

Andy Cumming

Manchester's hotels began to fill up with visitors a few days before the final as did makeshift campsites at rugby and cricket clubs. One was named Bear Camp at Burnage Rugby club but there were also others. The majority would arrive on match day but several thousand fans enjoyed the city's hospitality for a day or two and watched the atmosphere build towards what they were all in town for.

Some even set up base in hotel car parks or pitched tents in friend's gardens in the city such was the need to be there. The day before the match saw a large influx of Bears arrive but Manchester would be in for a huge shock the next day. Manchester is a noted sporting city with large football clubs, a cricket team with a test cricket venue and has hosted the Champion's League Final and Commonwealth Games not so long ago but it had never seen anything like this.

Hotel rooms within a thirty mile radius of Manchester were also virtually impossible to book.

George MacDonald

Could I get a hotel? Not a chance. I and my brother were planning on just roughing it for the night and coming back up first bus next day. Then bonus!! There was an article in a newspaper about a Rugby Club hiring out their fields for campers. I got on the case right away and we had accommodation. Travel was already booked. We were raring to go to the biggest party on the planet.

Iain Harding

It took hours of searching and inappropriate use of her work time but my wife finally got me and my mate a hotel room in Cheadle. Miles away from the city centre but we couldn't be picky.

George Lynch

We had got an army mate of ours to get us digs at the barracks in Manchester centre; we arrived at 3am and were greeted by the guard wearing a gers scarf who directed us to the mess. We could hear the tunes blaring out and when we got inside there must have been 200 guys with camp beds set up all bevyng and the tunes on! Nobody went to sleep and the party continued all night till the next day!

Alan Hutchison

We could only get digs in a travel inn at Birch Service Station on the night of the match. Undeterred we pitched a couple of tents behind some bushes in the middle of the service station roundabout, less than 100yds from the M62 traffic cops depot and spent a night in the service station cafe swapping Rangers stories and downing beers before bedding down in our tents ready for the big day.

Craig Kirkwood

Our hotel didn't look the best. It was a few miles outside the city centre on Rochdale Road and it wouldn't have looked out of place in an episode of Shameless. There were 4 guys standing outside drinking bottles of beer. As we carried our luggage in my dad started talking to them. It turned out they were Bayern Munich fans who had got tickets for the game before Zenit had knocked them out. They had decided still to come over and go to the game anyway.

David Wilkinson

We had been forward thinking and took the risk of booking our travel and hotel to Manchester in the hope that we got to the final after the Sporting game in the quarter final and what a gamble it was.

Fraser Munro

Bearing in mind the game is in Manchester, the closest hotel we could get was Huddersfield!!! Ridiculous! If that wasn't an indication of what was around the corner and the amount of people coming to the city for the game, I don't know what would be! So we passed on that option and went to plan B as that was just too far away!

Gary Tedford

About thirty of us had travelled everywhere that season and knowing Manchester was going to be full of neds, hangers-on and glory-hunters. We decided to stay somewhere out of the way and chose of all places, Huddersfield

Christine Sommerville

We were booked into a hotel in Huddersfield and had decided to go into Manchester early the next morning and go up to the stadium looking for tickets. Looking back, that was perhaps a little naïve. I couldn't believe the number of fans that were around Manchester that morning.

Alan Wardlaw

We arrived at our "hotel" in Eccles where we were sharing the "facilities" with a supporter's bus. Basically we assumed we were to crash wherever we could. They served up a cracking BBQ though which helped us sober up a bit for phase two.

Stuart Cooper

Our accommodation had been taken care of prior to the Quarter Final win over Sporting Lisbon when one of my mates, JJ (so called because of a resemblance to former Rangers striker Jonatan Johansson), had the foresight to book us an apartment just in case.

Fraser Munro

Plan B was not going to be an easy option for myself that's for sure! Now my ex girlfriend was from Warrington and this seemed like the solution that could benefit us if I pulled it off! OK maybe slightly naughty and not one of my proudest moments but I had to get back into her good books so that maybe, just maybe we could stay with her family! To be honest I was still friendly with her

family anyway so I figured it wasn't going to be too much of a problem from their point of view but I knew she would happily throw a spanner into the works if she wanted.

It's just when an ex kind of hates you, it's not always easy to get into her good books. So for a very brief couple of weeks we gave it 'one more chance', we got the accommodation sorted and strangely enough around late May I figured it wasn't meant to be.... again!

The things you have to do to follow your team!

Mick Bradley

Obviously I had to keep quiet about going so my work wouldn't find out, even though some of the lads knew I would be there. One of the workmates, Scott, got in contact to find out what my plans were & I told him I was taking my car & was trying to find digs. "Can I come with you? I'll share the petrol". It was a deal.

One of my mates, Brian, has a brother who lives in Leyland, near Preston & I had an idea he would be going down & thought I give him a call. "Aye, no problem", he says "Henry has plenty of room & would love to see you again". Yes ya beauty, thinks I. That's the digs sorted. "Just remember your tent; you'll be kipping out the back"!!! Ouch, can my sciatica take this? Transport & digs sorted, we arranged to meet at Tesco's in Port Glasgow at 7am on the "Big Day".

Kenny Scott

We stayed in Warrington and were pleased to see that many other Bears had booked their accommodation here too. You couldn't look onto any street within the town without seeing someone decked out in Royal Blue. Warrington saw a large number of Bears descend upon their town that night, and the bars and clubs would soon be making a healthy profit from their visitors.

George MacDonald

There was no time to waste. We got to the Rugby Club as quick as we could. Pitched our tent, draped it with our Johnstone Castle Loyal flag made perfectly for the occasion. That was more to make it easier to find the tent at the end of the night.

Douglas McIntosh

When we got down, we had to check into the hotel. An experience in itself. As the room was a twin and only booked for 2 people, we had to try to smuggle my mate Gary, 3 suitcases and a blowup bed into the room without the staff noticing! So we checked in, got the room key and then the switch was on.

Gary waited in the car while we went to the room, then I went out to the car to get more stuff.....helped by Gary....hoping that they thought he was my brother, not a new person! And we were in! But then we realised that we all had gut rot from some dodgy motorway service lunch that we had....and so began the round robin trips to the toilet! We soon started to realise that the toilet was not equipped to handle 3 guys with stomach problems....and we soon started to run out of toilet paper!

The decision was made that one of us would have to go and ask reception for more. As the room was booked in my name, I was talked into being the fall guy! So, having asked for some more toilet paper at reception - to some very strange looks, they told me one of the staff would bring it. While we were waiting back in the room, we realised that there was one person too many in the room – what if they came in? We all agreed that one of us should hide in the cupboard when they arrived with the toilet paper. The knock at the door came.....from the other side it must have sounded very odd....”Just get in there – *but I won’t fit in* – just force it – hurry up, will you – *shut up, are you the one getting in here...no, so shut it* – just get in the feckin thing!” BANG – the cupboard door was shut!

So I opened the door, with what must have been the guiltiest look on my face and out of breath.....there stood the female receptionist with 3 extra toilet rolls in her hand. I grabbed them and thanked her and shut the door.

Now, most people would have instantly gone and got the person out of the cupboard, but because of his moaning, my brother and I kept Gary in there for a good 3-4 minutes. When we opened the door he was sweating like a beast – but we are pretty sure it’s not the first cupboard he has had to hide in!

Steven Clifford

Accommodation was secured with my Aunt and Uncle in Blackpool, travel was also booked to Manchester with the Blackpool true blues. Fortunately for us as we were in the travel club tickets where secured without expense or the additional costs succumbed to touts that other bears unfortunately had to pay.

By the time of landing in Manchester we were suitably merry before the short train ride to Blackpool which ensued. By the time we made it to Blackpool and

met with my Aunty at 6pm there was no turning back, we were both suitably drunk and ready for a night in the town.

John Macaulay

So the three of us and my mate from Manila arrived in Vegas on the Saturday evening and left for Manchester on the Tuesday morning by scheduled flight which cost £100 more than the week's holiday of £850.

David Wilkinson

When I Woke up that Tuesday morning and turned on Sky Sports News, for some reason the story was about Nacho Novo sitting in a racing car, I think Rangers had just launched their official racing team. I couldn't believe that we were heading to Manchester to watch Rangers in a European final and I had serious goose bumps like never before.

Mick Bradley

Around midday we arrived at Henry & Lorraine's house in a lovely part of Leyland. It's a semi-detached. "Brian, what the f... Where are we all gonny fit?" I scream in a fit of panic.

"Follow me", and he leads us to the back garden. It was like something out the Shankill. Flags, scarves & banners covering every square inch of surface. The garden itself wasn't huge, but big enough for about 5 tents, which was fortunate as that's about how many were there. Henry & Lorraine had the barbie going & the beers chilling for us when we got there. This was amazing. Could the day get better? I certainly hoped so.

Next thing there's a knock on the door & it's the local newspaper wanting to do a piece on the family & their day to Manchester to see the Rangers. I was designated the spokesman but politely had to decline due to the fact I was meant to be laid up in bed with a very sore back & it would not have went down well had a photo of me made its way home & into my gaffer's grubby mitts.

So if you see a guy in the Lancashire Evening Post on the day of the game with a Rangers scarf covering half his face bouncing about a back garden resembling something from VE day, it's me.

Nick McAusland

It was 2pm on the afternoon of Tue 13th May 2008. In little over 24 hours, the team I supported all of my life would compete in a major European Final in Manchester, possibly the one and only opportunity I would get to see them do so. Yet, as I sat at my desk in a factory in East Kilbride I was still in the dark as to whether I would get the opportunity to join my friends, family and brethren on the pilgrimage down the M6.

About 60% of the factory already had a spring in their step, knowing they had the time off to savor what the next 36 hours would bring. I wasn't one of them.

A relatively new recruit, last in the door and last to have his leave request reviewed, time was marching on. My seat on the bus was secured, light blue jersey washed and ironed – all that remained was the gaffer's nod. He too was a Bluenose, and a big one at that. His ticket was tucked away safely in his inside pocket and he was grinning like a Cheshire cat.

I knocked on the door and took a deep breath before entering the room. "Alright Boss, how are things?" "Fine pal, absolutely fine. What can I do for you?"

He knew exactly why I was there. I paused then went to open my mouth, but before I could get the words out he piped up "Away you go".

I didn't know if this was the kybosh I'd dreaded or if he just wanted me out of his office. "Eh?" I replied. "Manchester", came the response. "Away you go and get on that bus!"

That was it. That was the nod. The go-ahead. I could've kissed the man there and then, but I was already pushing my luck. What a feeling. I could only hope that it would get even better.

Gary Scott McGregor

The day before the game, I was still not allowed to go. I begged, I pleaded and I used every trick in the book but still no budge from my mum to let me go. Then, like a miracle, my dad phoned my mum. I still to this day do not know how he convinced her but he did. I was allowed to go to Manchester to see Rangers!!!!!!

I had a part-time job in a restaurant at the time and one of the chef's I got on well with was going down himself in his car. I phoned him straight away and asked if I could join him on the adventure to Manchester, he agreed speedily. This was one of the happiest days of my life and if Rangers won would have been easily the greatest day!

Del McDuff

We stayed in Blackpool, already invaded by Bears and went into Manchester the night before game with our faces painted, as you do! After meeting up with family and friends, I was interviewed by Cat from Real radio after she heard I'm on my honeymoon without the WIFE!

I proceed to give a very drunken ramble about loving Mrs McDuff and Vegas and WE ARE THE PEOPLE CAT Y`KNOW. My wife then gets texts galore the next morning from her family, when it's played on air, Oh and Andy dropped a pint on Cats feet begging "interview me Cat".

Fraser Munro

All I remember thinking was that if this is what's it's like the day before the game, what the hell will it be like tomorrow?

It seemed that every man and his dog had made their way to Manchester to see the famous Glasgow Rangers. All the talk was of who had tickets and who didn't. Throughout our whole time there we played dumb and never admitted to having any.

Colin McHarg

Manchester was jumping on the Tuesday night with almost every pub resounding to the unmistakable rhythm of various Rangers anthems. I nipped into a boozer in Piccadilly which on the outside seemed to be vying for the title of World's smallest licensed premises but similar to the Tardis, was remarkably spacious enough within. Sitting quietly in the corner were a dozen Zenit fans, accompanied by a photographer grasping a very expensive looking piece of equipment.

Put it this way - it was no £2.50, single use only disposable camera. From what I could gather reading between the lines of broken English, he was keeping a visual record of events for a Leningrad publication and went to great lengths to snap images of the opposition. It was during one of these photo call exchanges that I heard the cry of 'cheese' followed by him asking a group of Gers fans for the name of their supporters club.

I suppose the idea stemmed from the cheese remark, but I still laugh as I recall the Russian asking "Parmesan loyal - could you spell for me please?" What is it with Zenit fans and cameras?

I remember another of their kind snapping away at all and sundry - including youngsters - which prompted one of the lads I was with to mutter under his breath:

"Vladimir will be selling those kiddie pics on the black market next week!"

Kenny Scott

My buddies and I decided to sample the Warrington nightlife, perhaps partake in a shandy or two; after all, we had good cause to be in celebratory mood. Pubs and clubs were packed out. But not because it was student night in Warrington. Because the Rangers were in town.

David Wilkinson

We got speaking to a few elder bears that had been to the Cup Winners Cup final in Barcelona they told some stories! It turned out they were the same age as we were at the time of Manchester when they were in Barcelona. That got us all thinking about how much of a special occasion this actually was and that could be us sitting talking to younger bears in years to come about Manchester just like they were doing with us.

Alan Spiden

We got to Blackpool around 4.00 pm and after dropping our bags at the B&B (16 pounds a night...and believe me, I think the B&B still got the better of that deal!) we headed out to sample the local delights.

I'd not taken my youngest, David, as we had no tickets and I felt that a day watching his dad get drunk was not really an ideal day out for him. I regret not having him with me though and if I could have the chance again I'd not hesitate to take him along.

Our first port of call was the Jaggy Thistle and I don't think the local Police had expected so many of us to turn up (I heard later that there was 10,000 of us in Blackpool that night) and for the first couple of hours they were quite wary of us and vice versa. After they realized that we were there only to have a good time they backed off though and I didn't see any of Lancashire's finest the rest of that night.

Kenny Scott

Bars were bursting at the seams. Bears were telling any local who would

listen about the Rangers. I must have relayed tales of Ibrox and The Rangers to a good number of Warringtonians, but they thoroughly enjoyed our presence. No malice, some fantastic football banter, and "Simply the Best" being blared out in almost every Jukebox and Karaoke machine in the place.

Douglas McIntosh

That Tuesday night we spent in Manchester was amazing. A couple of moments that really stick out from that night are meeting Derek Young and Bert Campbell in a pub as they were mid song!! Then trying to get into one of the more popular clubs in the city centre, the doorman said "not tonight son, it's a sausage fest in there!" Then came the reply from a mate "Aye, but I have a bratwurst.....and yir maw loves it!" Thank God the chap on the door had a sense of humour!

Alan Spiden

After a short while we had officially drunk the pub dry and so we moved on to a karaoke bar just off the strip. The DJ tried desperately to keep the songs sung to those on the official song book but after much gentle persuasion he eventually gave free reign to the punters and the party really started.

Davie Norton was one of the first of our bus up on stage, it's hard to prize the mic away from him at the best of time to be honest.

Kenny Scott

I felt it was a good idea to partake in some Karaoke. I wasn't particularly keen on murdering John Travoltas Grease, or having a stab at Tragedy, so I belted out "Though the streets be broad and narrow" and what followed, was a terrific sight. The whole club joined in a resounding chorus of our clubs famous anthem.

The rest of the night was a bit of a blur, Rangers songs were the order of the night, friendly football debates with locals about how Rangers would give Liverpool a run for their money, how Manchester United would fall to the Rangers sword, or that Ibrox was the greatest of sporting arenas.

Alan Spiden

We finally rolled back to the B&B around 1 or 2...it's a bit hazy to be honest as by this time we had been on the go around 12 hours and I was slightly tired and emotional.

That night in the B&B was one of the funniest I've ever had and, although the surroundings were humble, the company was top class. From the dulcet tones of Davie grinding his teeth in rhythm with Brian Galloway's sheep like barking in the room next door, to the singing way into the night of the late night revelers, it was absolutely fantastic.

Bob Baird

Tuesday night before the game, I and my 2 pals (Jim & Andy) are on our way back to our hotel in a taxi after a "right good bevvv". We asked the driver to stop at a kebab shop and we all get out to get some much needed scan.

On the way back out the shop, my mate Jim tripped and started to run forward in that drunken way you do to try and catch your balance. Unfortunately for him, he ran out of pavement and proceeded to trip over the kerb falling onto the road. Fortunately, there was no oncoming traffic (else he would more than likely be dead), but in his desperation to save his late night snack, he fell onto his shoulder rather than dropping his kebab and using his hands to soften the fall.

This resulted in him letting out an almighty yelp and complaining of "having done his shoulder in". In our drunken stupor, we got him into that taxi where I attempt to "pop" his shoulder back into place. The pain must have been unbearable as he attempted to give me a right hook to the face. Fortunately for me, he just missed, but I could tell he was now in serious pain. Whilst this commotion is going on, my other mate (Andy) is quietly munching into Jim's rather squashed kebab.

When we get back to the hotel reception, Jim is now in tears of pain. We try to convince him that it'll be alright in the morning, but he's having none of it and asks the receptionist to call him an ambulance. Andy is still scoffing Jim's kebab, but the poor guy is in so much pain, he doesn't give a fuck! Ambulance crew duly arrives and instantly diagnoses a broken/dislocated shoulder. So it's off to hospital for Jim. I half heartedly say I'll accompany him, but thankfully he's having none of it, so Andy & I retire to our rooms for the night, leaving Jim to get wheeled out to the waiting ambulance.

Following morning, I wake trying to remember what happened the previous night (as you do after a bevvv). Vaguely remember there being an ambulance, but kind of thought I had dreamt it until I get a knock at my door from my brother who tells me he's just saw Jim getting dropped off in a taxi with his arm in a sling.

We head down to the reception to find Jim holding court to the rest of our mates filling them in on what had happened the night before (too much guffawing as you can imagine). Jim proceeds to tell us that the doctors gave him his maximum dose of morphine to try and get him to fall over, but he'd had too much to drink it was having no effect - they had to wait for him to fall asleep naturally before being able to pop his shoulder back into place properly! So, for the actual game itself, he had his arm in this sling all day/night.

On the Thursday morning, we had to call into the hospital in order for him to collect his X-Ray's that confirmed he had broken a bone in his shoulder which would require an operation to fix.

As you know, that was over 2 years ago, and Jim has had no such operation, but his shoulder is still in constant pain. A permanent reminder of a memorable trip to the UEFA Cup Final!!

Paul Dunnachie

I was sitting there with a pregnant wife who was due a week later but ready to drop any second... a ticket in hand. The night before the final, she looked fit for popping and my trip to Manchester was cancelled. After dropping my mate off with the rest of the group travelling up, I drove home and blubbered like a baby all the way. For some reason I hadn't factored European Finals into the planning for the baby's arrival.

My second is child due Christmas Day, no cup finals this time around.

Robert McQueen

We arrived in Manchester pretty late that night, and already my Auntie's house was heaving. There must have been around 30 in the house that night. We found a space to sleep were possible, I was on the wooden floor in the living room. Bodies were strewn everywhere.

Steven Clifford

Before too long it was past midnight and officially Uefa Cup Final day. Rangers Football Club, the team I had followed for all of my 26 years had made it to a major European final and I was there to see.

Fraser Munro

We left the city centre around midnight that night and it was fair to say that

the bevy had taken its toll. Particularly on one of my brothers! Our digs were not exactly a mansion with me and my rather intoxicated brother sharing the living room. So just as I'm getting to sleep I get woken up to my brother trying to use the fire place as a toilet!

Kenny Scott

I went to bed with my head buzzing, knowing my team was in a European final the next day. A European final!

Bruce McAuliffe

I spent the night tossing and turning, just wishing for the morning to arrive.

Steven Clifford

It really was the most fantastic feeling in the world.

Alan Spiden

The next morning the excitement once again overtook all thoughts of any hangovers, and, around 8 or 9 we were awoken to the sound of a Lambeg drum and two or three flutes. Three or four of us headed into the street in time to watch an impromptu walk through the streets around our B&B. That got us back in the party mood right away and got the day off to a flying start and, after wandering around Blackpool (buying up dozens of "Rangers" Blackpool rock and getting some sea air in our lungs), we were on the bus and on our way to Manchester.

The Journey from Blackpool to Manchester was even more remarkable on that Wednesday morning than the one down from Scotland. This time the motorway was absolutely chockers with Rangers fans in all sorts of transport. I think that it was about this time that we began to realise just how many of us there were going to be in Manchester.

Jordan Dallas

When we arrived in Manchester it was like the Italian Job a la Rangers style.

John Macaulay

I guess my magic moment was standing outside Manchester airport in fabulous sunshine at 10am on the morning of the game thinking this is going to be our day.

(6)

THE BLUE TSUNAMI

My first sight of the Rangers fans was the cars with Union Jacks in them coming down Rochdale Road Middleton, many of the locals bemused by it all waving, and smiling as each car passed by.

ALAN FINERAN (MANCHESTER CITY FAN)

It was one of the largest mass movements of people in Europe since the Second World War.

Virgin trains sold 9,000 tickets on services bound for Manchester. Flybe alone reported that sales on its flights from Belfast, Glasgow and Edinburgh had risen by 50% compared to the same time last year for the Manchester route.

One hotel website, LateRooms.com, said it experienced a 500% increase in calls the Thursday before the final with 44% of its searches for rooms in Manchester on May 14.

Manchester Evening News, 7th May 2008

MEET THE GLASGOW PILGRIMS

Glasgow Rangers' European tour this season has taken in nine away matches in eight different countries. Everywhere they have played; there have been thousands of Scottish fans cheering them on. So with the final of the Uefa Cup being played just 220 miles down the road, three words spring to mind: Manchester, brace yourself.

It is not an over-exaggeration to suggest that more than 100,000 fans will descend on the city for next week's final against Zenit St Petersburg as, quite simply, the Glasgow club have a unique fanbase.

No ticket? No problem. No hotel? No problem. There is just that feeling among fans of Rangers that they HAVE to be there. It is like a pilgrimage.

Andy Cumming

Rangers had seemed terrified by the amount of people wishing to travel and somewhat farcically between them and Greater Manchester Police had estimated between fifty and seventy five thousand fans were likely to make the trip. Rangers and the authorities were told by fans groups that their estimates were wrong.

Alan Wardlaw

There was an article on the front page of the Evening Times explaining the chaos which would ensue for all rail travellers going to Manchester from

Glasgow, seemingly your ticket guarantees you the journey it doesn't guarantee you a specific train or a seat. So basically you had to join the queue and board whatever train you could. Not a great plan to ensure we were going to get there on time.

Alan Fineran (Manchester City Fan)

In the days leading up to the game, I swear that 80 % of Mancunian's knew nothing or next to nothing about the game, only football fans " in the know " had any idea of the sheer numbers of people involved..... or so we thought. We thought maybe around 100.000, but even we didn't know for sure.

It was only the evening before the game that Gordon Burns (of Krypton Factor fame), on the local Look North News warned people to avoid Manchester City Centre because of possible congestion, that locals finally began to digest what would be the greatest invasion of a City by football fans that Britain had ever witnessed.

Nick McAusland

Our bus left Gourock at 5am on the morning of Wed 14th May, under the cover of darkness and bound for Manchester. We hadn't got out of the car park at the Pierhead before the songs had started and the first cans of lager cracked open. The tiredness of getting up at 4am with only a few hours sleep had vanished, the adrenaline had kicked in and the party was underway.

Andy Cumming

The journey began with everyone on board full of optimism and just delighted to be going. Many on the bus never had tickets and had given up hope of obtaining any but that did not matter. This was one occasion that Rangers fans were not going to miss, no matter what.

Beer and champagne, vodka and wine were passed round, songs were being sung and tales of trips of previous rounds recalled. Several people were going mad with their cameras, taking pictures of everything and anything and the mood of excitement just grew as the journey progressed.

Original estimates stated that if all the buses travelling were placed bumper to bumper they'd have stretched for thirteen miles, in reality they'd have stretched much further than that!

Alan Wardlaw

So into action the usual organisers went, two hours later we had a minibus, but no-one wanted to drive, minibus cancelled. Later that afternoon we had a crew bus with a driver but he wanted a fuckin fortune, robbing bastard. Then we had two people carriers with one driver but no-one wanted to miss out on the undoubted bevvv session. Then came the best text yet –

*"PROBLEM SOLVED GUYS, GEORGE SQUARE,
6AM DEPARTURE, NO QUESTIONS, JUST BE THERE,
£100 A HEAD".*

Chris Thorburn

I believe there were around 6 Rangers fans travelled from New Zealand. Mostly from Auckland but there was definitely one that travelled from Lower Hutt near Wellington which, by my reckoning, made him the bloke with longest journey to Manchester.

On my trip home Auckland – Melbourne – Singapore - Dubai – Glasgow Around 28 hours flying time. I arrived in Glasgow around 7:30am the Friday before so that I could get to see the Dundee Utd game and take in the build up to the final.

Scott Jacobs

05:15am Tuesday 13th May 2008

Me

Sweetheart, would you like your coffee stirred clockwise or anti-clockwise?

Sweetheart

*Aw for goodness sake; I told you last night I was going into the office today;
therefore I had an extra hour in bed!*

But what do you say or do to a near fifty year old wean that can dilute the excitement of waking up on this sunny, Christmas Eve morn?

Douglas McIntosh

The time up to when we left seemed to go in so quickly. I remember not sleeping much the night before.

Mike Rennie

I Set the alarm for 3.15am....I needn't have bothered, I didn't get a wink.

Kenneth White

3.30am 14th May 2008.

Alarm goes off. I had been awake for half an hour already, my fear of missing my flight to Manchester burned into my sub-conscious and waking me. I drove to the airport with the strangest feeling ever going to a Rangers game. I'd made the journey to the airport to go to Rangers games before, but this time my stomach was churning like mad. Rangers in a European final. A European final.

To be honest that had been my mantra for the 2 weeks previous where I had day-dreamed my way through work and generally been a useless sod, killing time until the event that had been abbreviated to 'Manchester'.

Scott Jacobs

I got through that May Day Xmas Eve, but it was a drawn out experience. As night fell, off I skipped off, to my parents' house. My bruv and I were getting picked up at four the following morning from one of his mates, to 'beat the traffic', so we thought it was a good idea just to hook up Chez maw n paw and take it from there.

I have to say I was still in Xmas Eve mode. Now I know that life goes on, and some people get old apparently, and my parents now have a posse of grandkids and great grandkids and not just my bruv and I. But there we were, just the four of us, for the first time in goodness knows how long. Maw, paw and the two original brats.

At this point we had no tickets, no real hopes of getting one (I had already knocked back a couple of offers because I wasn't prepared to pay silly money) and just wanted to 'be there.'

But hey, Xmas Eve was coming to a close and I decided to call it quits at 11 pm and wait for Santa, I even got the top bunk, too. As we were going to bed, our old man stuck a score in each of our hands; 'Get a drink on me for the troops

tomorrow'. So there we were getting money at 11 pm and four hours later, we were getting breakfast laid on. There's not really much more I can add to that scenario; I am a product of the greatest couple I'll ever meet. Quite how they produced a pair like my brother and I though, will forever remain a mystery.

We de-bunked at 3:15 am the next morning, made their ablutions and our Mum was making our breakfast. Yup, Santa had arrived.

Mark Gourlay

Well my journey to Manchester started at 3am in the back of a black hack taxi! Me, my mate Jared, my brother, my dad, his two mates all the way from Memphis, Tennessee.

Jared was a guy I met 4 years previous during a soccer scholarship in Memphis. He was travelling Europe at the time and had emailed me saying he would be in Glasgow to see me from 13th May for 3 days. Fate I thought but unfortunately wasn't to be in the end. May I add the slide door was bugged on the taxi and it had to be held shut and the draught was horrendous but there was no way I was missing this day.

Mike Rennie

I Get to Gav's at 3.50am and he's up and ready. We hang two scarfs out the rear windows and we're off to join the throng of my people on the road south.

Rab Picken

I woke up on the morning of the game as Normal at 4am stomach churning with excitement. I was heading to Manchester to see the Rangers in a European cup Final but before that I had to go into work for a couple of hours.

So there I am on the Tube from Woodford (Essex) to Tottenham Court road on the central line. Normally I was suited and Booted but Today it was different, I had Rangers top Jeans and Trainers' on, I wanted all the people from London who always shot down Scottish football to know I was going to Manchester for A European Final to see The Glasgow Rangers.

The 30 min Tube journey was over in seconds I was on a high Loads of Londoners were wishing me all the best saying their 2nd team was Rangers and good Luck. I headed into work for what seemed an eternity.

My mate (Mick) who was a gooner but had been to see Rangers on a few occasions was coming with me as was a friend from Londonderry (Steve). I met

both at my work and headed off to get Breakfast

Alex Campbell

I was on my own driving up from home in London to Manchester, the very fact that I was actually on my own did not stop me singing at the top of my voice the whole way up! 2 tickets for the match in my glove compartment for the UEFA cup final, made it even sweeter! The very fact that my team was in the final, was, well simply the best!!

Robert McTeer

I headed down with three mates, two of whom I'd known since I was 5 years old. We took the Megabus down with other bears from all over Scotland. We set off in a good mood, I was hopeful and apprehensive all mixed into one, a few beers to settle the nerves and once the banter and songs started to fly I relaxed. I was sure to only have a few lagers on route as I wanted to remember the game. Arriving in Manchester it was clear to see not everyone was in the same frame as mind as myself.

Alan Wardlaw

George Square at 05:45 the place was heaving with Rangers fans. We stood for a while then round the corner came a stretch Hummer bedecked in Union Jacks and Red Hands, surely this couldn't be our ride..... feck me it was Ian Kilpatrick out the sun roof giving it laldy. 16 of us in the Hummer, absolutely brilliant. The bevvy started as the door closed & I remember pouring several vodkas and red bull, the party had begun.

Bryan Polland

When the big day arrived I set off from Maidstone in the pouring rain at just after 0600 hrs I was dressed in shorts and Rangers shirt along with my waterproof Gers jacket, the looks I got on the train from the commuters were priceless as I stood dressed like a drowned hobo!! One or two people gave me a knowing glance or nod as they knew exactly where I was going and I couldn't help grinning to myself occasionally as I still couldn't believe I would see my beloved team in a European final.

Douglas Dickie

We (The Toryglen True Blues) sent a convoy down to Manchester that morning. Among the travelers was myself, my Dad and my Ibrox neighbor Jamie.

We erred on the side of caution for now , no-one likes a drink at the football more than the three of us, but we hadn't waited this long to see Rangers in a European Final to spend it slumped down in some Manchester back alley.

For us it was to be down to Manchester and back after the game, although if we had won I doubt I would have made it home that night. As it was, I very nearly didn't anyway. The alarm went at 5.30am the bus was leaving at 7am.

Keith Thomson

I left a caravan in Ayr in the early hours of the morning the night before the game as I got a text from my mate who was travelling down saying the roads were chaos, so I bundled my wee boy who was one year old at the time into the car and made my way down.

Innes Walker

I was working as a lecturer in a Glasgow at the time. I couldn't get the Tuesday off so I had to get up at about 5.30am on the Wednesday to get a train from Central via York. As my pals went down on the Tuesday I had to go down on my own and was supposed to meet them down there.

I got off the subway at Buchanan St and walked down to Central station. When I turned into Gordon Street, everything suddenly turned blue. Gers fans everywhere rushing to get into the station, t-shirt and flag vendors, singing coming from the station. In the station the scenes were amazing with huge lines of barriers hemming in the thousands of our fans queing to get on the various trains just to be near our beloved club at one of the greatest hours in their history. All this at 6.30am!

I felt very proud and emotional, "35 years I've been supporting Rangers, waiting for this day" I thought. The train was packed full of bluenoses even whole extended families including grannys and grandweans.

The first stop was Waverley, Edinburgh and again the entire place seemed to have been painted royal blue as hundreds of east coast teddy bears clambered onto trains heading South. The scenes were honestly amazing and you had the feeling that about 2/3 of Scotland were heading to Manchester.

Christopher Cairns

My dad stayed in Germany so he got our tickets off a Bayern Munich fan and I booked the return train from Glasgow to Manchester (soon to be a big mistake!) I had a university exam in the morning, so I finished my exam, met up with my dad who had just flown over and we set off to get the train down.

We bumped into this bear who my dad met on the flight sober, and by now he was plastered, and apparently a completely different person. He has every joke in the book and made the journey seem shorter as his patter was non-stop!

Colin McHarg

The banter was excellent and I still laugh at the big guy who, having banged his head twice on the small luggage compartment while visiting the toilet, turned round on the third occasion to inform everyone that he'd finally remembered to duck, before stepping forward and, you've guessed it - cracking his head again!

Andrew Hunter

We had a 17 seater mini bus and we could have filled it twice over. We decorated the bus with numerous flags, Rangers, saltier, red hand, union flag, Ulster Scots , orange Standard etc... there was not a space on the bus that was not covered even the roof All done in Dalucianos car park at 06.30 in the morning

Iain Munroe

We were collected by one of about 20 luxury coaches at Ibrox and there were dozens of Bears I knew waiting in anticipation to board. There was some of the youth team travelling with us and the buzz was extraordinary – a quiet and restrained excitement was growing and you could hear in people's voices that this was a big big day.

Stepping on to that bus in the sunshine and waiting for it to move off seemed like an eternity and when it jolted out of its bay the growing euphoria was palpable.

The journey will be better described by others in this book – but it was almost life changing – I have never driven on a motorway anywhere in the world without thinking of that unbelievable convoy of Red, White and Blue.

The Evening Times, 13th May 2008

THE INVASION HAS BEGUN

A red, white and blue army left Ibrox Stadium today as a convoy of Rangers fans set off to join thousands already in Manchester. Every car, pick-up truck, transit van and mini-bus was covered in flags, balloons and scarves as around 200 vehicles began the journey through the city en route to Manchester, where tickets are selling for up to £2000. Music blared as CDs belted out Rangers songs and a deafening procession of tooting car horns signalled the start of the journey.

Nick McAusland

Imagine our joy when we spotted the obligatory Celtic top amongst the early morning workmen. Said builder was as bold as brass, happily hurling abuse at every passing vehicle. A one-man army against a Legion of thousands. For every gesture he pulled he must've received about a thousand in return. It must've been the longest shift of his life.

Lenny and Shirley Scott

Although I am now back living in Scotland, at the time of the UEFA run I was living and working in Canberra, Australia. When the semi final penalty shootout came to its conclusion the house was a riot. I immediately made plans to head home to Scotland.

Shirley and I arrived in Scotland on the Monday before the final. We had arranged to meet up with the convoy from Ibrox that was travelling the next day to Manchester.

What a sight that was. I reckon there were around 100 vehicles stretched out in the park. The convoy was so big we lost touch with many fans on the way down. The sight of the huge crowds on every motorway bridge however kept our spirits high.

Mick Bradley

Port Glasgow, Tesco's, 7am Wednesday 14th May 2008. The sky is blue, the sun is shining. Thank you Lord, I thought. The car was decked out in union flags

which we'd hunted for hours to get in the days leading up to this.

It seemed every red, white & blue flag in Greenock & even Port Glasgow had been bought. We got specially made Manchester iron on transfers for the flags, one of which I still have.

A quick headcount & I make it 22 people in 5 cars. "Brian, does Henry own a campsite"? We'll be fine". Says he, again. Off we go, the Greenock - Manchester convoy. Nothing could have prepared us for the sight on the road south.

Andrew Hunter

As we got underway and it was a mixture of singing and banter, I had made some CD's for the trip as you may have picked up I had time on my hands. Particularly popular were the ITV commentary from the Fiorentina game and some excerpts from last night of the proms along with every other Saturday and of course the gone but never forgotten Billy boys. A new favorite was the famine song which was enjoyed with much hilarity.

Colin McHarg

For some reason, possibly because we were leaving on the Tuesday morning, I presumed the passenger list would be predominantly Rangers based with a small scattering of businessmen and holidaymakers making up the numbers. Forget the hangers on - It was one hundred per cent wall to wall bears (or window to window in this case) giving the impression of a regular supporters bus which meant no holds barred in a singing sense.

Kenny Scott

There was no talk of work, or women, or worries, just the excited chit chat of football supporters on their way to a once in a lifetime event. Even the train had a tremendous buzz about it.

Alistair Gourlay

I went with my supporters club, (The Yorkhill True Blues), we left at 7 and headed for Preston where we were staying. A morning of drinking and watching the Red, White and Blue Convoy down the Motorway had begun.

Greg Martin

My best mate Ross and I only decided to go down to Manchester a week before the final. We'd both struggled with money for the few months prior but we did what we could to get the cash together, tactically planned my mate's business mileage in his company car and we were on our way at 8am from my flat in Edinburgh on the day of the final!

Due to the fact that we didn't plan the trip in advance, we had no accommodation booked and we were very much flying by the seat of our pants for the trip.

One of the things I remember most vividly is the sheer number of cars on the motorways, even coming out of Edinburgh. Within 5 minutes of getting on the motorway, it became apparent that about 90 % of the cars & minibuses on the road were heading to Manchester to join in the party.

Alan Spiden

The journey is one that will live with me forever. It is without doubt the best away trip I have ever been on, all the regulars from our supporters club were joined on the bus by those from other supporters clubs and those who were just determined to be there and part of Rangers history.

Andrew Hunter

I remember there being a hold up, I think a car had broken down and the bus went slightly quiet but we got moving again and the singing and banter resumed.

Robert McQueen

The highlight was definitely the traffic jam. We got stuck about 3 hours into the journey and it was a standstill. At that point a bus load of bears got off their bus and done the bouncy on the motorway. Then a few got out of cars and joined in. It ended up a big party on the motorway. Best traffic jam ever!!

Greg Martin

My favorite moment of the journey down was that traffic jam. We were stuck next to a rickety unsafe looking mini-bus that was resplendent in the red, white & blue and just when we pulled up next to them they realized that the queue of traffic wasn't going anywhere in the near future, so the mini-bus emptied and the boys all had a cigarette in the sunshine, and we decided to join them for the banter.

What followed can only be described as a miniature al-fresco sash bash to the music that was blasting out of their decidedly poor stereo speakers. All the boys were serenading the surrounding cars, and we even managed to get a few of the drivers and passengers out of their cars to join in the fun.

Nick McAusland

We marched onward to the Lakes as the volume of traffic increased around us. The flow of Red, White & Blue vehicles never subsided; it only grew larger and louder. As the journey continued down the M6 we spotted a bit of commotion up ahead. The hazard warning lights of the cars in front were flashing as the traffic put the anchors on. Something appeared to be obstructing the carriageway and vehicles were swerving to avoid it. As we drew closer we could see exactly what the problem was... a Rangers jersey! The traffic refused to drive over it. The shirt was afforded the respect it deserved.

Mick Bradley

"Rangers Roadkill" as we called it. Thousands of flags, banners, scarves. You name it, they were lying by the roadside, one of mine duly joined them, ripped off by the wind as the vehicles streamed out of Scotland, heading to what would become the biggest movement of people since Moses crossed the Dead Sea in Noah's ark & led his people to safety from the Nazis (or the 150,000 manks that went to Suville: The Scottish Press). We truly were The People. This was turning into a very special day.

Keith Thomson

On the way down you could actually see where busses had taken piss stops as there were scarves and flags next to the hard shoulder, I remember saying something like "Manchester we are coming".

Nick McAusland

The carriageway had become a car park, and the embankment a makeshift lavatory. One unlucky punter was unfortunate enough to be accosted by road traffic officer's mid-flow to be issued with a fixed penalty notice – pretty harsh considering the other 20 guys from his bus had managed to relieve themselves and hot tail it back on board!

Alan Wardlaw

Yes the obligatory 16 guys on the hard shoulder pish session. One of the guys who will remain nameless was bollock naked on the hard shoulder, I looked at my mate Billy and pointed at my watch it was no more than 8am and here all of us licking windaes and a streaker to boot.

George Lynch

We knew it would be a mad day when a guy ran passed us on the hard shoulder when we were stopped, wearing nothing but a pair of timberland boots and a Rangers scarf!

Mark Dale

When the traffic started to move I'm sure most of us cars behind would have happily let them wait until it picked up the last two lads. However the driver decided he had to drive off (perhaps on purpose and the rest of the Bears in onboard were all laughing at them).

So for the next 10 minutes or so, in my rear view mirror was the sight of these two lads running, desperately trying to catch up with their ride, but they kept getting within about 3 cars before the traffic started moving again. Bear in mind it was quite a hot and sunny day, and these two lads were already tanked up on booze, so they looked absolutely knackered.

Eventually it did pull over. But it was a funny sight to see two Bears running down the middle of the M6.

Steven Clifford

Cammy and I boarded the bus from Glasgow city centre on the short journey to Glasgow airport for our 9am flight to Manchester. We managed to be leaving at the same time as most of the unofficial Rangers party, the John Browns and Mark Hateleys of this world, who were excellent company as we propped up the Airport bar, who cared if it was early, I was having a pint! By the time of landing in Manchester it's safe to say we were suitably merry.

David Frew

We started our journey at Waverley train station in Edinburgh. As soon as we entered the station there was already a buzz of excitement in the air, with the train station full with fellow Rangers fans waiting on the next train to Manchester. Normally you would need to look at the information screens to find out which train you had to get on but there was no need in this case.

As soon as it was time to board the train we followed a sea of blue onto the train and we took our seats. Neither my flat mate nor I had a ticket for the final but both of us just wanted to be there to sample the atmosphere.

Lawson Barrie

We had a Train booked from Edinburgh to Manchester at around 9am. 5 of us headed through by car to Edinburgh to meet my Cousin at his flat, the excitement was killing me!

We picked up Minty on route; he was at the top of his road waving his flag to the passing cars. A 35 year old acting like a 5 year old at Christmas time, and I wasn't much better! The train down was great banter with some particularly witty songs being sung and everyone in great spirits.

Our 1st bad decision of the day had been made though; we didn't bring a carryout for the train. We heard reports that the train companies would be very strict about alcohol, so we decided not to risk out. Just as well we got to Manchester before all of the beer was sold out!

Rab Picken

We got to Euston station at 10:00 am for the 13:00 train to Manchester we had already eaten and had a couple of cans of beer in a bag; It was awash with Rangers and Zenit St Petersburg fans the atmosphere was fantastic, the police were fantastic, the pub on the top concourse was fantastic as fans all around us enjoyed themselves.

Alistair Gourlay

Once in Preston we jumped on a Train to Manchester, we ended up split up due to weak bladders so the club separated into 2 different trains. My 'happy bottle' had managed to find its way on the wrong train much to my disappointment but I soon forgot about it as the sing song started.

John Punton

At 10:00 am we got on the Preston to Manchester train at Blackpool North. There was only about twelve bears waiting to get on plus some locals so at the time so I really didn't think much about it but as the train got to Blackpool the crowd of bears that had gathered there was unreal. The train soon filled up and we were on our way leaving at least another 4-5 train worth's of people at the station.

I was standing next to a local who said he was on this train every week and had never seen it so full; I don't think he could really understand what was going on. As the train went through its daily stops to let folk on or off locals who probably got that train every single day couldn't get on as it as we were all going to the last stop. If it was me I'd have just went home for the day as the next trains would have been exactly the same. How do you explain that one to your boss?

Douglas Dickie

We could have been handed a more exotic destination on the continent for the final but it is unlikely the weather would have been any better.

After leaving the bus and a few beers we headed for the train station, it could have been mistaken for jumping off at Ibrox underground. It was a sea of blue, I doubt anyone had ever seen anything like it, and I doubt they ever will.

Along with thousands of others we crammed our way into a tiny carriage which literally rolled into the centre as we regaled the locals with that well known classic, The Bouncy.

David Frew

It was the first time in my life that I could actually feel the train bouncing as we bounced up and down full of excitement.

Jamie Peters

It was a great journey down (Minus a very unhappy partner who was left in Glasgow on her own, which she loves to remind me about) I simply assumed that it could not be the case that so many cars were down to the Rangers fans. We were barely out of Glasgow at this point! It quickly dawned on us that the traffic was purely of Rangers.

The traffic eventually came to a crawl and it was only about 10:00 am. Every car was full of jubilant Rangers fans. That was something that stuck out for me; a seeming lack of nervousness about the game about to unfold and instead a total party atmosphere. An atmosphere unlike any I had ever come across at any event I have been to.

David Frew

Everyone I spoke to on the journey down to Manchester was saying the same thing, “We’ve come too far this year to lose now” and I suppose I bought into that view myself!

Jamie Peters

In that drive down, there were the sights I am sure that tens of thousands of other fans seen, the mini-buses or camper vans pumping out Simply The Best so I am sure their words can do it justice a lot more than I can. What a feeling, what a sight and what a sound is all that I can say. These small details apart, there does generally seem to be a blur from leaving home in Glasgow to arrival in Manchester.

I believe the total influx of adrenalin to the system stops many of these memories in the same way that a sky-diver probably doesn’t remember take-off in advance of the main event.

Del McDuff

I cannot begin to describe the buzz, and we’ve not even had a beer yet. The journeys peppered with what seemed like everybody in world suddenly wearing Gers stuff.

Douglas McIntosh

It didn’t really hit home what we were doing or where we were going until we were crossing into England on the motorway. Every car we passed seemed to have flags, scarfs, hats, banners and in some cases paintings.....all Rangers. It was the strangest drive to Manchester I have ever had. We stopped off a couple of times on the way down to use toilets and refuel; it seemed the whole of Scotland was on that motorway on the Tuesday. Gers fans everywhere!

Alan Spiden

All I could think of was the stories of Barcelona '72 that I'd been brought up on and here was MY Rangers team going to a European final. Emotions ran through my head one after the other, joy, panic (will I get a ticket?), but most of all, complete and utter pride.

After a couple of hours on the road we started to see the convoys of Rangers buses, vans and cars travelling in the same direction down the M6 and, although I have always felt part of the Rangers "family", that journey confirmed to me what it is to be a Rangers fan. To see so many people with the one purpose, to follow their team and to know that they were feeling the same things as me and my compatriots on our bus was quite overwhelming.

Colin McHarg

There was a real sense of belonging, that you were a part of something, a feeling of we really are the people. Complete strangers became mates, busloads of unacquainted bluenoses became one, and you really did believe that you were contributing to a little piece of history in the making. As I boarded my bus and noticed queues of supporters standing in line as we pulled away, I knew we were bound for a never to be forgotten trip with enough memories to last a lifetime.

The Herald, 12th May 2008

'YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO TO MANCHESTER'

IT'S a promise from one of the club's very own legends, Mark Hateley: "You don't have to go to Manchester." With upwards of 100,000 making the journey to the English city, fans left behind in Glasgow have been assured an unforgettable night as Rangers lay on a party for 25,000 stay-at-home supporters.

It had initially been suggested that big screens would be erected in Glasgow's George Square but it was decided after talks between Rangers and Glasgow City Council that Ibrox should be the focus of Glasgow's celebrations.

Stephen Sinclair

To be honest, I hadn't been to an away game with Rangers for a few years, so the thought of sitting at home and watching the game in the comfort of my own home rather than travelling down to Manchester without a ticket and to stand

and watch with my fellow supporters didn't really bother me. After all, a few years previously I had given up my season ticket of 20 years and had got out of the habit of going to watch Rangers regularly, home and away with my wife Louise, my brothers Johnny, Alan and Scott and my dad.

You see, I had always gone to the match with my dad since I was 5 years old. He was always there. His love for Rangers was part of a bond that made our relationship as father and son so very special. I cannot remember a match that I attended when my dad was not at my side. We suffered together during the Celtic 9-in-a-row and we celebrated together when it was our 9-in-a-row. How we enjoyed 'Helicopter Sunday' is something I will never forget.

In 2002 my dad's eyesight started to deteriorate and he started to miss the games because he could no longer make out the players or where the ball was. His season ticket was taken up for the rest of that season by my other brother. But I missed my dad being there. I did not renew for the following season or any season after that. I hardly attended any matches, home or away, after that so, I would bring my dad up to my house to watch the live Rangers games on the, 40" widescreen', where he sat in his usual place, bang in front of the telly, just to the side. In December 2007, my dad passed away.

On the eve of our UEFA Cup Final in Manchester, I was still adamant that I wasn't travelling to Manchester. My brother Johnny 'phoned, practically begging for me to go down. My wife kept saying I should go down. My mother said that I should go. But, I couldn't, I was working next day anyway and couldn't just walk out of my work and go down to Manchester to watch a football match! Anyway, later that night, the telly is blaring out in the living room and all I hear is this commotion emanating from it. The Scottish news is on and the report is all about Rangers fans leaving for Manchester in different modes and costumes and every one of them with a big smile on their faces.

For the first time I start doubting my decision not to go to Manchester. The phone rings again. It's my brother asking if I have changed my mind. I tell him 'no, I have work tomorrow anyway'. It's left at that as I go to my bed looking forward to us maybe lifting the UEFA Cup.

On the day of the final the phone rings again. It's my mother this time. 'I think you should go down to Manchester with Johnny and Louise'.

I explained to her, 'Ma, I can't I'm working. I won't get time off!' 'Look, just get down there, you'll regret it if you don't!' 'Look ma, I'm not goin to Manchester. End of' 'Right. Ok. Forget it!'

The phone is put down. I'm probably too scared to admit to myself at this point that the real reason I'm not goin' to Manchester is because it would be the first time that I had went to a Rangers away game and my dad wouldn't be at my side or in my home watching it on the big telly.

The day rolls by and by 10.00am, in my mind; my decision not to go to Manchester is really being doubted. I look out of the office windows and I notice a line of cars heading out of their street bedecked in red, white and blue. Balloons, flags, people tooting their horns, radios turned right up, blaring out Rangers party tunes, people hanging out of car windows being cheered as they leave for Manchester.

I hear my dads' voice in my head. 'Get down to Manchester son, and cheer the Rangers on to victory!' My minds made up. I immediately down tools. My colleagues at work are encouraging me. 'Go for it! Get down there! Never mind your work. These things don't happen often. Away ye' go!' I approach my boss. 'Ach, it's probably time you're owed anyway! Go and enjoy yourself! See you tomorrow'.

I phone my wife Louise just as she's leaving for work. 'We're going' to Manchester!' 'But I'm just ready to step on the train to go to my work' she says. 'Well step right back off it again! We're goin' to Manchester!'

I phone my brother Johnny. He's at home devastated he'll not be in Manchester. 'Johnny, get your things together. We're goin!' 'Great. Brilliant.' He says 'Andrew, (my nephew) wants to go as well. Is that okay?' 'No probs. It's 11.00am and Manchester here we come!'

Robert McQueen

All the buildup was incredibly exciting. It seemed like every man and their dog was heading down. I remember watching the news and seeing footage of the convoy setting off.

Bruce McAuliffe

The Dunfermline Loyal we're running a bus to the final and I had taken the daughter out of school as I did not want her to miss the trip.

We left Dunfermline at 11.00am and Broke down at 11.02am!!!! I still remember waiting at the side of the road and the passing cars were blasting their horns and wishing us good luck. We even made the Real Radio traffic report!!!

Scott Jacobs

The Glasgow accent on the car radio soon turned into a north of England one and Gordon and his brother Graeme decided we would stop off at the service station at Carlisle as they wanted a bite to eat.

We were now in Lancashire accent territory on the radio and it seemed like every ten minutes they were mentioning this phenomenon, this Cavalcade jauntily heading down the M6 to Manchester. One guy, Joe from Blackpool, phoned into say every three cars in four, was awash with Rangers scarves and banners. I think he mentioned there was the odd Union Jack thrown in too. He said he had never seen an explosion of color like this in his puff. Neither had we Joe, neither had we.

Craig Kirkwood

We tuned the radio into the local station and the DJ had brought a family of Gers fans into the studio and surprised them by giving them tickets to the game. How jammy were they!

Malcolm Clark

Every motorway bridge in Scotland was festooned with flags, banners, & wildly cheering bears.

Douglas Dickie

All I can say is it was truly "the greatest sight that I have ever seen".

Mike Rennie

11.30am and I'm standing on a bridge at junction 42 on the M6 (Carlisle) with my Gers top on and watching the cars/mini busses/vans, decked with scarves and flags flash their lights and wave to me. In every 2nd vehicle there were Bears and Bearettes smiling and waving and tooting their horns. I stood there for half an hour, waving back. In that 30 minutes I must have seen a thousand Rangers fans...."This is going to be mental, Manchester is in for a huge surprise", I thought.

The anticipation was unbelievable; I was going to Manchester to be part of history. No ticket, I wasn't caring....I was going to be amongst my people.

Right, I'm off down the road, about 5 miles to Southwaite services.....The place is mobbed and there is hardly a space to park. "Jesus Christ, this is

mental".

Scott Jacobs

It was early morning and the place was awash with red, white and blue. Oh, and there were plenty of empty beer bottles too.

Alan Spiden

It soon became clear that this was no normal services. It had gone through a Rangersification and had been completely transformed into a haven of red, white and blue.

Jamie Peters

The service station was completely packed with Rangers fans. Every space seemed to be taken up with members of the Blue Tsunami. All sporting Rangers tops, or an entertaining t-shirt!

Robert McQueen

You couldn't help but join in the sing song with random bears.

Stephen Macleod

Our sport for the day was spotting the many RSC clubs from all over the globe, on flags, banners and polo shirts. Too many to mention – the world had come to see the Rangers.

Alan Spiden

Fans sat in their cars, songs playing on their CD players, fans engaged in several games of football in the car park, and fans running full pelt into the toilets after holding on for 3 hours!

Nick McAusland

The place was overrun with Bluenoses, some already the worse for wear despite it being early morning. It was hard not to laugh at a heavy-set middle-aged woman, clearly under the influence, who couldn't find her bus for love nor money.

Andrew Hunter

It really was incredible; the service station was awash with Blue. Bears everywhere! It looked awesome as every second car pulling in had a Rangers flag or occupants with a Rangers top on. We bumped into my wife's cousin and his daughter who had managed to get tickets via the uefa ballot a few months earlier and as Derek joked. I always knew I would be watching the rangers when I put in for these!!

Steven Wilson

Even driving along the M56 from North Wales I could see huge numbers of cars with the red, white and blue travelling west towards Manchester. This isn't right I thought where are they coming from? By the time we were entering the outskirts it was virtually a traffic jam of cars, coaches and mini buses all heading towards the city centre with their colours out the window.

Ian Nicol

If it wasn't for my mate I would've missed the Granite City bus that morning as my alarm clock broke and I was out drinking with my dad and a few of his cronies the night before. We travelled down from Aberdeen with just one stop on the way.

Colin McHarg

I'll bet those regular motorists who normally play 'spot the Eddie Stobart lorry' enjoyed the alternative version of pointing out a Rangers vehicle. Scores would have been in the thousands.

Andrew Hunter

My mate's dad, who is a lorry driver, was driving up from London and said he couldn't believe the volume of cars travelling and described it as 'incredible' passing them all with a flag or scarf hanging out the window, waves and thumbs up were being exchanged all the way down the motorway.

Mike Rennie

I drive back home to Carlisle and phone my Brother who's in Lockerbie to tell him....He's as excited as I am. Gee, I'm 45 and he's 43 and we're like 5yr olds on Christmas Eve!

Susan MacMillan

The morning of the final my son David was sitting his higher Business Studies so I picked him up at lunch time car decked out in all its finery and we drove to Manchester. My daughter had travelled down from Edinburgh on a plane which she describes as the smallest she had ever been on and was lucky to leave the runway she too had an exam that day at Edinburgh Uni but there was no way as a family were missing this.

Malcom Clark

I was up early that morning to get ready (me kilted) as my son arrived and dumped the car. My daughter went to Tesco & came back with a crate of Beer, & numerous sandwiches, & snacks for us during the day before dropping us at the station. Where we stood for 10 minutes before one of the staff informed us that not one single train had stopped there all morning.

After a call to my daughter...rescue us please. We set off on the road in her Porche loaded with goodies. The roads were mobbed, Taxis from Glasgow, Blackpool & every place around Manchester were belting up the taxi lane music blaring, & bears having a ball.

Steven Clifford

Beers and singsong aside there was another memorable moment as we approached Manchester. One ugly cretin wearing a Celtic strip, the only one which polluted the air on our trip, began to taunt the bus which was met by a defiant and deafening cry of no surrender back at him. Fitting it was that he should turn and walk straight into the Job Centre which was met by a joyous roar of laughter from all aboard the bus.

Dave Croall

At the time my Grandad, who has been a Ibrox regular since the late 40's was just recovering from a hit and run and was also waiting on test results to see if he had lung cancer, so unfortunately he was unable to make the trip.

When we were about half way down I got the call I was expecting from my

Gran. Unfortunately the tests were positive and my grandad had lung cancer.

To be honest I was not surprised, as we were told to expect this, but I just wished that he could of been on this trip as since he started taking me to Ibrox when I was four years old and we had always talked about the day that me and him would walk into a stadium somewhere to see the 'Gers in a Euro final. Even though I was distraught to here this terrible news, I will never forgot what my Grandad said to me on the phone as we were on the way to Manchester. *'David, just bring that trophy back'*.

Even now I got hairs on the back of my neck thinking back. However, as we all know it was not to be and although I have many stories from Manchester, the sing songs, the parties, the laughs and the tears - this is the one that sticks out in my mind and I guess the one story that really shows what it is like to be a Ranger and why we really are the people.

Douglas Dickie

We were soon past Bolton and as we edged into Manchester. A pub in Stretford was our first destination. On the outskirts of Manchester we expected to be isolated, but nothing could be further from the truth. Even here, miles outside the centre, everyone was wearing blue.

Greg Martin

The closer we got to Manchester, the greater the concentration of cars decked out in our colours. The closer we got, the louder it seemed to get and the anticipation was seriously building for the game. Every time we turned a corner the number of fans on the street was getting higher, until we got 5 minutes from the fan-zone and it was absolute BEDLAM!

Donna Sevwright

When we reached Manchester and seen the streets covered in bears enjoying the sun our bus started rocking with most of the bus doing the bouncy which caused some strange looks from people passing by. The poor drivers head must have been pounding but we did have a whip round so he could buy some painkillers and drink once he got rid of us.

Colin McHarg

Our poor driver was afforded a chorus of "the driver willnae sing the sash so he's a Tim" following his reluctance to exercise his tonsils in accordance with the policy of the day - everybody gies it laldy!

Alex Campbell

My wife is from Manchester and her parents have a flat which was available that weekend.

We met up at the in laws flat, the lads had brought "one or two" beers which were promptly opened and the rest were loaded into the rucksacks. It was one in the afternoon and we had decided to head into town 'early' to soak up some of the pre-match atmosphere! For some reason, we thought that walking was the best course of action. Bad call!

We must have walked about 3 miles and hadn't even made a dent in the journey towards the city centre. We had to stop at the next bus stop. We we're in Swinton which is roughly 15 miles away from town and the heat that day wasn't doing us any favours. Hardly a Ben Fogle/James Cracknell/Ed Coats-esk expedition by the same token!

We were there waiting in a bus stop for about half an hour watching countless supporters buses rocking down the East Lancashire Road and into town, I'd say roughly 99.9 % beeped their horns when the driver clocked our colours, although none of the swines actually offered us a lift! That was until, out of nowhere a black Audi swung into the bus stop. Fantastic, we all thought, another bear doing what we would and offer us a lift on his way to a game!

There was a slight difference though as there were no colours, no songs blasting out and no apparent Glaswegian accent! Just an ordinary fella who boldly proclaimed in his Manc accent "My mate is in the Macclesfield True Blues and I made a promise to him that if I seen any lads stuck on their way to the game, I'd pick them up" A trusting move given there were 4 of us!

It turned out he was involved in Eccles Rugby Club, the same place we're both my wife's cousin's play! Small world indeed and summed up the attitude of the locals that day.

Jamie Peters

I am sure many fans can relate to the huge sense of pride that started to grow as you got nearer to Manchester, as the roads got busier, as the singing got louder...the size of our club never fails to amaze me.

David Wilkinson

It was an amazing feeling and it was one of the moments when you were proud to be a Rangers fan (in fact I am getting goose bumps just remembering this).

Alan Fineran (Manchester City Fan)

My first sighting of the Rangers fans was the cars with Union Jacks in them coming down Rochdale Rd Middleton, many of the locals bemused by it all waving, and smiling as each car passed by.

(7)

WHIPPIN' PICCADILLY

*Once upon a time, not too long ago,
we took a day out in Manchester
we all fall down, there's not enough hours in the day
played a bit of football, fell into the union
Barged our way into the toilet,
with the kung fu king there's not enough hours in the day.*

WHIPPIN PICCADILLY – GOMEZ

The Daily Record, 14th May 2008

WE'RE 24HR PARTY PEOPLE;

WAITING IS ALMOST OVER FOR IBROX ARMY

Rangers fans painted Manchester red, white and blue yesterday. The advance guard of the expected 100,000 took over the city centre on the eve of the Uefa Cup final against Zenit. They sang and danced in the sunshine as temperatures soared into the 70s at the start of a 24-hour party. At the Cathedral Gardens fanzone, flags, scarves and banners were draped from every pub and hotel window.

David Wilkinson

We all woke up on the Wednesday a little bit worse for wear. Me and my mate Condie went down and sat outside waiting on everyone else getting ready and what not.

All of a sudden our mate Irvine comes bursting out of the hotel and runs straight by us, he gets to the bottom of the hotel drive way, picks up a pizza box and then proceeded to launch it away. He was walking back up the drive slowly looking all over the ground and his face was as white as a ghost. Condie then turned to me and said "he has lost his ticket" we giggled slightly and then thought awww naw!!!

When he finally got to us and we asked him what was up he & confirmed that he couldn't find his ticket for the final anywhere! It wasn't until about half an hour searching Galway found it in his room under the bed.

Turns out he had came in rather drunk and decided that he was sleeping with his wallet but obviously when he was sleeping the wallet has fell between the bed and the floor and he had forgot that he had went to sleep with it. We were all mightily relieved when he found it as that may have put a dampener on the whole event!

Gary Tedford

I woke up at 5am and put the TV on. That prick Chris Hollins who does the BBC breakfast Sport was reporting live from Picadilly Gardens. There must have been 2,000 bears already there giving it laldy.

Stuart Cooper

We had a few drinks on the Tuesday before retiring to bed. However, none of us could sleep and we all woke up about 6 am on the day of the Final. It was here at last and when we looked out the window, we couldn't believe it. It was as if, overnight, half of Scotland, the blue half of course, had been transported to the North of England. My dad and brother had been part of the twilight "Blue Tsunami" and were now also in town.

Bruce McAuliffe

I got up at 6.30am and went for a walk to clear the head only to be met with the sound of the BILLY BOYS filling the air!! I wandered up to Piccadilly and could not believe my eyes. It was packed and this was at 7.00am in the morning.

Mike Rennie

It's 8am and Albert Square is already busy. We find a bench to have a wee rest and watch the locals trying to negotiate their way to work; through the thousands of Gers fans who are already opening cans of beer and having a wee sing song. It's good to be here, it's sunny and there's already a good atmosphere. A few guys from Ayr are standing next to us; one of them offers us a drink. "No thanks mate, we won't last the day if we start now!"

We find a "greasy spoon" and decide its breakfast time. There are a dozen bears in there already, they must've just got off a bus and some of them were steaming drunk. It was funny watching one of them trying to order a fry-up in a drunken Glasgow accent. The Turk behind the counter didn't have a clue what he was asking for.

Robert McQueen

We got up early that morning, had some breakfast and set off into Manchester centre early. We passed by Old Trafford on the way in for a few quick photos. We then arrived in Piccadilly to find a sea of blue already amassed. It was only 9am! There was great atmosphere, the sun was already shining and the beer was flowing.

Douglas McIntosh

I stuck the television on and was greeted with the sight of a live report from Piccadilly in Manchester. It was 9am and the place was bouncing with bears. Some great interviews were given to the camera that morning and we decided it was time to get up, get washed and get into town!

The sight that met us was unimaginable! Manchester was red, white and blue from top to bottom! Statues had union flags in their hands, flags were draped over every chair, banister, stairway.....it was a fantastic sight.

Steven Hogg

On the morning of the game I picked up my fellow FF bear, we introduced ourselves and headed off to the airport with big smiles on us both. Arriving early at the Dublin airport I was amazed to see so many people in Gers tops. It looked amazing, and even the taxi driver wished us good luck for the game. A few beers, a few songs jump on the plane, a few more beers and songs and we arrive in Manchester.

At the airport it immediately becomes clear that this is going to be massive. There are people in Rangers tops everywhere, all streaming to the trains to take us into the centre of town, where I couldn't believe the amount of people all singing, smiling, drinking and wearing Gers tops...everywhere you looked there were Gers fans. A sea of blue.

Alistair Fyfe

If I thought it was full of Gers fans the night before I was stunned by the number of blue shirts everywhere I went. In one of the shopping malls I took the escalator up to the food court, where it seemed that every seat was taken by someone in a Gers top.

It was like a scene staged for an advert. I eventually thought I should get out of the city centre, so took a tram to the Lowry Museum. Even there, outside the adjacent shopping centre, the restaurant tables were full of people in blue Gers tops.

On my way back to the city centre the tram had to stop because the streets were too crowded for the trams to move safely through them, so everyone had to walk a mile or so into town. The locals on the train were incredulous. A couple of commuters asked me, "Isn't the match at night?" and one old boy stopped me just to say, "I'm told there are still more on the way?"

Fraser Munro

My Rangers kilt and strip was proudly on and I was ready to go. Getting the train from Warrington, I couldn't believe my eyes. I don't think the train quite knew what was going on as we gave a good few renditions of the 'Bouncy' to make the short journey more enjoyable. I'm surprised it never came off the tracks! The train was rammed full of bears ready to make sure this was a day to remember!

Scott Jacobs

After Gordon and Graeme had checked into their hotel, just outside Warrington, we got the train into Manchester Piccadilly. By this time their brother in law, Steve, had joined us (and more about him later) and the hunt for our hotel was on.

The Hotel Britannia was soon discovered and after more ablutions were made, it was time to greet the brand new day. By this time it must have been around 10:45 and all you could see was a city awash with blue. Van Gogh might have done yellow and sunflowers in a medium sort of way. We do blue, extra large.

Stuart Cooper

Having arrived in Manchester, we bought a blow-up doll from the local Ann Summers shop, christened her Rhona, stuck a Rangers top on her. Rangers were here alright! We also had our photos taken at the Town Hall with the UEFA Cup, and interrupted a couple of live Russian TV interviews with a medley of Rangers songs, before bumping into Gary McSwegan. Not only that, but we met one of our old teachers who had “dogged” school when he really should have been there with it being exam time and everything, and he encouraged us to join him in a chorus of “Derry’s Walls.” Surreal.

Mick Bradley

We headed for our train to Manchester via Preston. What a shock. Every train that passed through was jam packed with bears. It looked like those trains you see in Japan where they stuff as many bodies as possible on. Anyway, somehow, me, Scott & number 2 son got on one of the trains, leaving the rest to make their own way. What a scream. The Bears were everywhere, passing round everything from Buckfast to spliffs. Not a cross word spoken, just hundreds of people on

this train with one thing on their mind, to go have a good time whilst supporting their team in a European Final.

Bryan Polland

The train tannoy announced 'We are now approaching Manchester Piccadilly that was the cue for me to phone my family and friends who had travelled from Greenock to arrange a meeting point within Piccadilly fan zone.

David Frew

We arrived at Piccadilly train station and the carriage doors opened. What I saw then will live with me for eternity. A sea of blue shirts and flags filled the platform and we squeezed ourselves off the train onto the platform and up the escalator which lead into the station. As we walked through the station, with "Derry's Walls" ringing in our ears we spotted a group of about 10 Zenit fans standing looking in sheer amazement at the number of Rangers fans and how we had seemed to takeover Manchester.

Jamie Peters

I was looking to swap tops with a Russian but such was our numbers in the city that I barely seen any Zenit fans never mind got close enough to swap anything.

Christopher Cairns

When we got off at the train station we had no idea where to go at first, the centre was just a sea of blue.

Colin McHarg

The adrenaline rush when entering the city was unlike anything I've ever known. The noise was unbelievable and that sensation I mentioned that we were the people was totally overwhelming. It was as if we were on a mission. The decibel level seemed to force passersby to look in our direction and I'd swear the bus was actually bouncing towards the Piccadilly stance.

Steven Wilson

On entering the city centre the enormity of the occasion and the sheer volume of our fans started sink in.

Jamie Peters

The arrival did of course confirm how we really were taking over the city of Manchester. I arrived at about 11am and walked, or that should be *attempted* to walk, through one of the main squares, Piccadilly. It was completely packed. Like our defence of Weir and Cuellar the previous rounds: there was no way through.

George MacDonald

It took my breath away. A sea of Red, White and Blue covering the whole city it seemed.

David Wilkinson

Seeing that amount of Rangers fans in once place was just breath taking. I loved the way that we were all talking and mingling with each other like we had all knew each other for years.

Craig Kirkwood

It was amazing how much of a family occasion this had turned into with men, women and children of all ages everywhere you looked.

John Hendry

Obviously the numbers grew and grew as the day wore on - just amazing. I had been to the 1967 final but Manchester was something very different.

Rab Picken

I had never seen a sight like it in my 40 years following Rangers I was too young to go to Barcelona in 72 but my father told me all about it even though I seen it on telly. I now know what he was talking about.

Mike Rennie

I phone my old dad who was in Barcelona in 1972 to tell him there must be a million Rangers fans here. He tells us to stay safe and behave.....he's like that, my old man.

Jordan Dallas

In my all my life I don't think I will ever see such a sight! The only way to describe it would be, not so much a sea of blue, more a blue tsunami.

Chris Thorburn

I met up with a few more mates from Clydebanks and we basically sat and watched the Square fill up with thousands of fans in the roasting hot sun. This will be my lasting memory of Manchester.

Murdo Euan MacLennan

The day itself was a mixture of emotions for me. My dad was texting me all through the big day, asking for photos, listening to songs etc. I knew he was gutted he wasn't there.

Craig R Morton

As a Rangers supporter, supporting the club since my Dad took me to my first game at Ibrox in August 1993, this was the biggest and best experience I have had with the club. I remember thinking about the people that spoke about Barcelona '72 and that I would probably hold Manchester '08 in the same regard in 20-30 years time.

Fraser Munro

As we came onto the platform it was hard to find anyone not in Rangers colours. The atmosphere, the songs, the smiling faces! To me this was heaven and we were in Manchester of all places! If you stopped to listen you could hear 4 or 5 different songs being sung at any one time. From children to the elderly, male and female, everyone was just reveling in the May sunshine as we hoped for just one more momentous performance from the boys in blue and to bring that trophy back home to Ibrox.

Greg Martin

As we walked around the streets of Manchester, I will never forget the feelings of pride and brotherhood I shared with my fellow Bears.

I met tons of new people as well as friends I hadn't seen for a long time and we all shared our favourite stories about Rangers teams old & new and our own personal experiences as fans.

This was my high point of the trip as I think everyone realised this would likely be the only time we would get to experience a European Final and we wanted to cherish every second of it.

Fraser Munro

Looking around you seen so many banners from all around the world. If anyone was ever in any doubt just how big a support we have they only have to look to that day for proof. People coming from America and Australia suddenly made Portugal look a stone's throw away from Manchester.

John Pullar

I took down Castle Street True Blues Shirt with the intention of giving it to the first overseas Rangers fan we came across, the guy who got it was a Canadian from Brampton, Ontario, he was well chuffed.

Chris Thorburn

The sheer numbers were staggering. Everywhere in the city the bears seemed to be in their thousands. We met up with heaps of bears from other ORSA clubs from Melbourne, Brisbane etc and on either side from Coleraine and Millwall bears!

David Frew

We walked out of the station and again all I could see was Rangers fans for as far as my eyes could see, Scotland, Ulster, Union and Spanish flags were in view as we followed the crowd down the street, the air was full with the sound of different groups of fans singing different songs and air horns being continuously blown.

Innes Walker

Later in the afternoon at Piccadilly and Albert Square I saw flags and banners from Australia, Canada and even Azerbaijan. Oh and a massive Black Skull of Springburn banner which had the locals looking on open mouthed.

Jamie Peters

Amongst the faces in Manchester I spotted a couple sporting a Venezuela flag, a country that I had just spent a number of months in only a short time before. I went over to have a chat and it turned out a lad from Venezuela and his missus from Puerto Rico had tickets for the game.

They spoke to me for a while and said they were just fans of football and not bothered who won. A few hours later I noticed the couple both decked out in Rangers scarves and probably a few cervezas deep, but nonetheless expressing their new found love for Rangers! That showed me the type of spirit that was evident in Manchester that day.

David Frew

My heart was bursting with pride at the moment and I've never been as proud of my team as I was right then. As I walked down the street, looking at the other fans and listening to the optimism from various supporters; I felt that deep down in my heart we just couldn't be beaten by anyone that day. I honestly felt that they could throw Barcelona, Real Madrid or Manchester United at us and we wouldn't be beaten. I felt invincible to a degree; the badge on my chest was a symbol that any team should fear.

Bryan Polland

Nothing could have prepared me for the fantastic scenes; I was an emotional wreck and had Goosebumps all over me as I walked through the sea of Rangers fans down to Piccadilly Gardens, that sight will never be replicated I thought Barcelona was amazing but this was something else.

Mark Gourlay

It sent shivers down my back. "Our day has come!" was my thought. That coupled with the weather made me think God really was looking after his own that day. The look on Jared's face really was a treat as we headed into the main square. He just couldn't believe that so many people would turn out to support

their team, especially so long before the game was scheduled to start. "Rangers are our lives" he was told.

Greg Martin

Thousands upon thousands of proud Bears in a joint celebration of how we'd overcome the odds in every round previously and this was Rangers' moment to write themselves into history. The moment I turned the corner into the street leading to the zone, seeing the mass of humanity in the colours of my heros and seeing the Daily Record bus with the huge picture of wee Nacho celebrating his winning penalty against Fiorentina was one of those moments I will tell my grandchildren about. Pure euphoria!

Mike Rennie

"There's no way Manchester is going to cope with this" I thought.

Steven McLeod

We visited the first 2 fanzones which were good fun, easy going and an excuse for us not to be in the pub. The third, by Piccadilly, was chocabloc, and this was still early.

Steven Wilson

We headed round to Piccadilly Square but quickly made up our mind to bypass it as it was already bursting at the seams.

Alistair Fyfe

I sussed right away that a lot of people would just stop there at the first fan zone at Piccadilly Gardens.

Gary Scott McGregor

Standing in the middle of the fan-zone was astonishing, the atmosphere was electric, the colour was blue, the songs were going, there were beach balls, sunglasses, beer, flags, banners, and it was Rangers Party Day.

Andy Cumming

We wandered around as so many others were doing, many of us in disbelief at the size of the crowd. It soon became apparent that we were not going to get in to the fan zone set up in Piccadilly Gardens as it was already seriously overcrowded.

Mark Dale

Not long after arriving at Piccadilly, I spotted the Bears with the Lenny Henry cardboard cutout from the Premier Inn, and we managed to start a big sing-song of 'There's only one Lenny Henry'. Interestingly, there were a couple of regular cops present and they were very friendly and joining in on the banter.

I must admit I couldn't believe the nick of some of the folk even that early in the day, and I was even more amazed as to why there were no groups of cops/stewards posted among the fans inside the square itself, instead of just posted on the streets around the perimeter.

Fraser Munro

Our kilts were going down a treat with the few locals you could see. But I was in for a cheeky shock when this female copper asked me the ever old question if I was a true Scotsman? To which I replied of course I was, she proceeded to lift my kilt and grab a feel for proof! Who says coppers are all bad? Good job it wasn't a cold day!

Douglas Dickie

It quickly became apparent that we were witnessing something special. As we neared our destination the ratio of Mancunians going about their daily business to Rangers fans started to edge in the way of the latter. Pretty soon you could have been forgiven for thinking some invading force had rolled in, but there were only smiles on show.

You stopped looking at individuals as everyone rolled into one massive blue body. It was beautiful. Piccadilly Square, an innocuous enough name that would soon be ingrained on all our psyches for all the wrong reasons. But with that still a long way away, we headed off to find our companions, armed with a crate of Carlsberg and a whole bag of dreams.

Manchester evening News, 14th May 2008

TESCO SLAMMED FOR BOOZE SALES

Tesco were today slammed by a council boss for selling discount boxes of beer to Rangers fans as they arrived in the city centre. The company's Metro store on Market Street piled boxes of lager at the entrance to the shop which were snapped up by supporters who were in town in the early hours after travelling through the night.

Councillor Pat Karney condemned the practice as "highly irresponsible" and marched into the store, ordering them to remove the booze from the shop entrance.

Councillor Karney said: "Unbelievably at Tesco they had boxes of booze at the front entrance selling at discount. It is highly irresponsible and they have let Manchester down. We had huge problems with this with the screening of the World Cup in Exchange Square. The police and council have asked them not to do this. They had been selling it from 6am. I have given Tesco a final warning and said that if they continue to do this they are putting their own licence to sell alcohol in jeopardy".

Alistair Fyfe

I went into the Summerfield supermarket it was almost sold out of booze and the queue was almost entirely made up of Gers fans buying wine. The few locals looked slightly worried by the singing and especially by the fact that some of the wine was being drunk in the shop. A few guys in front of me were having a slug from screwtop wine bottles. One lad had picked up a small bottle and a couple of his pals took a swig before handing the bottle back to him.

He finished it off and proceeded to the checkout, where the empty bottle was scanned and he handed over his cash. That summed up the spirit of the event for me.

Jamie Peters

After a beer in one of the tents we went to a Tesco store which was so busy that the security guards were selling crates of Fosters for a £20 note. Like many Rangers fans have grown used to it was overpriced for a lesser product but it seemed a fair deal to us at the time!

Andy Cumming

Some establishments are reported to have raked in a month or two's takings in two days.

David Frew

Due to us arriving quite late all of the beer was sold out from supermarkets so we resorted to offering other fans money for some of their drink. Not one Rangers fan would take our money and they *insisted* that we took a few drinks free of charge from them, just another reason why I was incredibly proud of my club that day.

Alan Wardlaw

Skin and I went sharpish into the town to soak up the atmosphere, not saying we were pished but a few days later I bumped into my mate Stewart Taylor who said "you were steaming in Manchester"; "how the fuck would you know" was my reply. "cos I was speaking to you for about half an hour" says he. No way I didn't see you down there I said convincing myself. It wasn't until he emailed me photographs of us all together than I would believe him. Maybe I was a bit tipsy after all.

Scott Jacobs

It was noticeable though even this early on, despite the fun and the carnival atmosphere was the amount of booze being carried from the streets and supermarkets into the 'fanzone' under the benevolent eye of the Constabulary? And I mean real booze drunk by real men, not those poofy Breezers. And I would assume this was happening at the other zones and in every other part of the city.

Now I'm not blaming Plod at this point or the punters, but I did ask myself at the time, 'if the troops were hell bent on shifting slabs upon slabs upon slabs of beer at that time in the morning, what they would be like at tea time?

Douglas Dickie

It appeared that nowhere in Manchester had prepared for what was happening, pretty soon there wasn't a drop of alcohol left in the shops and the prospect of over-priced fanzone beer hit us hard in the Spring sunshine, but it was better than nothing,

Beer out of a plastic cup never tastes the same, but we overcame our displeasure and the drink started to flow and the songs started to be sung. I found a flag caught on a tree and decided it would come to the stadium with me. "The spoils of War," I joked not realizing how prophetic my words may have sounded a few hours later.

Steven Hunter

We spent ages looking for somewhere that had drink left. Finally we found a place in Chinatown that had 24 buds left.

Greg Martin

This proved to be the most difficult part of the trip, since every off-license within 5 miles of the city centre had been stripped bare of every brand of lager. Regardless, we plodded on until we found a Tesco, which had a massive queue round the shop and was full of thirsty Bears seeking our alcohol.

We proceeded down the big escalator going downstairs to the food & drinks section to the sounds of a raucous rendition of "let's aw buy some cat food, let's aw buy some cat food, na na na na, ooft" which had managed to spread throughout the store.

The shelves were bare of lager, beer, stout, cider, red wine, white wine, all alcopops and vodka, as well as almost every other kind of spirit making the beverage choice that little bit more difficult. Out of the corner of my mate's eye, he spotted something that changed the complexion of the trip. The last bottle of Jaegermeister in Manchester!

We bought 2x 2litre bottles of water, the above mentioned Jaegermeister and 12 cans of sugar free Red Bull (full fat was sold out funnily enough) and we were on our way. We stopped down a nearby quiet(ish) side street and using our new supplies, I transformed the water into 2x 2litre Jaegerbombs! That will set us up for the day, without a doubt.

Kenneth White

I had made a conscious decision to enjoy a few beers, but to savour the day and I wasn't going to be doing that through the haze of Carling goggles.

Jordan Dallas

I wanted to soak it all in so I decided against taking even so much as a sip of a

pint, I didn't want to have to run to the toilet when I was in the ground as I didn't want to miss a glimpse of the action.

Robert McQueen

I wasn't drinking that day as I had to drive home that night, but I didn't want to drink anyway. I wanted to savour this day in its entirety. I wanted to savour every single moment.

The guys who were drinking set off to find more beer for watching the game, only to find everywhere had sold out. It took them well over an hour to find them somewhere selling beer. They came back to meet us in the square and the story goes that they walked to Liverpool, although I am not so sure I believe that! They said they felt like people in Africa walking miles to the water wells! Not quite the same!

Andy Cumming

We arrived at the City of Manchester Stadium around lunch time and the coach parked up very close to the ground. There were already literally hundreds of buses there. A first impression of the stadium was that it looked very nice indeed from the outside. There were thousands of Rangers fans in the vicinity taking photos and having a laugh with the police. We asked the best way to get to the city and were directed to a queue for buses that were put on to take us there.

The bus was full and probably over crowded and as soon as it started moving the singing started. The double decker was bouncing along with the Rangers fans and the driver loved every minute of it.

Steven Clifford

Beers and singsong aside there was another memorable moment as we approached Manchester. One ugly cretin wearing a Celtic strip, the only one which polluted the air on our trip, began to taunt the bus which was met by a defiant and deafening cry of no surrender back at him. Fitting it was that he should turn and walk straight into the Job Centre which was met by a joyous roar of laughter from all aboard the bus.

Nick McAusland

The mood was at fever pitch. The songs were blasting out; everyone was on

their feet and savoring the atmosphere, eager to reach our destination. We stopped at a set of traffic lights in Salford, right beside a fellow minibus full of Bears. No sooner had the driver pulled on the handbrake the passengers were in full flow giving it the Bouncy.

They were going berserk. The bus was rocking from side to side and to this day I still don't know how the axle held out without snapping. We hung a left turn into the Sainsbury's supermarket and stocked up on slabs of lager to take with us into the city centre. We located a parking spot not far from the train station, got our gear together and follow-followed the Blue shirts to wherever we were being led.

As we turned a corner onto Portland Street in the city centre, we couldn't believe our eyes. Red, White and Blue everywhere. It was truly breathtaking. There were thousands of fans bedecked in Club colours, waving flags and scarves, singing at the top of their voice in the middle of the street. It was immense.

Andy Cumming

The sight that greeted us will never leave us. A mass of bodies as far as the eye could see all wearing Rangers gear, singing, bouncing, smiling and enjoying themselves. Behind us was a high rise building being constructed and there was a huge Rangers Supporters Club banner hanging from the top. Full marks to whoever got that up there.

Nick McAusland

You could just about make out everyday Mancunians going about their daily business amidst the festivities and the look on their faces told two hundred thousand stories. They were in awe of what was unfolding before them, and the smiles across their faces reflected the carnival atmosphere and good spirit amongst the masses.

Our group slowly made their way through the crowds towards Piccadilly Gardens. It was nearing midday but already the place was strewn with litter and half naked bodies basking in the sunshine.

Andrew Hunter

Trying to get to one of the fan zones took an eternity; the crowds were so dense that it was like coming out of the football at full time where you really are

moving at the speed of the crowd.

George MacDonald

Getting around the city centre was no easy feat. It would have been so easy to have lost your mates. It truly was something magical. A testament to the size of Glasgow Rangers Football Club that we should have all that support concentrated that far away from home.

Stephen Sinclair

A couple of hours earlier we had arranged to meet my nephew John (who was coming up from London) in the Piccadilly fan zone. We push our way through the crowd but its crammed full of Rangers supporters with hardly an inch to spare. Having been to that fateful day in January 1971 and witnessed it, this is another disaster waiting to happen.

‘Far too many people are in here’ I say to Johnny and Louise, ‘We’ll never find young John in here. No chance!’ We don’t find him. We try and phone him on the mobile and tell him to get out of there as it is too crowded. But he tells us that where he is it’s not too bad. But we can’t get anywhere near him.

We make our way out of the Piccadilly fanzone and decide we’ll maybe go down to the Arndale Centre for something to eat and meet up with John later. Unbelievably, among the thousands and thousands of fans there, we bump into my brother Alan, who unknown to me, was going to the match! He tells me that my other brother Scott is down for the match and is nearby.

I realise now that this the way it was meant to be. Dads’ four sons have all come together through his calling and are down to watch Rangers play in their first European Final for 36 years. It is the first time all the brothers have been together to watch Rangers for a long, long time, if ever!

Johnny asks me ‘Do you think Dad would have come down here today even although he couldn’t see or walk properly?’

‘Nothing would have stopped him from being here today. Nothing’! I tell him.

Alan Spiden

Our bus managed to get us pretty close to Albert Square and we jumped out and walked the few hundred yards up to where we could hear the party had

already started. The place was absolutely bouncing; literally, the Bouncy was being done in the middle of the square by thousands and thousands of Rangers fans, what a sight!

Craig Kirkwood

By now and the area around the big wheel is just a mass of bodies enjoying the sunshine and drinking. We stop as my dad wants to get a photo of me, David and Scott in front of the big wheel. Just as he takes the photo a voice calls out “Is that Colin Kirkwood” and this guy approaches my dad and gives him a hug. They chat for a few minutes and we get introduced. It turns out my dad went to primary school with this guy and they hadn’t seen each other since they left school more than 25 years ago.

Douglas McIntosh

We decided that we wanted to go up on the big wheel to get a good view of the bears. Well....I say ‘we’, but Gary seemed a little less enthusiastic than my brother and I! Once we were in the ‘pod’, Gary decided to tell us that he was afraid of heights and there was much grabbing of handles and shouts of ‘I don’t like it, let me off!’ But my brother and I were enjoying the incredible view too much to notice. Thousands of bears, all over the city - and then we heard it.

Nick McAusland

A strange muffled beat in the distance beyond the hustle and bustle of the crowds. It grew louder and deeper as it drew closer to our location. By then we could also hear the shrill tone of the flutes and the rattle of the accompanying drums.

Douglas McIntosh

It was the start of the Orange walk from opposite the Arndale Centre. What a site. The Manchunians must have wondered what was going on. Had they ever seen anything like this before? Probably not!

Nick McAusland

A mini Orange Walk underway in the Manchester City Centre, a sight to behold. That wasn’t the only cultural music on public display that day, there

were many solitary flutes stationed in pub doorways and street corners entertaining the passing crowd.

Alistair Gourlay

Singing, chanting and flute playing could be heard from all around. I have never seen anything like it in my 10 years (not long compared to many I know) of following Rangers home and away.

Douglas McIntosh

Gary at this stage decided he had had enough. He pushed the 'panic' button and round we went. The lovely blond lassie that had the job of putting everyone into the pods opened the door and asked if everyone was ok? Gary, as quick as a flash, pointed at me and said "Aye, we're fine. But the big man couldnae handle it!" and ran out the door, leaving me stammering to explain it was him and not me but she couldn't hear me over my brothers laughter.

David Hamil

I pester the Doctors even more but I am informed that Manchester is not for me so reluctantly I accept their findings. However I learn that one of the Doctors is going as is the only male nurse. My big mate Davie is also booked and my ticket has been snapped up as you would expect.

I get a visit by 3 bosses from my work, a Bluenose who had visited me before to tell me he was going and 2 from the dark side to wind me up as I would not be attending. However I was able to win that battle as I was 14 and in attendance when Rangers won in Barcelona in 1972. I had seen Rangers win a European Trophy.

That very morning the doctor came round on the ward visit. It must have been after 11:00 am and he said to me "are you watching the final", my reply was "of course what a strange question". He said "how would you like to watch it at home".

He informed me that I was not fit enough to travel to Manchester but he would allow me to be discharged to go home. I was in my house 2 hours later after being in hospital for 4 months.

Douglas McIntosh

The atmosphere was electric and genuinely good natured. Sure there was

loads of Russians in the city too, but we were all enjoying a drink together. A word for Uefa though no-one wants to hear Jazz at 12pm on the day of a final.

Whoever booked that group should have known that there was going to be a danger of something happening and so it was when a beach ball was booted with fantastic accuracy into the band stand, hitting the trumpet player and knocking over his music stand. A comedy moment and honestly officer, I can't tell you who hit that shot! Honest I can't!!

Stephen Sinclair

When we arrive, the weather and atmosphere is unbelievable. A sea of blue shirts fills the Manchester streets and shops. The singing, the flute bands! A real carnival atmosphere. Now I'm really glad I came.

Bruce McAuliffe

Great weather and great company surrounded by likeminded people.

Iain Harding

A city crawling with fellow bears. Red, white and blue everywhere with Union Jacks flying high.

Mike Rennie

There's a brass band playing, entertainers on stilts and thousands of Gers fans sitting/lying on the grass.

Fraser Munro

It was apparent to me already that the city just were not equipped or prepared for what was about to happen. As we arrived into Albert Square to set up camp for the morning and afternoon I looked about and thought, two things are a certainty here. Not enough beer and not enough toilets! And naturally since then I was proved right! To this day I still don't grasp how under prepared they were for our invasion!

Mark Dale

I said to one of my mates that this was going to kick off later, unless they organized it better. We didn't stay in there long, but it genuinely crossed my

mind to say to one of the cops outside on the perimeter, that they should get some presence inside the square among the fans, just to help keep things in check. So after the match when I heard what happened, I wasn't surprised. Then again I doubt one fan like me saying something to the cop's early doors would have made any difference to the way they organized things.

Alan Spiden

It's just a pity that the Manchester authorities had been so ham fisted in their preparations, with inadequate toilet and refuse facilities being the only downside to a wonderful day in the sun.

Donna Sevwright

We ended up in Piccadilly gardens which was a great atmosphere although had no toilets and the police wouldn't let us out to use them unless we stayed out.

Alistair Fyfe

Having seen the pathetic supply of portaloos on the other side of the square and the complete lack of them on the side I was standing, I knew I had no option but to join the alfresco pissers down an adjacent lane.

Andy Cumming

Originally it had been announced that no screens would be erected in Manchester and facilities for fans would be extremely limited probably enough to cater for around fourteen thousand fans (the number who got tickets officially through Rangers). It was clear that the facilities would be inept even if they were upgraded from what the original plan.

Alistair Fyfe

I realised from complete lack of bins that the city's plan was just to sweep up all the rubbish the following day, but the pictures of the litter were later used to make *us* look bad rather than the authorities. However, at that point the beat cops were very friendly. So much so, that when a lad in front of me bumped into a cop, the cop apologised to *him*.

Andy Cumming

The streets hadn't been that bad with litter earlier on but now they were becoming a mess. This wasn't surprising as the few bins that were there were long since full up and I think the authorities gave up with trying to keep the place tidy as it was an impossible task.

Alan Fineran (Manchester City Fan)

The day before the game I was so concerned about congestion in the fan zones, I warned people on Follow Follow and was also worried about the organization and preparation by Manchester City Council..... my fears were sadly proved right.

I went down to the City centre around 1pm just to check it out really, and was gob smacked by what I found in Piccadilly. It was already heaving, and you didn't have to be a genius to work out that problems could arise later, although the atmosphere was incredible. Someone high up in Manchester City Council had let down the Rangers supporters badly, shocking organization, poor sanitary conditions..... I could go on. I left around 4pm, but still hold the view that if you would cram 60.000 Man City fans in a square for hours in poor conditions, tell them " you're not going to see the game on the screen ", there would be some kind of trouble, it's called HUMAN NATURE.

Colin McHarg

If this is how Manchester handles major sporting events then I despair. I wouldn't trust the council to arrange Sky Sports masters football. If England ever secures the rights to host another World Cup then I implore FIFA to examine the evidence surrounding the incompetence of those responsible and deny the City any rights as a possible venue for the finals. At the very least, there should be a petition by Rangers supporters to that effect....

Alistair Young

Around 3pm I had made an approach to a WPC and highlighted my concerns regards the sheer volume of people in the so called Fan Zone area, which by game time I felt would be unsafe.

She confirmed that her seniors were aware but there was nothing she could do. I pointed out the large advertisement TV screen above the bus stop in

Piccadilly square which was running adverts and trailers of the match. “Why couldn’t they put the game on there”, she agreed it was a good idea and that her commander was aware of the existence of the screen but there was no intention to show it on this second large screen.

Concerned I called the owners of the screen to see if they could show the match. Ironically it was a Glasgow based firm called Forrest Media who owned it. When I called and spoke to a Margaret on their reception I explained the situation and major concerns about the facilities in Piccadilly she put me on hold spoke to her Manager and returned advising that the screen would not be showing the match. I explained that this was mistake and that there was a potential for another Hillsborough due to the sheer volume of fans trying to view the match on one small screen.

Andy Cumming

Texts and phone calls kept alerting us of the situation within all the fan zones and it was obvious that Albert Square and Cathedral Gardens were almost as crammed as Piccadilly Gardens as were the many of the surrounding streets. We got news of the tram service being suspended as the streets they run on were packed with people, they had been running earlier in the day and this again tells you that the council had no idea what to expect in terms of numbers arriving in their city centre.

Jamie Peters

Walking through the city there was a common theme; everywhere was packed and every shop was sold out. Every food shop, every pub, restaurant, hotel and off-license. And it was barely noon. Manchester was warned with those words ingrained into every fan’s mind to *brace itself*. It seemed it was unprepared for one of the biggest movements of people in the past century.

Walking/squeezing yourself down the streets in Manchester there were many sights to see. Mainly a wall of blue but also the locals integrating with the support. Amongst the scenes that for some reason stick out for me was a crowd of 4/5 black Mancunians decked out in King Billy scarves. I have a feeling they did not have those at the start of the day. Police with Rangers scarves posing for photos and a few fans from other SPL clubs also down for the party.

Steven Wilson

Having resigned myself to not getting a ticket I decided to savour the day and content myself with the notion that at least I was there. Me and a mate, Chalky decided to jump in a cab into the city centre to soak up the atmosphere. Pity we jumped into a fly mans taxi as all he did was drive round in a circle and virtually dropped us 500 yards from where we got in. Unpertrubed we got another taxi which thankfully turned out to have a more honest driver who duly dropped us in the city centre.

Steven Clifford

We decided to head for a look around the city and somehow secure some much needed refreshments. That journey took us to around Old Trafford where a carry out was secured. From there we walked back into the city via the Marriott hotel where we met the Zenit team whilst using the hotel facilities.

Douglas Dickie

I can't remember the name of the pub. It was one of those non-descript places, like a Wetherspoons. A little soulless, but safe for children. The pub was packed with Rangers fans. Men, women and children alike, but in the corner sat a group of Russians. My Dad clocked them right away and he could tell that something wasn't quite right.

We should have left then, but instead I placed our beer under the cigarette machine and headed for the bar. It didn't happen straight away, but pretty soon some Russians started taking umbrage to some of our songs. A shouting match followed and a chair was thrown from the Zenit support.

Pretty soon furniture was flying in several directions and most of the pub had cleared. I had been right underneath the Zenit fans when it started. At first it had barely registered, but soon enough I was well aware of what was happening. I maneuvered myself towards the door dragging my Dad, who seemed intent on standing his ground with me. Then, I turned to get the most important thing, the cargo, only to see the cigarette machine had been sent tumbling. I didn't hold out much hope and soon found myself on the street, with my adrenaline pumping.

What happened next is a bit of a blur, but one moment of panic stood out. In my paranoia earlier in the morning I had handed Jamie my ticket to keep in his zip pockets, thinking it safer there than in my wallet. But minutes before the fight he had went for something to eat at McDonald's and suddenly I couldn't find him, or my ticket.

Eventually though he came ambling towards the pub munching on a Big Mac, enquiring as to what had happened. After fruitlessly trying to persuade the pub manager to let me in to look for our lager, we set off into town to try and forget the unsavoury incident and start enjoying our day again.

Iain Munroe

We hailed 2 taxis and the 6 of us headed off for a good Italian restaurant we had booked. The taxi driver was a really friendly manc and he told us he would only be able to take us so far as when you got close to the centre the roads became rivers of bluenoses. We joined one such river and were carried along it singing The Sash and other battle hymns, it was an unbelievable feeling.

We found our restaurant and our day got better Richard Gough was at the next table and we got a chance to speak to him, a seminal moment for this Bear. He will always be a hero to me.

Apart from one of our group nearly choking to death on his T-bone the meal was great.

Gary Tedford

We managed to blag our way into the Britannia Hotel. The grand piano in the corner of the bar was used as ledge to help us pour our carry-outs into expensive crystal champagne flutes that we had managed to 'acquire' from the lobby and we stayed there until about 4.

Stephen Macleod

Time for us to go and find a pub for a nerve calmer and the first company we met was an old friend of Andy's who flown in overnight from Detroit for the game despite being ticketless. No one, it seemed, wanted to miss the party.

Murdo Euan MacLennan

I met up with some of the boys from lewis who had been drinking in a lap dancing bar. One of the guys I spotted was Calum Best, son of the late George Best. Talking to him was a guy I know from back home, who shears sheep most weekends, and here he was talking to a famous playboy watching dancing girls in a trendy Manchester Hotspot – quite a surreal experience you can imagine.

Mike Rennie

There's a Shakespeares across from Primark, we go in there and it's mobbed, no seats, so we stand outside drinking our pints. There are about 50 fans outside and hundreds more on the street. A Milkfloat with "Creamline Dairies" written on the side drives past us. There's a bear hanging onto the back of it holding a pint of lager.....Cue the cry of "We are the creamline dairy boys!"Brilliant!

Colin McHarg

Once again, Zenit fans were present and were asked by one of our lads, via a combination of charade and lip sync movements, to sing a club song. I have to say it was the most depressing, mournful, gloomy, dirge like, funereal, five, yes five minutes of deadness that has been my misfortune to hear.

Most national anthems seemed rave like by comparison. This was bordering on ear assault. Songs are meant to lift a side, not send the players in the general direction of the samaritans. As the Russians went for the big finish, Gers fans politely clapped, though silently we were all thinking: 'thank fuck' - until the second verse began!

However, there's a fine line between tolerance and having the pish ripped right out of ye - and one rousing chorus of "Derry's Walls" by Broony soon silenced the Russian entry for next year's Eurovision song contest.

Greg Martin

Another memory of my day was while we were sitting enjoying our beverages outside Harvey Nichols in the City Centre, while roughly half a dozen footballs were constantly being kicked in the air, with the shout of "HEEEEEEEEEEEEDS!!!" as they approached the napper of an unexpected fan, who when hit, would have to take the next turn to blooter it in the air. Those paying attention who managed to get a half decent header on it when it approached them received rapturous applause from the masses.

Raymond Gordon

Me and my son we're heading to Albert square when WALLOP; it caught me right on the head. They were only larking around.

Greg Martin

To some, this was childish. To me, it was brilliant.

Steven Wilson

We ended up in a bar on Canal Street (No laughing at the back! we honestly found ourselves there by accident!) where we had a few beers outside soaking up the sun. We then made our way to Allbarone on King Street where I had to meet my mate Davie who was up from London. It took us about 1 hour to find it right enough no thanks to the coppers who didn't seem to have a clue (although I did find out later a lot of them had been drafted in from other areas).

Stephen Macleod

Our afternoon was spent on Canal Street, and yes I know what it's famous for, but on the day it was flooded with Bears, toilets and bars were accessible and it offered a little oasis from the 200,000 strong throng.

Alistair Gourlay

Once in the pub I got a call from my mate Andy. He had made his way up to the ground and was drinking in a pub just outside it. He had found a ticket! The only drawback was it was gonna cost £500. 'I just can't miss it', I thought and managed to arrange a loan from my Dad.

He agreed that I couldn't miss it. I was disappointed that I wasn't given a ticket, in fact slightly bemused when seeing some of the people who got ahead of me but I didn't care so long as I was in there. I had the ticket and I was going to watch my beloved Rangers in the UEFA Cup Final. Andy was phoning me telling me to hurry up as the guy wants to get rid of the ticket.

Mike Rennie

Sick of standing, we decide to try and find another pub. The streets of Manchester are teaming with thousands upon thousands of bears, it's crazy.

After much walking, we find a pub that isn't mobbed.....The Crown Inn. There are doormen outside refusing to let people in. They let us in (we mustn't have looked drunk) and we manage to get stools at the bar. The place is bouncing....and I mean bouncing! We drank and sang and drank and sang. We weren't about to leave this place for a few hours. We had seats at the bar, it was busy and we were singing the old songs, the songs from decades ago, along with some newish ones....and bouncing! The time flew by; we were drunk

but happy drunk. Relaxed and happy....and bouncing! So far, this is one of the best days of my life.

There's a big screen in the pub so we decide we're staying to watch the game here, nae luck, they're not showing it, one of the barmen tells us they're closing soon as the toilets are overflowing.

Colin McHarg

My friend Joe, lucky enough to attend the final tells an amusing tale regarding a black hole of a pub situated near the ground which wouldn't be out of place in TV's Shameless. Called the Bank of England, there's not much of an interest rate if you're looking for modern premises but serves a purpose if you fancy a quick swallow. Joe noticed that the old fashioned urinals were so blocked up that the contents of those tetanus protected souls was in danger of flooding out of the toilet and into the bar.

He made a B-line for the manager and informed him of the impending onrush, expecting said landlord to arrive armed with a plunger or possibly a mop. Imagine then his surprise when a couple of sandbags were thrown on the floor accompanied by a comment of 'sorted.' Wonder if the owner has considered moving lock, stock and barrel to the Gallowgate? The Bank of England - take note!

Jamie Peters

Upon finding a suitable spot to relax everyone just seemed to bask in the occasion.

Craig R Morton

The next few hours were filled with drinking, chatting, laughing and generally having a good time with the other Rangers supporters in our vicinity. The atmosphere got even better when the stereo system was switched on with 'Simply the Best' and other songs blasting out. I vividly remember texting my friend, who was also in the same fan zone, although we hadn't met that day, to say how good the day had been so far. The text read something along the lines of: "Mate, this is the best ever! I can't believe I'm here!"

Marc Ferguson

After getting separated from my pals and my phone dying I stood in

Piccadilly square enjoying the sunshine and the sight of thousands upon thousands of bears partying.

After a while I started talking to the girl standing beside me, her name was Julie and she introduced me to her family. We all had a drink together whilst enjoying the spectacle (I even managed to steal a kiss). Well the girl I met that day by chance is now my partner and we've just had our first child together a little bundle of joy called Jack.

Nick McAusland

Albert Square was much more comfortable when we arrived. We positioned ourselves just in front of the monument in good view of the screens and cracked open a few cans to toast our arrival. We spent the rest of the day enjoying the entertainment on display, counting down the hours until kick-off.

Mark Gourlay

80 degree heat, never ending flowing beer, never ending singing and all this in company of likeminded bears and more importantly close family and friends. We never thought in our wildest dreams a day like this would ever come and it may never come again so we weren't in any mood to let it pass us by and partied like there was no tomorrow.

Ian Nicol

I remember having one of my pals up on my shoulders in the fanzone when we started singing "Follow Follow" there are a few blanks as heat and alcohol don't mix.

Steven Wilson

There were guys hanging off the street furniture balancing cases of lager. The atmosphere was awesome, so friendly.

Paul McMurray

The Sun is out & it's a carnival atmosphere. Never have I felt so at home

Iain Harding

The rest of the afternoon was full of banter and awe at the amount of bears that descended on Manchester. A chance photo with Graeme Dott (who was very pleasant) and many beers followed. One of the most amazing sights was a rather brave gentleman who scaled the monument and stood with his flag as the sun was going down.

Nick McAusland

Not a sight for the faint-hearted it has to be said, but he must've had the best seat in the house that day.

Bryan Polland

I finally met my mates and family who told me their own great stories about the bus journey down and it made me so envious as I had to travel through on my own but I was now going to revel in the day. The atmosphere was amazing and we partied there in the glorious sunshine long into the afternoon, each time someone asked to see my ticket they were amazed to see me pull it from my trainer!!! I was so paranoid about losing it or it being stolen that I was taking no chances, this was a moment I had dreamed of and I was not risking or missing it.

Murdo Euan MacLennan

The day progressed, the drink began to flow and expectations rose, the excitement just grew and grew.

Steven Clifford

It would have been around this time the nerves really began to kick in and part of me just longed for the game to be here and kick off time to arrive. We began to talk about tactics and strategies about the night ahead, I think at this point not one person in our expanded groups (other friends had joined us) thought about the possibility we might lose the match ahead, it just never even entered our heads.

Jamie Peters

I am sure that every fan in attendance was sickened by the SFA over the last few months and the sheer number in Manchester (As well as countries around the world and in Glasgow itself) suggested to me that we are a force that

shouldn't underestimate the power we can have. But that is a matter for another day....

Stephen Macleod

No one was wildly optimistic, no one was overly pessimistic. What would be would be.

Fraser Munro

We started to make our way back from Albert Square, through Piccadilly and onto the Stadium. After walking past Piccadilly it was just ridiculous how busy it was. FAR too many people in one place, it was a recipe for disaster.

Douglas Dickie

By 4pm with the sun beating down on us, the tiring effects were beginning to take their toll. The big screen showed highlights of our run, each goal celebrated with similar gusto.

Kenneth White

At 4pm the lucky ones who had tickets made the decision to make their way to the stadium.

Mark Gourlay

In the group of around 15 of us there were around 6 or 7 that had tickets.

Douglas Dickie

We had no idea which way we were going or how long it would take. Little did we know the walk would be the highlight of what had already been a special day.

Kenneth White

First we had to collect the 'Linlithgow Loyal' flag from a fence where we left it in Albert Square earlier in the day. It took us nearly 20 minutes to squeeze our way over the short distance. Someone, I can't remember who, said 'If we score, people will get hurt here'.

Murdo Euan MacLennan

Around 5pm we made our way to a pub to meet my mate's supporter's bus, the Forfar Loyal. They were in good spirit but I didn't really know any of them. But by that time I didn't care, I just wanted to get to the stadium and cheer on my heroes.

Robert McQueen

Time was getting on, and the real reason we were all there was beginning to kick in. It hit me at around 5pm like an absolute brick wall. All of a sudden my stomach was in turmoil. This was it. Rangers in a European Final!

Jamie Peters

We had made the UEFA cup final. It just really seemed to dawn upon a lot of us. I am not one to go for the teary eyed approach that fans often do these days but if I was ever close to shedding a tear for my club it was that moment amongst hundreds of thousands of other Rangers fans waiting for my team to kick-off a European cup final.

Bear in mind we come from a city that hosted the mighty Real Madrid in a Champions League final a few years before and their support barely spilled over George Square. No other club in the world has had a following like we had that day in Manchester.

Gary Scott McGregor

When Daz went to the stadium for the game, I was left alone with thousands of strange Rangers fans that I knew I could be jumping around with later that night. I was in a strange environment with people I didn't know, but I felt safe, because I was a blue nose.

Andrew Hunter

We decided to head to the ground early – this was hard as we left behind a number of people – who had not been fortunate enough to get tickets. It again reinforced how lucky we had been but it was disappointing to see good bears consigned to watching the game in a pub or fanzone.

Rab Picken

We hadn't a ticket for the game nor did that matter I was there amongst an estimated 200,000 of my brothers and sisters in Manchester to see the Rangers the atmosphere was Building and Building this was amazing.

Mike Rennie

I believe to this day that the estimates of between 150000 and 250000 fans in Manchester that day were way short of the mark. I was there; I saw it with my own eyes. Nobody is going to convince me there were any less than half a million bears in town that day, not a chance.

Gary Scott McGregor

I seen a William Hill just around the corner and thought I'd pop in for a little flutter to waste time before the kick off. I went in, bet a few horses and a few things for the big game then sat down to watch my horses. Next thing I know, it's an hour later, and I'd fell asleep (my horses we're donkeys).

Steven Wilson

My dad who had travelled down the night before with his brother phoned me to tell me they had left Manchester to head back to their digs on the outskirts as they feared not seeing the game due to the volume of supporters in the city centre.

We left the bar and headed to the Albert Square fan zone. With kick off approaching and my dad's words on my mind I was beginning to panic myself about not seeing the game. We could hardly see a thing at Albert Square so Henry, who stayed in Manchester, took us to a boozer a few streets away where he persuaded the bouncers to let us in.

Steven Hunter

An hour before kickoff time I decided I wanted a munch. I got a subway and headed back to the square but to my surprise they had locked me out and shut all the entrances. I pleaded with them that all my family and friends were in there but they still didn't let me in. I ran round all the exits once more and ended up bumping into Allan Hutton. He was drunk and on his mobile phone but I shook his hand quick and wished him well. I wondered why he wasn't at the game but didn't wait to ask as all I could think of was getting back into the square.

David Wilkinson

As the day went on and the beer got warmer and I got more burnt. I got a call from my brother Jim and his mate Mark who had travelled up from Birmingham for the day to watch it with us. He had managed to find a club that had just opened its doors as he was walking past that nobody was in yet and it had air conditioning and cold beer this was the place for me!

When we found the club it was great to get in out of the sun but by this time the place wasn't so empty anymore but just getting into somewhere that had air conditioning and cold beer was amazing. The manager said he was showing the game so we decided that we would just stay there for it.

We were all having a good sing song and a laugh together when the manager made the announcement that he was having troubles getting the game to show and that he was going to have to close the club again. This was only 45 minutes from kick off and by this time we had all ready heard that there may be a problem with the screens in the square.

Mike Rennie

Me and Gav were going to the gardens to watch the game and that was that. Gav wanted to walk around the Gardens to get the programmes he had left earlier. I said to get them later as it would take too long to walk round and we could get into the Gardens from this end. He was adamant, so off he went and I went into the throng and tried to get a place to see the big screen.

Gary Scott McGregor

As I was walking out the shop, I heard a familiar voice shout "McGregor" I turned around and it was a neighbor from my street. A bus had come from the local Rangers pub and there were a few people I knew. So I felt even safer now that I knew someone. We all went into the main square to watch the big screen, where we would maybe be watching history. My most vivid memory of that day was looking up at the big screen and seeing the legend Ally McCoist talking to the media at this point my stomach was in knots.

Alistair Fyfe

When the screens didn't show anything for a bit, and it occurred to me that I might be able to make my way back to Stockport to watch the 2nd half if the

screens failed. A prescient thought as things turned out elsewhere.

George MacDonald

We get to the closest screen to us. Got a good spot up on a wall, got the beers out and waited for the game to come on. Unfortunately, there seemed to be a glitch at the start of the game. No worries we all thought, they'll fix it soon enough.

David Frew

At 19:30 a message was put up on the screen that was due to show the game which read, "There are also screens available at the Velodrome, please proceed there." My mate and I decided that as it was so close to kick-off we would just stay where we were.

Mike Rennie

I'm a big lad and managed to push my way along to where I thought I might get a view of the screen.....Not a chance in hell. It was bedlam. I had no idea what was going on. I don't know if the screens had already failed by then or not as I was drunk, well drunk! All I knew was that it must've been 7.30ish and there was no way I was staying in there, I could move or see a thing. I was getting out of there! I wanted to watch the game; I'd find a pub somewhere, no probs.

Nick McAusland

As the clock ticked down towards kick-off the Square got busier, and the space more cramped. At the same time an air of anticipation descended over the crowd. You could feel the collective butterflies fluttering away as the television coverage began on the screens.

Craig R Morton

Five minutes before kick-off things started getting a bit antsy, a few comments were made about the TV feed and five minutes later they just heightened. Fifteen minutes into the game and nothing had been shown on the screen and that's when the experience of a lifetime turned sour.

Glass bottles and beer cans were being thrown from the crowd towards the stand where the music was coming from. A man came out to try and assure the

fans that the connection was trying to be established and then he said "it's not our fault". Seconds later he was hit with a wall of cans, bottles and anything some mindless people could throw.

The frustration was evident, I felt it myself there's no doubt I could feel my blood boiling. But, the action of some fellow 'supporters' was more than embarrassing. The most distressing sight was when all four of us decided to leave the fanzone, only to turn around whilst walking away and see a older gentleman, around early-to-mid 60s with blood streaming down his face from a glass bottle thrown from a distance. We were standing in the same spot as him only seconds before. The distress on the man's face was clear to see.

Ian Nicol

Just before kickoff seeing as me and my other travelling bear did not have tickets we decided to watch the game not in the fanzone but in a pub instead (where I can't remember) but just remember seeing a crowd of Rangers fans start to come through the door 20 minutes into the game. At that point we had no idea on what was happening outside.

Donna Sevwright

Unfortunately the screens didn't come on and due to the crowds moving about me and my brother got separated. I was hit with a flying missile although I was ok. I stayed in the place where we got separated and luckily my 2 brothers came and found me. We quickly decided to head back to our hostel as the police had started wading into the crowd who were trying to find somewhere to go and watch the rest of the game.

Mike Rennie

After much pushing and jostling, I managed to escape the mêlée going on around me and found myself outside the gardens. Right which way to head. No idea. I see some shops, a McDonalds and realize I'm starving. It's busy and there's a sing song going on. I wonder why they're not all watching the game. Never mind, I get my hamburger and stagger off to try to find a pub.

I phone Gav but there's no answer. He'll be fine, I'll phone him later. Wandering around, there are people everywhere. Eating my burger, I find myself on a side street, no idea where I am. There's a woman getting out of a taxi. Right,

that's it....I dive in the cab, get out my phone and find Helen's address. Show it to the driver and he takes me there.

During the ride he says there been trouble at Piccadilly Gardens. Told him I never saw any but he says there's riot police there.....I have no idea what he's talking about.

(8)

WEDNESDAY 14TH MAY 2008

**UEFA CUP FINAL
ZENIT VS RANGERS**

We were here, THE RANGERS, UEFA Cup final.

STEVE CHALMERS

The Uefa Cup final would be game 64 of a record 68 game season and game 14 in a staggering run of 18 games in 8 weeks. It would also be a record 19th game in Europe that year for Rangers the equivalent of half an SPL season. As a result the SPL had no option but to extend the season by 4 days to allow Rangers to complete their schedule (Rangers had also reached both the Scottish and CIS Cup Finals).

After having a request for a longer extension than 4 days to prepare for a European final denied (unlike Zenit, whose own league mandarins cleared their fixture list to allow them two full weeks to prepare). Rangers are forced to play their last 4 games in the space of 7 days which include 2 cup finals and a title decider.
The Daily Record, 13th May 2008

THE LITTLE GENERAL V THE REAR ADMIRAL.

IF Dick Advocaat is the Little General perhaps we should start addressing Walter Smith as Rear Admiral. After all he did return to save a sinking ship and did so by fixing leaks at the stern. Rangers didn't go down and, in fact, have risen to heights no one, not even Smith himself, expected.

Graham Mitchell

On the day of the game all of my mates had gone up to Manchester. Living in Kent I decided to go to the pub-crawl in London mentioned on FF. The meeting place was a pub on Tottenham Court Rd. As I walked in the door I was disappointed to see there were only two groups of Bears, around 10 in total, and none that I knew.

I went to the bar and got the first of many pints. As I was ordering I noticed out the corner of my eye a big bear from one group giving me a stare. At the time I thought 'oh shit, not someone out for bother'. I soon became involved in a chat with the group without the big guy. I couldn't help notice the big guy talking to his mates and still giving me looks.

I was pleased when the group I was with decided to move on to the next pub. As we were leaving, the big bear stepped out in front of me, I thought 'here we go', he said 'is your name Graham?' 'Aye' said me, 'why?' He looked me square

in the eye and said' I'm your brother ya daft bastard' It was indeed by younger brother Gav who I had not seen or had any contact with for 15 years (family issues). We hugged and had many pints as we caught up on things. Family issues were never mentioned. We ended up as planned, in the Cock Tavern where we had a cracking night sashing it up. We left after the game and went our separate ways.

Strange thing is, despite that night, we have gone back to our old ways of not being in contact. Probably down to unresolved family issues. The thing is, the UEFA Cup Final for me will always be the time my brother drifted back into my life, if only for the day. We had a great day and it was fantastic to see the kid I took to his first Gers game when he was young, standing next to me, belting out the tunes.

Douglas McIntosh

It was about 5pm and a bit early to be heading out to the ground but I think none of us could actually believe what was about to happen. We were in the final. A European Final. It was still difficult to take it all in!

Alan Spiden

Around 5.30 we finally left for the game and, after meeting the same policeman what seemed like 6 times and asking him for the same directions each time, we finally wandered the "mile and a half" (more like 5 miles!) up to the stadium.

About 90 minutes late we decided we were going in circles and managed to hail a taxi that would drop us within sight of the ground. We also took the chance to ask the taxi driver what he thought of the Rangers fans and he was glowing in his praise, saying that he had seen no trouble all day and that even United wouldn't have drawn so many people to Manchester as we did!

Jamie Peters

Time progressed and the walk/tidal wave to the stadium began. I do not know how long it normally takes to reach the City of Manchester stadium from the centre but I imagine there will never be such a huge and loyal following make that walk.

Stephen Macleod

It was a longer trek than I was led to believe.

Robert McQueen

As we headed to the stadium we walked back toward Piccadilly to get the bus. There was a different feel to the atmosphere there than there was at Albert Square. Even at this time it was obvious that it was overcrowded and there was a lot of people that had far too much to drink.

Regardless, we set on our way, and as we drove through the streets en route to the stadium, it was incredible just how many people were there dressed in blue. Every bar was full to capacity and every street was lined.

Douglas Dickie

Unforeseen disaster meant I would not have my trusty old-style scarf and pin badges. Again fate was maybe giving me a clue as to what was coming up. That scarf had served me well. The story of how I came to part with it in the week of a European Final is a painful one, but I know I only have myself to blame. The devil drink can do strange things to a man.

Bryan Polland

Once on the bus the nerves really started to jangle and on the top deck of this double-decker a friendly bear was handing out cans of Red Stripe which I gladly accepted, the singing was constant and we even burst into the bouncy which amused all the fans walking alongside the buses. Eventually the bus became slower than walking pace so I got off and walked to the stadium taking a few photos on my mobile as I went along amongst the throng of Gers fans

Alistair Gourlay

I was on a bus that a Manc lady promised me went past the stadium. I didn't believe her though or at least it was taking far too long so I jumped off and ran towards the stadium myself. Following the crowd but definitely underrating the distance I had to go. I finally got there though, sweating like Artur Boruc in confession.

Steven Clifford

It took roughly around 45mins, probably similar to a walk towards Ibrox from Glasgow City centre actually.

Steven Hogg

Thousands of us walked in procession through the Manchester streets to the match, singing, laughing, smiling, and waving flags. A day never ever to be forgotten.

Steven Wilson

We walked from Piccadilly following the crowd east; it felt like a home match.

Steven Clifford

Except no walk to Ibrox has ever felt like this journey did. The people of Manchester clapped and cheered for Rangers as we walked on the way, displaying our flags and banners as we went. It felt really good and as excitable a moment as I have ever felt supporting Rangers.

Andrew Hunter

The nerves and anticipation really started to set in. The response from the locals as we passed was fantastic they cheered us on our way and left us in no doubt that they wanted us to win.

Fraser Munro

As we walked up I was waving my flag and scarf proudly at every passing car in what is possibly my proudest moment yet as a Rangers fan. I look around at my dad and brothers and couldn't quite believe that we were about to witness Rangers in a European Final. What a feeling! Up at the stadium myself and my brother were asked to do a radio link for radio five live. So we done a short piece on where we had come from and about what we thought the score would be. Never thought I had a teuchter accent until I listened back to that!

Douglas Dickie

The Carlos Cueller song was the favourite as we walked, but the whole songbook was dusted down. It was magnificent, especially passing a van decked

out in The Bill slogans, a reminder to a certain set of supporters who were quick to rub it in five years earlier.

We stopped off in a small store owned by an Asian gentleman in a housing estate not far from the stadium. I enquired as to whether he would be supporting Rangers tonight and he replied in a broad Scottish accent: "As I'm from Mount Florida, yes."

Murdo Euan MacLennan

We actually ended up walking beside about 1,000 Zenith fans that were making their way there, a real party atmosphere. The City of Manchester Stadium came into sight and then the butterflies in the stomach appeared.

Iain Munroe

We walked to the stadium savouring the atmosphere. Rangers Supporters and Zenit supporters mixed freely and the banter was superb.

Robert McQueen

We arrived at the stadium fairly early and the three of us took a walk around sampling the atmosphere. It was different from the squares here. Here it was anticipation. There was real sense of occasion. A nervous tingle in the air.

Steven Wilson

The stadium looked perfect swamped by tens of thousands of Walters foot soldiers. To be part of the spectacle may now be a once in a lifetime, you cannot put a price on such a day.

Murdo Euan MacLennan

I was going to watch Rangers in a European Final – bring it on. We stopped on a bridge as one of boys from Forfar managed to get a ticket outside the ground for a pretty penny and he and my mate went off to conclude the deal. I stood on the bridge near the stadium and waited for them.

It was at that point my father texted me something that I will never forget.

‘I am very proud of you son. In 1972 I had to go round to a friend’s house to watch Rangers in a final as your grandfather couldn’t afford a TV. Enjoy the game son; let’s hope the bears do us proud.’

Honestly the emotion of it all got the better of me; I could feel myself welling up. I'll never forget it.

Steven Hogg

The atmosphere leading up to, around and inside the stadium was amazing.

Steve Chalmers

Looking round the stadium all the banners filled me with pride. We were here THE RANGERS, UEFA Cup final.

Fraser Munro

Spirits were high amongst everyone and I actually felt confident going into the game. While we were no match for Zenit technically, I felt that Sir Walter had us very organised and we were and very difficult to break down that so we would always have a chance. We had beaten some top quality sides on the way to the final so why not one more!

Bryan Pollard

As we got nearer I seen the stadium for the first time and now my mind was racing, were the Rangers about to make me and thousands of others happy beyond our wildest dreams, I actually believed so although we knew Zenit were no mugs.

Fraser Munro

The butterflies that had been in my stomach went into overdrive. I was trying to get my head around what it would be like to see our captain Barry Ferguson lift aloft that amazing trophy. Then imagine the scenes that would follow in Manchester and Glasgow, along with how I would probably have to call my boss to let her know I wouldn't be back to work for a few extra days. It was just a feeling that will stick with me forever.

Christopher Cairns

We eventually made our way to the stadium with a little bit of time to spare which was spent waiting in line for the match programmes. We made the wait worthwhile and bagged 5 of them!

Murdo Euan MacLennan

First up was a ticket checkpoint, which was already massive, so we waited inline. Just to our left was Jackie bird and Reporting Scotland team. My parents watch it every night and I thought it was funny that they would be watching her and yet I was standing less than 20 yards from her.

Bryan Polland

When we reached the stadium the queues at the turnstiles were huge. I eventually got to the front of the queue and scanned my ticket which was rejected; I tried another couple of times without success before a steward told me to go to customer services as I had a fake ticket!!

I kindly told him that was absolute bollocks as it had been issued from our club but that it was not reading the chip (probably due to it being in my trainer for the last 8 hours.....eek!) so he took me to a bloke who was verifying tickets with a hand-held scanner.

The girl in front of me had her ticket scanned which said her ticket had already entered the ground and that she had a fake, I thought she was going to break down in front of me and it also got me panicking like mad even though I knew mine was genuine.

My ticket was scanned and eventually cleared so the steward escorted me back to the front of the queue.

Jordan Dallas

Once I passed through the turnstiles I felt a sense of relief as we had been warned not to bend the electronic strip inside the ticket so I was glad to see the green light to let me through.

Christopher Cairns

I was so nervous about the ticket being a fake waiting in the queue watching the stewards checking each ticket very carefully...

Robert McQueen

My hand was physically shaking as I inserted my ticket in the scanner.

Christine Sommerville

I did get nervous as I was queuing up and saw that there was a machine checking the tickets. What would I do if it turned out to be a forgery?

Stephen Wilson

Within about 50 meters of Eastland's, I bent down to look at something lying on the ground in front of us. Yes it was a genuine ticket for the match, now bearing in mind this was only 15 minutes before kickoff, I could not contact my younger brother, who had also travelled down with me (due to the mobile phone wipe out, due to the amount of bears there that day). So we just pulled in the nearest bluenose to us and asked this guy, if he fancied paying for our next round, (although not telling the guy what it was really for) the guy said yes. That was when we ourselves noticed for the first time that the actual ticket was just a couple of rows behind our own seats.

You should have seen the smiles ripping off his kisser once he entered the seating area just behind us. Basically the guy ended up sitting 3 rows behind me and my mate, for the price of a round and 3 hot pies at half time (the lad actually said that he would have been more than willing to stand us a full blown meal later that night, rather than a few steak and mushroom football stadia pies).

As for the ticket, my guess was that some poor punter who had probably cherished it (as you well know the tickets were genuine gold dust for this match) and stored it safely out of the way, dropped it unknowingly on his approach to the first of three ticket check barriers.

There was no way in the world that we could have passed it back onto its rightful owner as we had no idea as to who had initially dropped it.

Jamie Peters

I felt a huge nervousness about losing it/the possibility it was fake etc. Akin to how a nervous traveler constantly checks his pockets for his passport I was checking to make sure that piece of gold dust was in place until I arrived inside the ground.

Gary Tedford

I had taped my ticket to the inside of my calf with surgical tape to keep it safe and it was excruciating when it came to take it off!

Steven Clifford

We removed our tickets which had been guarded all day securely in my pocket, as I had been nominated to look after the briefs! No pressure there then! It was a beautiful night and we were at the stadium, I could now officially relax and enjoy the next few hours.

Douglas Dickie

We managed to pass through all the security cordons with little hassle. We were here, at a European Final to watch the Rangers. It was a surreal moment. Everything seemed similar to my few previous European trips, it all seemed so continental, yet we were only a four-hour drive from home.

Song after song followed, waving at fellow fans, but something didn't seem quite right. The closer we got to the stadium the fewer people there appeared to be, then a crowd of folk in white passed by and it became apparent we had wandered towards the Zenit end. Our earlier experience of the Russians had, perhaps unfairly, persuaded us to move with caution and we managed to get back into more friendly territory.

Ross Murray

We had a sneaking suspicion we would be in the Zenit end based on the entry gates and the seat numbers. Sure enough on the day, the Zenit end. However that's where the adventure starts.

John Hendry

To our horror as we walked round our tickets were for the Zenit section!!!

Ross Murray

Based on the fact we thought it was the Zenit end we took jackets just in case we would have to cover up.

John Hendry

PC Plod came up the queue and picked out loads of Rangers fans saying, "Uefa regulations preclude you coming in this section" - we explained that we all

had (extremely dear) tickets - "tough" was his answer as he directed crying fans to the velodrome where seemingly the game was on a screen.

Ross Murray

My mate Ali (ginger hair, short and balding, not your typical Russian looking dude) and I proceeded to the gate. I spoke pretend pigeon Russian and looked confused when they spoke in English and was waved through. Ali on the other hand opened his mouth and spoke in broad "Highland" and was stopped.

Now here was the dilemma, do I turn back? Or keep walking up the ramp? I turned back.

John Hendry

No way was I not going to get in so Gordon took our scarf's etc (although I still had a South East London RSC polo on) and rushed back to his car (which fortunately was very close) and changed out of his Rangers jersey etc. I even tried to buy a scarf from a Zenit guy but he blanked me.

Ross Murray

Much pleading and begging was not helping, Security were called and I was being escorted out of the stadium, however, I had to enter the stadium first as you couldn't get back out the turnstiles, Ali was heading towards exit where he was told I would come out.

Now here was where our luck came in, the security guard was obviously hired for the event and did not have a clue where the exit was. He stopped to ask an older security guy that obviously worked at the stadium. The old guy questioned the young pup and at that point I put on the sob story.

He then radioed some guy higher up in security team who came down and he got a further sob story, price of tickets, once in a lifetime, not been drinking and all that. There was obviously some tension between internal and external security as he stated there were already bears inside and to let me in.

Problem No. 2, how do I get my mate in? I plead again with the old guy, who eventually said he would get him in, however he was at the exit gate, and I couldn't get a mobile signal. By sheer luck there was a window underneath by area we were standing, low and behold Ali was outside as the exit was right underneath us. Much banging ensued, pointing back toward the gate.

I will forever be indebted to the old guy, and the sensible security guy, proper gents, who went down to the gates to tell the security staff to let him in even when other bears we're still getting blocked.

John Hendry

By the time Gordon came back the police had gone, (afterwards we assumed the police had been called into the centre rather urgently).

We strolled in as honorary Russians no bother, I asked a steward where our seats were and he only spoke Russian!!!

We found our seats to make it 5 Rangers fans seated together, luckily our near neighbors were "of a certain age" and a couple had good English so we had some good banter and were pretty safe. There were boys in the very front row who were conducting the singing etc who would have been delighted to have got close to us!!!

We did the link arms Russian "bouncy" with them and the real "bouncy" when the whole stadium shook.

Scott Jacobs

At one end of the ground, there were half a dozen port-a-loo things and supporters of both clubs waited diligently in line (we waited about twenty minutes) to get rid of that unwanted slash. What would have happened though if we had not been playing the Russians, but some mob whose fans think it would have been okay to wind us up by wearing a yahoo scarf? It was definitely a friendly final between the fans, the Russian fans were superb and you have to take your hats off to them. But it was a friendly final because of the behaviour of 99.9% of the fans and despite Manchester Plod and Manchester as a city.

Murdo Euan MacLennan

I went to the spiral staircase that I was to enter the ground via and waited, and queued and waited some more; ever mindful of the fact that kick off was fast approaching. I could hear the teams coming out; still I was queuing to get in.

People got very annoyed very quickly as it was clear the game was about to start yet the stewards at our turnstile were taking forever.

Kenneth White

Bears desperate to get in on time raised the stress levels a bit for the stewards

but they coped with it well. My heart was racing as we made our way up the spiral walkway, so much so I was in a complete daze as a young Rangers fan jumped over the wall beside me and ran past the despairing dive of a steward to disappear into the crowd!!

Confused as to where he had come from, we peered over the edge of the wall to see he had to have climbed on top of a spiked fence and jumped from it to get onto the concrete structure! The 2 floor climb afterwards was obviously relatively straightforward for Spidey junior! Spidey, if you're reading, take a bow pal. It was brilliant.

Davie Watson

My wee story starts on a drunken January night before we even played Werder Bremen, full of Mr Tennants amber nectar I said to my son "don't worry son if we get to Manchester, you're getting the ticket". By now you all know the rest.

The afternoon in Manchester we bumped into a good friend of mine who happens to be a Glasgow councilor, (bet that surprised you eh) he is suited and booted with the official Uefa pass draped round his neck. After a few minutes exchanging pleasantries, giving him the prawn sandwich abuse treatment and he's on his way.

The afternoon passes in a blur and before too long it's also time for the ones with the tickets to leave for the game. I give my son the priceless ticket, give him a hug and whisper in his ear "WE ARE THE PEOPLE SON, DO US PROUD". Off he goes with my mates, leaving us ticketless orphans with a clenched fist salute; staring bleakly into our warm pints of lager.

At 19:10 my phone rings...it's the councillor

"Where are you?"

Me

"In some night club"

Councilor

"If you can get up to the stadium in the next 15 minutes I've got 2 spare tickets"

Me

"See you in 15 minutes councilor"

"Rab, move we have got tickets for the game"

Rab

"What about our pints"

Me

"Fuck the fuckin pints, move"

Now at this present time I do not have a clue where or how far the stadium is from us, after instructions from a local policeman, we're off and running.

Running after drinking about 10 pints of lager is not one of life great ideas, on the brink of collapse we see a taxi stopped at the lights, pull open the door and jump in, much to the surprise of a Rangers fan sitting in the back seat.

After explaining the situation to him he happily lets us detour the taxi to the stadium, 5 minutes the taxi driver assures us.

The greatest invention since steam rings again, it's the councilor

"Where are you?"

Me

"In a taxi will be there in 5"

Councilor

"Ok no later"

About 1,500 meters from the ground the police have shut off the road,

"Sorry guys this is as far as we go".

Shit, we give the bluenose in the taxi a score and we are off again, running. The phone rings again;

"Davie where are you I can't wait any longer"

Me

"We can see the stadium"

Councilor

"Right I'm standing right under the statue of a star or something"

Me

"I can see it, I can see it, and we're not far away"

Councilor

"5 minutes Davie no longer mate I really need to go"

Bye now I've hit the wall, run, spew, run spew and feel as if a heart attack is just 2 steps away, I'm goosed the final dream is slipping away, but suddenly wee

Rab the white Ethiopian streaks past,

"Run Forrest run" I hear myself cry. He's now at the statue but the dick has ran right past it,

"Stop Forrest stop, for fucks sake stop"

At this point I suddenly believe in God, Allah, Buddha and the Supreme Being just for all you masons, he stops turns and see's the councilor, result. By now I have reached the scene,

"Right I've got to go here's the tickets; hopefully bang into you after the game"

With that he turns and runs off, me and Rab look at each other and start jumping up and down like a couple of maniacs before Wee Rab drops to his knees and kisses the ground

"Who the fuck is he, the pope?" a big polis man asks watching us.

We burst out laughing; the big polis gives us a quizzical look and moves off. Phone my son and tell him what happened he's over the moon; his slight guilt complex of taking advantage of a drunken man in January disappears as we go through the turnstiles.

Alan Spiden

The ground is a great looking place and certainly worthy of holding the final, after finding my seat I stood and gazed round the stands. I was once again transported back to stories of Barcelona and not just that, my mind went over all the Rangers games I'd been to that season and others.

Gary Tedford

In the ground I met Stuart McCall and thanked him for his part in NIAR. As I Looked around me our end was pretty much full by this stage. I must say that I didn't recognise a sinner from previous Euro adventures that year which made me question the distribution of tickets.

Robert McQueen

I was in the very back row of the top tier so walked up the big spiral ramps to get to my seat. As I walked up, I had a disposable camera with me and took photos with every step as I wanted to remember the moment. I lost that camera, and it was just as well as the photos would probably have been terrible with my nervous shakes. As I walked out from the ramp and entered into the arena I was

overcome with emotion. I couldn't believe I was here. Not for the first time in this campaign - I was greetin'!

I was not alone, there was many in the same boat as me. Guys were sitting looking absolutely shattered with disbelief.

Andrew Hunter

I had tears of joy in Florence. I had no tears here, just a bursting pride though I was close to tears when the Ranger's fans launched into 'Follow Follow'.

Brian Taylor

Walking into the stadium and all you could hear was "Follow Follow"

Douglas Dickie

We ascended the stairs and then found ourselves in the stand, the massive Rangers badge floating in the middle of the pitch grabbing our attention. Our view was spectacular, just to the left of the goal Rangers would attack in the second half. I can still see it so clearly, but find it hard to describe. The flags, the banners, the colors, the whole occasion. It was lump in the throat stuff that was for sure

Christine Sommerville

I remember feeling so proud when I saw all the Bears waving their flags and singing their hearts out.

Craig Kirkwood

It was quite simply amazing. Ranger's fans were everywhere.

Christopher Cairns

The view and atmosphere was breathtaking.

Jamie Peters

Sitting waiting for kick-off and looking at how we had not only taken over the stadium, not only the city but also every nearby city, the size and importance of

this club was embedded in my memory, as I sure it was to everyone in attendance.

Stephen Macleod

I made my seat with perhaps 10 minutes to spare which was far tighter than I wanted. But enough time to have 'my moment'.

Kenneth White

I spent those minutes taking photos of what seemed like an endless array of Rangers Supporters Club banners and flags.

Fraser Munro

A few flags stick out in my mind which showed what it would mean to fans and players alike for us to win the trophy. 'Leave no regrets on the field – give everything' was one; one which was far straighter to the point was a flag of the Uefa Cup with a simple message to the players, 'Make it yours'!

Alan Spiden

To see so many Union flags and Rangers banners together in that place and to hear the Rangers songs being sung at full voice was the culmination of everything I thought I'd ever see as a Rangers fan.

My thoughts also strayed up to my father, in the Western General in Edinburgh where he was suffering great pain from an undiagnosed ailment in his back, I hoped he'd be able to see the game from his bed and muttered a quick prayer to that effect (I never pray for football results as I believe the Big Man has other things to worry about!).

Bryan Polland

I made my way to my seat behind the goal and tried to take this all in (I was actually here with thousands of bears watching our mighty team just 90 minutes away from glory).

Jordan Dallas

My heart was bursting with pride and I have felt no greater moment to be a Bluenose than as I walked down the steps of the City of Manchester Stadium,

just about to watch my team in a European Final, something I thought I may not be lucky enough to see!

Andy Cumming

I'll never forget the spectacular sight when I walked out the concourse area. The stadium was filling up nicely and the vast majority had Rangers tops on. There were red, white and blue banners everywhere apart from one half an end of the ground where the Zenit fans were situated.

Craig Kirkwood

There was just a small section of Zenit supporters to our right behind the goal as we looked down from the top tier. I'd never been so high up at a match before and dad said it was a bit like sitting in the club deck at Ibrox. It was so steep I wondered what would happen if we scored as there was sure to be people falling over.

Murdo Euan MacLennan

Uefa really had given me a seat and a half. I was in the top tier right beside the Zenith fans; I mean right beside them, there was me, then the aisle, then the Ruskies.

Andy Cumming

Huge inflatable's with Zenit and Rangers banners attached were on the pitch and added to the spectacle. Some Rangers fans had worked their backsides off during the day when the rest of us partied, ensuring a union flag was on every Rangers supporters' seat to be waved as the teams came out and as the teams came on to the pitch prior to the match, the sight of thousand of these flags being waved by proud

Bears as well as thousands of balloons being released and some flames coming out of boxes was a sight that still gives me goose bumps thinking about it today.

It was simply stunning and to be in the stadium and be witnessing this amongst thirty odd thousand other Bears was a dream come true.

Iain Munroe

I will never forget entering our corporate box being introduced to the lovely wee girls that would be looking after us, getting our first beer and heading out on to our balcony, it was a sea of Union Jacks. I tied the large one I had brought with us to the front of our balcony and the Bear in the seats in front helped.

Douglas McIntosh

We found ourselves in the middle of the sea of Union Flags. A truly magnificent sight. I remember the buildup, the warm up but the teams coming out seemed to take forever.

Gordon Cubie

I decided to go to Ibrox to watch on the big screens. I was to take my daughters and one of their school friends. I passed Ibrox in the afternoon. It was queuing up already. I told the girls to get their dinner as quickly as possible and we hurried over. More and more doors were opening and we got into the Copland rear with about an hour and a half to go.

The atmosphere was surreal. The sounds of women and children were everywhere. All the men must be down at the game, I imagined. The songs were high-pitched, flags were being waved everywhere, and there was a mile long queue for the ladies toilets!

It was the oddest visit to Ibrox I had ever experienced. No actual game, hardly any men, kids and mums all over the place.

Robert McQueen

It is amazing how much Rangers can mean too so many. It took me a while to collect my thoughts. I sat with my head in my hands for a short while, a few big breaths, stood back up and I was ready. This was it, the final. The occasion, the atmosphere, the journey to get here mattered very little now. I wanted us to win this game of football. As the stadium filled to capacity and the noise levels rose, it was a proud moment to be there. It felt like we were all on the cusp of making history.

Adam Ross

Before the teams came out it hit me: BANG!!! The whole enormity of what I was about to miss hit me straight between the eyes then came back and hit me twice on the jaw. I WASN'T THERE.

I couldn't focus or think straight. I went to the bar ordered a pint and ten minutes later was on another. Deep down- my sub conscious I think decided to blot this out in the only way men know how to: get drunk.

Some people if any read this will ask "who the feck does he think he is?" and "why does he think he is so special etc?" Me? No one really and not special. I just think I should have been there.

David Wilkinson

So this was it the time had come and the final was about to kick off.

Jordan Dallas

The crowd swelled and the pre-match entertainment and atmosphere was bubbling nicely. The countdown was on until the teams came out and the Rangers fans belted out one of the loudest versions of 'Follow Follow' I have ever heard. This was it, our 19th game of an arduous European campaign.

Stephen Macleod

As the teams finally came on the park to a crescendo of noise I had clammed up, my throat swelled and darn it, were my eyes sweating? Right before my eyes, the Rangers were having their date with destiny.

Gary Scott McGregor

I had major butterflies and knew this could be the biggest and best 90 minutes of my life, as well as thousands around me. The adrenaline was rushing, my knees were trembling, my heart racing. Not one thought passed my mind about my very important English Exam the next day.

Jordan Dallas

The Foo Fighters 'Best of You' song was the anthem of choice for the evening, the immortal banner 'This is your chance, this is your time, become legends' was unveiled and it was a sentiment echoed by all those in blue in the stands.

Kenneth White

When I saw the banner my chest pounded and a lump the size of the match ball appeared in my throat. It was an incredible feeling.

A few minutes later, I got a picture message from Mairead of Jake fully decked out in a Rangers top and scarf! I had forgotten about the lucky mascot, hopefully he had one bit of luck left in him!

Stuart Cooper

The sight of Rangers walking past the UEFA Cup on their way to the pitch is something I will never forget.

Fraser Munro

This is where I heard a noise that I've never heard before at any match I'd been to. It was absolutely incredible and you couldn't hear yourself think. As a Rangers fan, to get the chance to see your team walk out onto the pitch with a European trophy as the prize is something that doesn't happen every year unfortunately. So to witness Barry lead his troops out onto the pitch was an amazing feeling and was just so proud to see the Rangers in such a great spectacle.

**ALEXANDER,
BROADFOOT, WEIR, CUELLAR, PAPAC
HEMDANI
SWHITAKKER, FERGUSON, THOMSON, DAVIS
DARCHEVILLE**

**SUBS: NOVO, MCCULLOCH, BOYD, SMITH, DAILLY, ADAM,
FAYE**

Nick McAusland

The eleven men who held the hopes and dreams of thousands around the World. There was only one place on the planet that a Bluenose wanted to be at that moment - Manchester. Each of us felt drawn there. It was an almost magnetic pilgrimage. I felt as though as I was amongst family in a sea of strangers. I've never experienced anything like it, and God willing I hope this

generation of Rangers supporters get to re-live that day again in another time, another place, another outcome.

Andy Cumming

To many people's surprise, the hero of the semi final, Nacho Novo, who'd played very well the previous week in a league game was only amongst the substitutes.

Steven Clifford

I was disappointed Nacho Novo did not start but not massively surprised. We were all ready for the game ahead and even then the thought of defeat still didn't enter my mind.

Douglas Dickie

The only surprise in the starting 11, for me at least, was the omission of Novo for Whittaker. But I knew we had to keep it tight. I wished Cousin hadn't been suspended, I wished we hadn't had to play so many games, but I held out hope.

Andy Cumming

The line up suggested a defensive formation and outlook and so it proved.

David Frew

Kick-off came and went and live feed did not start, this time the message read, "We are experiencing problems with the screen, please bear with us." Again we assumed that the problem would be sorted within 5-10 minutes at most. Then at 20:00 the screen was switched off, with no message or information being given. This obviously agitated a few fans and some scuffles broke out between fans and organizers.

George MacDonald

As time went on it became apparent that the screen would not be coming on. Our only thought as half time was approaching was about being able to see the second half. Leaving the square and looking around at all the full pubs, bursting at the seams I started to think we were onto plums.

Andy Cumming

Fans were advised to head to the velodrome and told that this was five minutes away. That was a lie as it was more like thirty to forty minutes away. The first sign of trouble was when an engineer appeared on the stage and was loudly booed and given a bit of cheek from some of the remaining crowd.

He promptly answered back through the microphone "shut up" which if he was to go on stage again in similar circumstances I think he'd chose his words more carefully than that.

Sadly a handful of buffoons in the crowd took severe umbrage with this fellow and threw missiles including cans and bottles at him.

This action enraged the decent fans that were left in the area and they turned on the idiots to get them to stop throwing things.

It became clear that the screen would not show the game as it was either not working or a decision had been made not to show it there.

Supporters were trying to leave this area as there was no way the game was getting shown and they also wanted out the way of the trouble makers.

Jimmy Paterson

I was in Piccadilly watching the game with 4 of my mates when the "riot" kicked off, I have been going to watch rangers for 30 years now, the last thing I was wanting to do was miss the big match. So we jump in a taxi and say to the driver just head for the ground. We were going through a housing scheme when we spotted a pub and told the driver to stop however the guy on the door wouldn't even tell us the score let alone let us in.

James Slater

Everybody picked up their stuff, and headed for the exits. We were just about at the UEFA stand, and everybody was saying we had scored, I turned round to see beer being shaken out of cans etc. Then the news came from my wife that there was no goal, we were now at the exit and trying to hold on to my mate with MS, and get through the exit was a nightmare.

We got out and a boy had a massive gash on his head and we wrapped his scarf round his head sat him down and got the police who said "we will get there when we can". We then asked another officer who proceeded to tell us the velodrome was 5 minutes away.

At that point the riot vans came flying round the corner and out bails the cops with batons flying and hitting anything that moved, women kids, anything. They charged into the entrance/exit where people were obviously coming from, and just hit anything.

We witnessed people with their hands in the air just being mown down with batons and this then resulted in other people stepping into aid, and they too were hit. It was truly a shambles and overzealous policing. Make no mistake about it, these officers wanted their kicks, and got them.

Innes Walker

I never caught up with my pals in the melee but ended up watching the match in a pub in Deansgate surrounded by fellow bears and local Mancunians including the actor who plays "Kevin Webster" in Coronation Street!! The guy that plays Kevin Webster was superb. He was mingling with all the Gers fans and doing photo's and autographs.

He told us he was a Man Utd fan and was looking forward to the champ's league final the following week, but wanted us to win the UEFA. I've still got a few copies of a photo with him taken in the beer garden.

Alistair Fyfe

I watched the match on the big screen in Albert Square, standing a long way off. I could hardly believe the amateurish production - it was clear that to avoid showing the ads during the TV coverage someone was using a mouse to drag the image down into the corner of the screen and then back again when the ads were over.

Stuart Cooper

The game itself is something that I don't really remember. It was over before I knew it.

Malcolm Clark

For the next 90 minutes I was bored shitless what a terrible game.

Iain Munroe

I can only remember certain parts, like when the Zenit support were chanting to each other and they all took their tops off and the crowd changed colour. Although it was amazing, I think it was only because they could hardly be heard for the rest of game. The noise the Teddy Bears were making was thunderous. We should be proud of ourselves indeed, very very proud.

Christine Sommerville

The game itself is a bit of a blur. I didn't really have any great expectation that we would win the game, I was just so proud of the players and management team for getting us there against all odds. With a bit of luck we could possibly have done something but perhaps we had used up all our good luck in the previous rounds.

Steven Clifford

I remember some points from the game but not a lot to be honest. The atmosphere is what will live with me the most, the fans were just fantastic.

Kenneth White

The first half just flew past in a sweaty palmed blur.

Mike Rennie

I try to get hold of Gav on the phone at half-time, still no answer.

Gary Scott McGregor

It was a shaky start from Rangers I'm sure, or it could've just been me shaking.

Douglas McIntosh

We could tell after 10 minutes that Zenit were not only a better team than us, but tactically they had it spot on! You would not expect anything less from The Little General.

Andy Cumming

The Russian side played some neat football in the first half, their passing and movement superb but Rangers crowded them out pretty well.

Fraser Munro

The first half was typical of our performances that year. Strong at the back and trying to hit the opposition on the break. Zenit were obviously extremely talented with people like Arshavin causing us quite a few problems. But the boys were holding up well and we were still well within a shout.

Walter Smith took a lot of stick that year with his 4-5-1 formation, but to me he was playing to his strengths. Unfortunately we don't have the Kaka's or Rooney's of this world so Jean Claude Darcheville was the one to lead the line for us. I still wonder if Novo or Boyd had started would it have been different but we will never know.

As much as I wasn't his biggest fan there was no doubt in my mind we missed Cousin up top, who was stupidly sent off in the semi final in Florence, therefore was suspended.

Kenneth White

Darchevilles chance for Rangers, a couple of long range efforts and a half hearted penalty claim for Zenit the events worthy of note. A free kick at the end of the first half which Kevin Thomson put straight into the wall brought my first real moan of the match, despite us giving the ball away needlessly on several occasions. The occasion must have been getting the better of me! Tight game, exactly how Walter would have wanted it was the general consensus.

Steven Clifford

It had been the same dogged performance we had grown to love from that Uefa run.

Jordan Dallas

I thought we could maybe push on a wee bit in the second half without opening up too much.

Alistair Young

The drink must have kicked in as I found myself on the phone to the bookies at half time placing £25 on Rangers to win.

Gary Scott McGregor

I just hoped and prayed that wee Jean Claude Darcheville would ping one in, in the second half and we could defend and let Barry Ferguson lift the Uefa Cup.

David Frew

We started to make our way up to the velodrome with other fans, but as we left the gardens a rumor was being spread that Davis had scored and we were 1-0 up after 20 minutes. My heart stopped for what felt like a life time and then I erupted, along with the other fans and there was bedlam as fans went crazy. I remember a fan then announcing that there had been no goal so far and we all came back down to earth with a bang! We walked up to the velodrome, which was further away than we expected and arrived there at the beginning of the 2nd half.

Jimmy Paterson

As we carry on up the road I saw through somebody's window they were watching the game. I gave the door a chap and an elderly couple answered the door. I told them what was going on down the road and asked if it would be possible if we could come in and watch the second half, she let us in we all took our shoes off sat on the living room floor quiet as we could be and watched the game.

Andy Cumming

Rangers began the second half brightly and Darcheville had a shot well saved and Ferguson struck the post following a scramble in which Rangers claimed a penalty.

Stuart Cooper

I remember screaming for a penalty for that handball in the box.

Kenneth White

The scramble in the box had me trying to boot the ball into the net myself. A real chance missed.

Douglas Dickie

My heart stopped a little when Darcheville had the chance and when the rebound looked like it may fall to Barry Ferguson the whole world seemed to slow down, as if I were watching it on slow motion. Whittaker's shot is cleared off the line, the momentary glimmer of joy quickly subsided as the ball spun into the air, away from goal.

Andy Cumming

Rangers had a couple more efforts blocked before the impressive Arshavin rounded Alexander, who was miles of his line and chipped an effort towards goal...

Kenneth White

The ball seemed to float towards the goal in slow motion.....Sasa Papac manning the goal line to bail his keeper out. Would that be Zenit's 'could have' moment?

Steven Clifford

I don't remember much from Zenit but who really remembers anything about the opposition, it's obviously all about Rangers. Then it happened.

Douglas Dickie

They had chances too, many of them. They were a decent team, but we looked on top. Then, the whole world came crashing down. I can't remember what minute it was. I told myself afterwards it was the 72nd but I suspect it was earlier than that.

Kenneth White

The clock ticked on. I remember looking at my watch and thinking it was getting towards 'squeaky bum time'.

Andy Cumming

The Russians began to dominate play again and on 72 minutes when a sublime Arshavin pass took out our defenders and Denisov scored easily.

Douglas Dickie

I knew it was a goal the second the ball fell at the feet of the white shirt. It was in by the time it left his boot. That horrible feeling you have in the gut of your stomach when the Rangers lose a goal quickly spread, except this was much worse.

Stephen Sinclair

Some guys climb up the lamp posts just in front of the screens, blocking the view for many others. Coins are thrown at them and eventually they are heckled down. When we go one down. A few bottles from the back of the crowd are thrown. 'Fuckin' disgrace' I shout as some poor guys 'cop' it near the front of the watching crowd.

Steven Clifford

The Zenit players were just too slick and Alexander was beaten. I remember thinking quite literally 'I just don't believe this is happening'. Even then I had it in my heart and head we would come back.

Kenneth White

You look to the ref....then the linesman...nothing. It really is a goal. That horrible noise that the smaller support in stadiums make was reverberating around the stands and the Zenit stadium announcer roaring through the tannoy. Gut wrenching, but still time. No need to panic.

Fraser Munro

I just remember utter silence. I'm sure the small band of Russians up in the corner were celebrating and making a noise, but to be honest I immediately went into a world of my own. Devastated and gutted just doesn't cover it. At that stage I think I knew it was going to be exceptionally difficult to get an equalizer.

David Frew

I felt like someone had punched me in the stomach and winded me, I just remember sinking to my knees and holding my head, I knew there and then that we would struggle to come back from that.

Douglas Dickie

I just couldn't see a way back.

Murdo Euan MacLennan

Some young Russian had gone a little mental and was right in my face celebrating, it was at that point that the police, almost out of nowhere, decided it was best to stand between the fans. The copper beside me said in my ear 'I hope you guys still win tonight, it would be great for British football'.

Stuart Cooper

If I thought the game was flying past up until now, it had nothing on how quickly those last twenty minutes passed. Time was running out. Surely we would get a last chance.

Gary Tedford

Even when we went 1-0 down the people around me didn't seem overly bothered about it. The game was pretty much a non-event, certainly not how I'd dreamed it would be.

Alistair Young

My gut instinct said at the time was game over.

Gary Scott McGregor

However in the square, all the Rangers fans were getting behind the team, there was still 20 minutes to go, we could still do it.

Fraser Munro

Walter made a few changes to try and make us more attacking near the end, the fans continued to try and back the boys and I never willed for a Rangers goal more in all my life.

Andy Cumming

Rangers were staring defeat in the face and soon threw on Novo and then McCulloch and eventually Boyd with a few minutes to go.

Kenneth White

Time suddenly seemed to speed up. Significantly speed up. Novo now on the pitch, if it was written for anyone, it was the wee Spaniard. A half fit McCulloch on for Hemdani giving us an aerial threat. Then came the chance. Ball into the box breaks for Novo on the volley....bury it wee man. Naaawwwwww!!!!!!

Craig Kirkwood

I didn't find out the answer to that question on falling although I did notice someone land 2 rows in front when Novo blasted over.

Alistair Young

It was at that moment I walked out the bar, I couldn't watch any more, it was injury time I hoped for a roar to signal extra time. Alas it was not to be; Chalky walked out and said "Let's go"

Douglas Dickie

Nacho Novo too, so often the hero. I knew then the run was over, we had come up short.

Steven Clifford

Even then I still believed.

Stuart Cooper

Then came a terminal blow, as we pushed forward in search of the equalizer, Zenit caught us on the break and scored again.

Kenneth White

If I was ever asked what the antithesis to 'frenzy' is I would give that moment as the answer. Football fans have a tendency to overplay the emotions they feel,

but, slumped in my seat, distraught was exactly how I felt at that moment. Life and Death? It's much more important than that. Reason goes out the window when you have invested so much energy into an event like this.

Craig R Morton

I could feel myself welling up; the second Zenit goal was a kick in the teeth and an absolute sickener for all the players and supporters.

Jordan Dallas

The players looked drained and out on their feet, they had given their all and Zyranov rubbed salt in the wounds when he scored in the 94th minute.

It kicked in then that the players had been running on empty, the SPL hadn't helped us in the slightest, unlike their Russian counterparts who gave Zenit a prolonged break before the Final.

Fraser Munro

To look around the pitch and see the player reaction, that mirrored the fans in the crowd was a real shame. Oh how it could have been the exact opposite but it was a case of so close yet so far. So that was it, shortly after that the final whistle went and the Russians went mental.

Some idiotic fans of theirs decided to invade the pitch to try and taunt the bears in our end. Thankfully our fans behaved to the impeccable standard expected and never retaliated. I still think had we managed to sneak one the roar would have been enough to lift the roof and who knows what could have happened then?

Stuart Cooper

It was over, and for the second UEFA Cup match in a row, the tears came. However, this time it was for an entirely different reason.

David Frew

That was it, our dream was over, bitter disappointment filled my heart, but I was still proud of my team and what they had achieved that season, it had been a terrific adventure for all of us.

Steven Clifford

I slumped in my seat and the emotion began to kick in like never before at a football match. I'm not ashamed to admit it I cried like a little baby. But it was pride as well as an enormous sense of disappointed, the players had played like heroes and they deserve the applause and adulation they took that evening.

Murdo Euan MacLennan

My heart sank. They were a better team, but had we scored the chance I fully believe we'd have gone on to win the match, but we didn't. Zenith deserved their win. At full time grown men all around me were crying, I promised myself that I wouldn't but I could feel myself welling up again.

David Wilkinson

I looked at my mate Jamie with tears in my eyes. It was emotional when the final whistle went and it was all over once again I broke down along with Jamie, we just couldn't believe it we had all convinced ourselves that this was our cup and our time, but it wasn't to be.

Robert McTeer

Quite simply we came up against a far superior team on the night. Any team that maul Bayern are going to cause you troubles, still though, we had that one chance where Novo snapped at a loose ball, who knows what might have happened had he done what he had done so many times for us in that campaign and kept his composure?

Douglas McIntosh

The goals they scored were more about 'when', rather than 'if'. We were being outplayed, but I still think if Nacho had stuck his chance away after they scored their first then something could have happened. But it wasn't to be. Still, we had had a truly memorable trip. Stories we could dine out on for months and years afterwards.

Mick Bradley

The game was very vague to me as I was consumed by the whole atmosphere & no doubt bevvvy, but remember feeling a sense of disbelief & disappointment that we were not going out & having a go & to this day I have not watched a re-run of the game.

Innes Walker

The match was disappointing, the Gers looked knackered and flat and to be honest Zenit were a better team.

Alistair Gourlay

The game was heartbreaking; I still don't regret paying the money for the ticket as it was worth every penny. *I was there!* It could be the only time it happens in my lifetime. As soon as it was over a fly or something must have went in my eye as I found my Dad and Andy all close to tears.

Andrew Hunter

I must admit to never really believing we could do it, Zenit in my opinion were a top team, just too good for us. My only hope was as before that we could nick a goal on the break or penalties.

Rab Picken

Dreams were in tatters but I was proud to say I was in Manchester to see the game on a big screen and meet so many fantastic supporters of our famous club.

David Frew

That was it, our dream was over, bitter disappointment filled my heart, but I was still proud of my team and what they had achieved that season, it had been a terrific adventure for all of us.

Jimmy Paterson

At full time we got up says thanks very much and that was that, what a couple letting in 5 drunken men to watch the game.

Douglas Dickie

It's a strange feeling losing a European Final. I've not sat through many domestic final defeats, but those I have are often tempered by the knowledge that you'll have the chance for revenge soon. Not so here.

It took us 36 years to get here; who knows how long it might take to get to one again? I was numb. I placed my hands behind my head and just stared at the pitch, or through the pitch. I applauded the players but it was like I was elsewhere, watching myself. Up until the first Zenit goal, it was unquestionably the best day of my life.

Even now when that Foo Fighters song comes on the radio or TV, I immediately change the station. Apparently some wounds still run deep.

Andy Cumming

Following the final whistle the players rightly looked dejected but were lifted by the magnificent support that had stayed behind and cheer them for their efforts. The Rangers fans generously applauded the winning side as they collected their medals and trophies and acknowledged that they were worthy winners and that it was no disgrace losing to a side that had beaten the likes of Bayern Munich, Villarreal, Marseilles and Leverkusen to get to the final.

Craig R Morton

Everyone was aware the calibre of their team. They really had beaten some good sides on the road to the final.

Stuart Cooper

Watching I couldn't help but feel envious though, before we began the long, lonely walk back to our apartment which, that morning, we had left with dreams of a party to end all parties. Instead we quietly skulked off to bed.

Robert McQueen

To a man we applauded the efforts and achievements of Zenith St.Petersburg and Dick Advocaat. We applauded our team too. To me they were heroes. They had provided me with some of the greatest moments of my life. I hope that in years to come that this achievement is celebrated and remembered for the correct reasons.

Stephen Macleod

We applauded the victors in a sporting manner alien to others from our shores, and proudly saluted our heroes in blue.

Christine Sommerville

I was disappointed at the result but just being there and watching us applaud the winners and our own team filled me with pride.

Steve Chalmers

Shame there is nothing really to shout about during the match however the team did a tremendous job in getting there in the first place and that's why they are heroes in my mind.

Andrew Hunter

It was heartbreaking not to win it but I was so pleased with the way the support conducted itself at the end of the game the fans stayed to pay tribute to the team and management and the magnanimity the bears showed in applauding Zenit as they went to collect the trophy is something every bear in the stadium can be proud of. It's what makes rangers and our fans special.

I can honestly say I did not notice zenith celebrating I was so focused on our players and ensuring they were left in no doubt that their efforts were appreciated not just that night but in giving us this occasion.

Bryan Polland

My lasting memories in the stadium were the fans and players themselves. I thought the fans throughout were fantastic, I have heard others since say that they thought the atmosphere in their area was poor but not for me I thought the support was amazing. I stayed right to the end as did many others and applauded both teams and although devastated I was still immensely proud of our achievements although.

As I looked at the players you could see they were raw with emotion as well, especially people like Walter and Ally who are fans just like us, the whole team knew how close we had come to the history books.

Mark Gourlay

The game itself may have ended up a bit of a damp squid but the atmosphere in the square was still amazing. We had lost 2-0 but Jared was still in absolute awe at the level of support and the sheer emotion everyone showed that day.

Gordon Cubie

If only they had got a goal and given us something to shout about. The noise in Manchester and Glasgow would have been like a sonic boom. It would have been the roar that was heard around the world.

Steven Wilson

Having watched the game (only once) on TV since the Final, we actually played better than I remembered. Unfortunately we didn't really turn up and maybe if we had brought Nacho on earlier at HT it may have swung the fixture in our favour. Up until they scored we had been holding our own, and even at the death a little composure from the wee man might just have taken it into extra-time, but it wasn't to be. The best team won on the night, but we certainly gave it a shot.

Murdo Euan MacLennan

I've only ever watched the game once, and that was live in the stadium, I don't think I'd be able to watch it again.

Chris Thorburn

I've heard lots of people say that they haven't watched the game since but I've watched it at least a dozen times from start to finish. If only Nacho had composed himself I'm sure he'd have rattled the net near the end. Walter's A4 notepad still baffles me!

Kenneth White

I haven't watched the game back since, nor do I plan to. Self punishment isn't my thing.

Greg Martin

I've blocked out most of the game itself from my memory as it was so disappointing, and to this day even though I had it on sky+ I have never been

able to bring myself to watch it.

David Wilkinson

I feel that we went down without much of a fight.

Mike Rennie

All I remember of the game is that Zenit scored their 2nd goal in the last minute and that we lost.

Andy Cumming

Many Rangers fans wished we'd went for it and played more attacking football in the final but we got there based on defence and it had worked for us so no one went overboard in slating the tactics deployed on the evening.

Steven Hogg

The match itself was obviously disappointing – how the hell we never had a real go at them I'll never know.

Kenneth White

People talk of the tactics employed in the game v Zenit, and in their opinion, Walter got it wrong. I disagree. I think he called it right, but we were beaten by a very good team. A team that a lot of Rangers fans underestimated in the run up to the game.

We had a very good record against teams from Russia and the old USSR and I think that had an influence on some peoples thinking. At the time I thought our formation would be perfect to stop their little genius Arshavin from having an influence, and to an extent it did for the first 72 minutes.

I don't think we banked on Igor Denisov having such an influence though he looked a real class act alongside Tymoschuk in the Zenit midfield. On the night we were beaten by the better team, I've got plenty of gripes but none of them with Walter Smith or his team

Bruce McAuliffe

Still thought we should have had a go at them. Who knows what could have happened. The game was a letdown for me.

Andrew Hunter

I know some fans have criticized Rangers for not going for it in the final but I honestly believe if we had went for it – the game would have been finished by half time. They would have ripped us a part if we had opened up. Walter did the right thing by using the system and players that had got us to the final.

John Hendry

My only real grumble was us not "having a go" - they were a good side - Arshavin is a fantastic player - but there were moments in the second half where we could have equalized and then, who knows. Team Vs Team the 1967 one was light years ahead.

Douglas Dickie

I didn't fancy "attacking them" as everyone else did; I thought it was more important to give ourselves the best chance of winning the cup rather than play into the opposition's hands. I thought we were doing ok, had weathered the storm and started to create chances of our own.

The Daily Record, 15th May 2008

SINGING THE BLUES;

175,000 STRONG TRAVELLING ARMY ARE IN MOURNING AS RANGERS FALL IN FINAL

Fans hail heroes despite defeat. The biggest travelling army in football history was mourning in Manchester last night after Rangers lost the Uefa Cup final but fans at the city of Manchester Stadium sang their hearts out for their heroes as Walter Smith & his dejected team thanked them for their support with a lap of honour at full-time.

Stephen Macleod

Perhaps we should have been more adventurous and played our Spanish charm. Football is all about moments and unfortunately Zenit just edged us in

terms of quality and decisive moments. No, it was not to be. The silver shiny prize was not to be ours.

Ally McCoist defiantly carried a scarf around the pitch and showed us all that this meant as much to those in the dressing room as in the stands.

Andrew Hunter

I remember Ally going round the fans his emotions were there for everyone to see he was thanking the fans for the phenomenal support and just showing a real pride in being a ranger and encouraging the fans to recognize the team. I also felt Dick Advocatt was gracious in victory and even pre match –he did not hide his affection for the club and its fans. Something I think really got under the skin of some of the media

Fraser Munro

The players collected there medals and then done a lap of honour for the fans. To see guys of the stature of Ally McCoist, Barry Ferguson and David Weir pretty much in tears showed just what it meant to them. I must admit to having a tear in my eye myself and just couldn't believe it was all over. I remember just sitting in my seat for a good while thinking what could have been.

Jordan Dallas

It still didn't take away from the occasion, the atmosphere had been immense and as the players lapped the pitch to applaud the fans, you could feel the bond between those on the pitch and those in the stand.

Andy Cumming

The team finally left the field and the fans who can be proud of the way the team was backed in Manchester and during the run to get there started to drift off, back to their coaches or to train stations or hotels, many shaking hands with and congratulating Zenit fans on the way and the adventure had come to a disappointing end yet everyone still felt immensely proud at seeing Rangers contest a European final.

Craig Kirkwood

Me and dad stood there until the team left the field and then left Zenit to enjoy their victory.

Murdo Euan MacLennan

I left the stadium just staring at the ground. How long will it be before I see Rangers in another European Final?

Greg Martin

We had come so close to doing the unthinkable but had fallen at the final hurdle. The last poignant moment of the trip for me was the mass exodus from the square, as 50,000 fans sang "Rangers 'Till I Die" with tears in our eyes and with all the voices we could muster to show that a loss in a European Final would take away from the love we had for our great club.

Robert McTeer

There were so many personal disappointing aspects in our UEFA cup final, but getting there, actually getting there 18 months on from where we were when Smith first returned to the club was astonishing. I've never felt highs like I have on our run in Europe. Away in Lisbon, McGregor's save, Novo's penalty. I wouldn't swap any of that for any other football experience I've had.

Christopher Cairns

The result was a disappointment but the experience is right up there with the best!

Alan Fineran (Manchester City Fan)

Back home, I watched the game on TV and saw the best atmosphere I've ever seen at the City of Manchester Stadium; unbelievable, and that's when the Gers had lost.

Bruce McAuliffe

A wonderful European adventure from Zeta to Manchester!! Let's hope I see the like again!!!!

Steven Wilson

A truly fantastic experience which will live with us all forever.

Stuart Cooper

Despite everything that has been said and has happened since, I look back on the whole Manchester experience with pride. Despite being gutted at not getting a ticket, I am happy that I watched the game and spent the day with my dad, brother, and my friends. That is something that I wouldn't swap for the world (well, maybe for a change of result).

The whole run was special, with the Semi-Final shootout the highlight. Anytime I get wound up due to a bad result or due to decisions being made at the club, I think back to that night in my dad's living room.

We may lose games here and there, and we may go through periods where things go wrong, but we will always have Florence and the 13 days that followed.

THE AFTERMATH

We're not exactly the Wombles, though in all likelihood you stood a better chance of seeing Orinoco or Tobermory than an employee of the cleansing department!

COLIN MCHARG

Manchester Evening News, 14th May 2008

BATTLE OF PICCADILLY

Violent clashes between police and Rangers fans cast a shadow over Manchester's world record breaking UEFA cup party. An estimated 200,000 Scottish supporters had turned the streets into a sea of blue ahead of their team's 2-0 defeat to Russian side Zenit St Petersburg at the City of Manchester stadium. But trouble flared after a technical fault meant 20,000 fans gathered at Piccadilly Gardens to watch the match on a huge screen were left with no picture.

Stephen Sinclair

Final whistle and again some bottles and objects are flying overhead waiting to find some innocent victim, devastated already about the result and now about to have their head cracked open by some clowns, sheer and utter madness!

We head out of Albert Square and head for the train station to get to the airport to pick up my car. So far, all we have seen of any trouble are the clowns who threw bottles, coins and bricks at their own support in Albert Square.

We turn the corner and the devastation to the street we walked down a few hours earlier is like a scene from a war movie. Police running about everywhere, riot shields, batons at the ready. We move along carefully keeping away from anything that may upset the police. 'What the fuck has happened here?' we ask ourselves. We try and hurry towards Piccadilly train station but the police have cordoned it off. Johnny is diabetic. His insulin is in my car. We have to get into the station so as I can get the train to the airport where my car is parked.

I approach one of the riot police to ask how we can get into the station. No sooner have the words left my mouth, when a barrage of bottles and bricks crash all around me. He hurriedly tells me to get out of the way before I get hurt and tells me to enter Piccadilly station by the side gates.

Seconds later there is a police baton charge as we hurriedly make for the side gates at Piccadilly Station. By this time, Louise is getting very upset but being an old warrior from Rangers v. Celtic days in the 60's and 70's, it's nothing I can't handle.

Eventually, at last, we get on a train to take us to the airport. But, this train ain't goin' nowhere! We stand waiting for the train to move. Nope! It's not moving. After standing in the train for a couple of hours without any information whatsoever and rumours flying around that the Russian fans are also heading for Piccadilly Station to cause a riot, we are told all trains have been cancelled until 8.00am in the morning.

Johnny's diabetes is kicking in and he starts to lose the rag a wee bit with some of the police who are being at their most unhelpful at giving any advice or information. We decide enough is enough and we leave the train carriage and go outside to find a taxi. Not a chance!

Now my panic is setting in. My car with Johnny's insulin is 10 miles away and I can see him suffering. We walk up and down the streets looking for a taxi but any taxi that passes is full and we have been told that taxis have been warned not to come into the Manchester City Centre.

We have now walked for nearly an hour. Thousands of fellow supporters are desperately trying to find a way home. The match ended over four hours ago and we are now stranded in Manchester with no mode of transport to get me to the airport. We are all tired after a hectic day and Johnny is giving us some cause for concern. The whole day is turning out to end in disaster.

Out of the blue, my guardian angel steps in. From a little side street off the main road, I see a taxi cab sticking its nose out as if to check the coast is clear and make a run for it out of the City centre.

I immediately make a run towards it and ask for it to stop. Please! 'How many are there of you and where are you goin'?' the taxi driver calls out. 'Four to the airport!'

'Jump in!'

The relief! At last we were on our way home. It was only then that we realised what had happened at the Piccadilly fanzone and the subsequent riots as the taxi driver explained to us why the public transport was halted and how the big screen in Piccadilly was turned off.

Johnny managed to get his insulin in time and a six-hour journey back to Glasgow was soured, really, only by the result. You see, my dad was at my side that day. He told me to 'get down to Manchester'. He arranged for all his boys to be there at the one time and I'm sure I heard him shout 'taxi' when that cab inched its nose out from that wee side street in Manchester!

Lawson Barrie

As it turned out, our 4 ticketless pals probably had the best story to tell. Well maybe not best, but they certainly had an eventful night that's for sure. They had been at the main square where the screens had "failed" so like many others went away desperately searching for somewhere to watch the game.

My cousin literally begged a random Mancunian to let them into his flat to gatecrash his quiet night in. Although I was at the game at this point, I can still picture him looking up to the window of this poor guys flat, begging for him to let them in. Luckily for them he let them in and despite not being a football fan (obviously a confused individual) stuck the game on for them.

BBC News England, 15th May 2008

UEFA VIOLENCE 'STRETCHED' POLICE

Police in Manchester who came under violent attack from Rangers fans in the city for the Uefa Cup final admitted they were "stretched" by events. Assistant Chief Constable Justine Curran said the influx of 150,000 Scottish fans was "unprecedented".

Colin McHarg

The whole fanzone experience was an unmitigated disaster as far as I'm concerned. Screens were too low which meant kids had difficulty seeing the live action. There was also the added distraction of wondering whether you would be targeted by the idiots (like the young woman struck on the head in front of us) who preferred to lob cans into the crowd rather than act sensibly.

I witnessed two punch ups, one more of a scuffle, the other a six man brawl and both as a result of the aforementioned tossers (a play on words but highly appropriate).

As for conditions underfoot, Jesus might have walked on water but Christ, I'd wager even the lord would have struggled to maintain his balance when negotiating his way towards the exit. Rumour has it that even fly-tippers thought better of depositing their garbage on this makeshift dump.

Gary Scott McGregor

I left the guys I knew in the square to walk to the point where I had told Daz I would get him. It was an Italian restaurant, I forget the name but I sat there,

holding back the tears while many people walked by. I was oblivious to all the rioting, I just sat there, against a wall, on a cold, dark, dull night in Manchester, all alone, with no-one to console me.

George MacDonald

We all piled back out onto the streets with what little of our carry out we had left. As if it mattered. As if we needed a carry out in the atmosphere that was still booming. The streets were still swamped with joyous Bears, no matter the result, we were there for a good time and a good time we had.

Mike Rennie

Gav had managed to retrieve the programmes from Kros bar and got into the Gardens just as it all kicked off. According to him, he came across a policeman and asked him the way to the Velodrome, the cop told him to "piss off" so Gav had squared up to him. A riot cop charged him from the side and knocked him to the ground, then started laying into his stomach and back.

He showed me his bruises his back and stomach were covered, he was black and blue. He had got up and walked away, tried to get as far away as possible from what was going on. He just kept walking, in his drunken state he hadn't thought of phoning me, he just wanted to get as far away as possible.

Gary Shaw

After leaving Piccadilly gardens (after the screen failure and then police harassment to "get back in there" and being sent through god knows how many back streets), we got back to the car park. Few other bears in there all fed up with how things were going and just wanting to get out of Manchester.

Colin McHarg

That was another gripe of mine, the decision by the police at the end of the game to shepherd the majority of fans in the general direction of Piccadilly.

I should add that the Constabulary prior to kick-off were excellent, very informative and laid back, but forcing almost everyone towards what they must have known was an already volatile area was a major mistake in my opinion. To add to the confusion, if you were a parent with a child, you were allowed access through a gateway and allowed to go the opposite way to avoid the main crowd.

Crazy when you take into account that many attending were in mixed

company and separating those travelling together wasn't the smartest idea in the world. Especially not when it meant a two block trek, walking past a couple of streets then doubling back to meet up with mates you'd been standing beside earlier! Mobile phones - what would we do without them! Still be wandering around Manchester probably.

Alistair Fyfe

Even as the disappointment of the result was sinking in I had a slight feeling of dread about what injuries would have befallen some of the people there had we scored. The statues in the square couldn't have coped with the celebrations, and more than a few folk would have fallen off the memorial in the centre, not to mention the lampposts and trees.

Alan Spiden

As we know, the game didn't turn out as we hoped and as I left the game, cursing a late missed chance, I was content in the knowledge that we had had a decent, if uninspiring, game and that the fans had acquitted themselves impeccably all day, in and out of the stadium.

Iain Munroe

On the way out of the stadium we bumped in to a group of Zenit supporters. I went up to them and shook every single one of their hands. I turned to them all and in my best pigeon English I said slowly;

“The only reason I shake your hands is because you support Zenit. If you were Liverpool or Manchester United I not shake hand. Their supporters are at big Finals all the time. Zenit supporters are like Rangers supporters, we dream of these days.”

The most beautiful Eastern European girl I have ever seen gave me a long hug – I could not help but be moved by this warm human gesture. With a wee tear in my eye I waved them and the stadium goodbye. Apart from my sons being born and Helicopter Sunday this was easily one of the best days of my life.

Jordan Dallas

As we walked away from the Stadium, I was down in the dumps that our European Final appearance had ended so flatly. It could be another 20 or 30 years before we get to another Final.

Craig R Morton

The walk back to the car was lonely, and I don't mind saying tearful one. I think we can all get emotional at times when it comes to our club, but the walk back to the car was a realisation that Rangers were not going to be lifting the UEFA Cup and my emotions got the better of me. Even being propositioned by a barely comprehensible Manc prostitute was nowhere near enough to entertain me to the point of diluting my disappointment.

Murdo Euan MacLennan

I walked, dejected, along with 45,000 other bears that night, contemplating what might have been. I waited at the meeting point I had arranged with my mate. After a while he appeared. We just hugged and shook our heads. It wasn't to be. Then it was a case of getting back to the city centre, finding our new hotel for the night and getting indoors asap.

Kenneth White

The walk back to the city centre was like a funeral procession, the mood only briefly lightened by the Happy Monday's style rave going on in one of the flats on the journey. We tried and failed to get into a couple of pubs for some liquid anaesthetic, but to be honest, I had no interest and wasn't bothered one way or another if we got in or not.

Douglas McIntosh

As we headed back into town, the songs started again, it was still a good night. Then I started to get texts from back home. We could hear the sirens in the distance....then riot vans rushing by on the main road. We knew that couldn't have been good.

Lawson Barrie

We were totally unaware of all of the problems in the city centre, until I got a text after the game had finished. "Watch yourselves for fuck sake, there's been big trouble in the city centre" it read, this came as a huge shock to us as we had witnessed no trouble apart from a couple of drunken idiots in the Chinese.

Stephen Macleod

The texts about some kind of trouble were just ignored. I didn't have the energy and was in bed sooner than I had ever hoped.

Malcolm Clark

Back at daughters she told me that there had been a wee bit of trouble, by the next morning that wee bit of trouble had turned in to WWIII.

Fraser Munro

After meeting up with my dad and brothers outside the stadium it became quite apparent that something wasn't right. There was helicopters flying overhead, police and ambulance everywhere and one look at my mobile told me why. I had several messages asking if I was ok? Then another telling me to avoid the city centre. By all accounts it was a battle zone and there had been massive problems. However with us having to get back to Warrington by train, we had to make our way into that area.

Iain Harding

The games a bit of a blur and after exchanging hugs with fellow bears we headed off to the train station. We lost my mate somewhere along the way. Too busy watching the helicopters I think. We had no idea of the riots at this stage.

Christine Sommerville

It was only on the walk back to the centre that I began to feel uneasy. There was a big retail park to our right and I noticed it was full of police vans and policemen in riot gear. Things seemed eerily quiet somehow. I wondered if they were expecting trouble and thought they'd be disappointed.

Steven Wilson

Already we were hearing vibes that no taxis were coming into the city centre. We then trudged almost 3 miles, to be met by bloodied Rangers fans. As I was asking what happened I got separated from my friend, Chalky. Next thing I knew was the phone going off only for the battery to go off.

I knew that would it be the boys on the bus to see where I was, but I couldn't answer and I couldn't phone back. I had not a clue where I was in relation to the ground, so I tried to come to terms with the fact that I could be stuck in Manchester for the night.

Ian Nicol

We tried to navigate our way back to the Lancashire Cricket Grounds where our supporter's bus was parked. The Police and passersby were no help at all.

Greg Martin

It took in excess of three hours due to a combination of poor directions from equally drunk fans and our own alcohol consumption.

Andy Cumming

I boarded my coach and people started to exchange stories of the day and just how good it had been whilst waiting for stragglers or people that had travelled without tickets to find their way back.

We waited until around 1am for the last person to get back to the now almost deserted coach park and stories of trouble in the city centre started to filter through. The scale of this trouble, why it happened and how many people were involved was not clear to anyone at this stage.

Steven Wilson

I bumped into a fellow Bear from Ayr, who was also looking for the bus park and together we made our way. When we eventually got there, our hearts sank as there were only six buses left in the coach park.

We went round them all asking where they were heading, until we got a reply saying "Harthill" We secured a lift for a nominal fee and off we departed.

Adam Ross

There was no chance of a taxi and the walk felt like forever, we knew we were getting closer as the amount of rubbish and litter increased with every step. At the time I never sensed anything but looking back now the way the Police were around the train station and the amount of fans about maybe something had just happened or was about to. It didn't register and I didn't care.

Scott Jacobs

Getting back into the city centre you could feel the electricity and the tension in the air. It was crackling.

Mike Rennie

I phone my dad to say we're ok and he tells us that there was trouble at Piccadilly Gardens and that the big screens had failed...That would explain the bedlam, I thought.

Jordan Dallas

We continued towards the city centre and immediately it became clear that something had happened there were sirens going off everywhere.

Alistair Gourlay

It wasn't the prettiest of sights. Glass all over the ground, a boots broken into and shattered bus stops. There were pockets of Rangers fans still enjoying themselves but generally most just wanted away from Manchester.

Mark Dale

We could hear the emergency sirens blaring, and there were some riot cops/vans so we knew something had kicked off. A middle-aged woman walking in front of us innocently approached one of the riot cops asking about directions, and I swear that he raised his baton to her. The guy looked like he was in a war zone the way he was pumped up, and it looked like he just needed the slightest excuse to let fly with his baton.

Colin McHarg

In that instance and only that instance, you can understand why police were heavy handed. Innocent bystanders were caught up in the riot as those thugs

brought shame on Rangers FC. We can debate all day about other firms being involved and spoiling for a fight, but the stark reality is that many were from North of the border and thought nothing of tarnishing the reputation of our great club. The consequences of their actions will have far reaching affects on us wherever we travel in future. Follow with pride or don't follow at all.

Alan Spiden

I couldn't find our bus and was unable to call anyone to ask its whereabouts as both mobile phones I had on me had run out of battery, that I began to hear rumours of trouble in the city centre, I began to panic at this news as my son was among those who had been unable to get a ticket and had watched the game in Albert Square.

I was heading back into what had become a nightmare scenario and still hadn't found my son when, purely by chance, I spotted him and others from the bus walking in the opposite direction on the other side of the road. I ran over and asked him what was going on and if he was ok, which he thankfully was.

He described coming out of Albert Square, making a wrong turn into Piccadilly and being confronted with hundreds of fans running out of the way of a few dozen trouble makers. He'd had to shelter under scaffolding to avoid some bottles that were being thrown and had made a pretty quick exit along with the rest of his party.

I was obviously relieved that he was ok but also furious at what my son had been put through by people masquerading as Rangers fans.

Innes Walker

The first I heard of the trouble was about 10pm when fans coming into the pub told us about it, I felt very disappointed as I knew it would give ammunition to the many Rangers haters within the Scottish media and public life. However even though these people have poured scorn on our club for years, the 200,000 plus in Manchester prove their bile hasn't dented the awesome popularity of the club.

Murdo Euan MacLennan

When I arrived back the city centre was still like a war zone. Riot police everywhere, the streets were covered in glass and cans. Yet amongst all that mayhem, I spotted a boy from back home, who was on the same year in school

as me, just making his way back to his hotel. We shared a quiet word in amongst a mini riot nearby, again, a surreal experience.

Douglas Dickie

When we arrived at Piccadilly Square there was eeriness about the place, and no sign of what had gone on while we had been in Eastlands. Only bumping into a group of friends from the supporters' bus offered us any clue. It took us hours to get out the centre and to the supporters bus.

Gary Tedford

The place was like a bomb-site.

Douglas McIntosh

The place was like a ghost town....a litter strewn ghost town. Not a taxi to be had. Buses had stopped. Not a copper in sight to help us find out way back to the hotel. Nothing. It was obvious that something had happened, but we were not sure what. Even people texting us from home could not really say for certain what had happened. So we started walking back to Oldham, back to the hotel.

Craig Kirkwood

Once back in the centre we had lost our bearings and there now seemed to be a lack of police around to point us in the right direction. As we stood scratching our heads at a crossroads wondering which way to go English voice from behind asked if he could help. We told him we were trying to find Albert Square and he said to walk with him as he was heading in that direction anyway.

It turned out he was a journalist from a local Manchester newspaper who'd been out on the streets covering events. He started to tell us about the trouble and how it was still going on and said he was so disappointed that what had been such a brilliant day with the fans in the city had turned out like this and how all of the reports in the morning won't mention the tens of thousands of football fans having a great time but will be all about the few hundred morons who rioted.

Donna Sevwright

We decided to head out into Manchester again in search for our lost friend once it had quieted down a bit, although it was like looking for a needle in a haystack and we were starting to get separated ourselves (we lost my younger brother for a bit while looking) and when my older brother phoned he told us he was in Sauchiehall street, he had to be reminded the we were in Manchester and not Glasgow.

Mark Gourlay

As we walked through the crowds back to the train station there was broken glass and bodies lying about. "Just steaming" I thought. Then the joy that I had seen earlier had turned to anger in some people. Some justified, some not so.

Alistair Fyfe

When I got back to Piccadilly and saw the queues I knew there was no way I would get on the local train to Stockport, so I jumped on a Sheffield train which had one stop - Stockport. Thus I was back in the hotel by 10.30 and oblivious to any trouble.

Scott Jacobs

We tried to get through Piccadilly Station as a short cut to get to our hotel, but Plod had barricaded those inside in, and those outside, out. Some of those inside who wanted out, just barged open the barricades, and that was our out, to get back out on the streets and get to our hotel.

Christopher Cairns

We hadn't checked the train times as we had assumed they must surely be running trains back up north past the border. So off me and my dad went jogging as our kilts swayed all over the place. We finally got to the train station, where it must be said; I'd be gutted if I were claustrophobic.

We joined the queue that headed up towards to top platform...where we find the big metal gates to be locked down blocking the pathway. We waited there for 30 minutes but still nothing had happened, so some of the lads ripped the gate out of the ground wrapping it upwards, and everyone poured through to the terminals.

To our surprise there were NO trains northbound for a good 1-2 hours. We waited and got the only train heading north...which was to Preston. We got on

the train and after about 20 minutes it stopped for about 1 hour as armed police wandered up and down the train platform outside.

Christine Sommerville

There was a train (to Leeds I think) ready to leave. I took one look at it and said to Elaine that I wasn't going on it. The fans were crushed like sardines. Just then, we noticed a train at the other side of the platform that was empty. We saw from the notice board that it also stopped at Huddersfield so we got onto the train and even managed to get seats. I know we were really lucky as I believe that was one of the last trains to leave Manchester before the station was closed.

Mark Gourlay

The train station was a nightmare and something I wouldn't want to go through again but there's no way these events could take anything away from one of the greatest days of my life (only beaten into second by the birth of my boy).

Alistair Gourlay

The trains stopped running at 11 with a huge queue still waiting, leaving the only way to get back to Preston a 60 quid taxi.

Steven Hunter

When we got there the station was closed, but just by luck a guy said they were putting on a bus to Blackpool and we ended up getting spaces on that.

Fraser Munro

We got to the station without difficulty but the amount of people in the station was unreal. We arrived at the platform at around 11pm and we joined the queue for a train back. I would guess there must have been about 3 thousand people in this queue. We knew we weren't going anywhere quick but with no taxi in sight and that queue also ridiculously long we thought we would stay with the train plan.

James Slater

Whilst in the taxi queue, we spoke to a wee guy in his forties, who was clearly shaken up, we asked if he was ok, and he proceeded to tell us that he had lost his 13 year old son and brother in law and whilst waiting at their pre-arranged meeting point, he was confronted by two riot police who told him to move on, he explained why he was waiting there, and told them he wasn't leaving without his son. He was then struck down by both officers and a dog set on him. He was in some state and so anxious about his son. I let him use my phone because his got damaged during the commotion, but to no avail, he couldn't get through to anybody.

Iain Harding

We found lines of fans sleeping at the station and lines 100 long for taxis. After standing on a stationary train we thought would take us to the airport and watching idiots start fights to get on the stationary train we thought enough's enough and we started walking.

Douglas McIntosh

We were about 3 miles into our walk and about ready to sleep on the pavement; when we managed to flag down a minicab that ripped us off for the last 4 miles or so back to the hotel. Between the 3 of us though, £20 seemed fair just to get us home. We would probably never have made it otherwise!

Colin McHarg

Returning to Denton was a nightmare. A twenty minute journey into the city that morning took three and a half hours to reach my destination. All city centre services had been cancelled while taxi drivers were either reluctant to pick up football supporters or ask ludicrous amounts of dosh for a hire.

Mick Bradley

We stopped one & were quoted £80 which we tried to knock down. No chance said our Asian friend, so we told him where to go & he fecked off. Bad mistake by us. We then walked for miles without a clue where we were. By this time it was after 11pm & the boys were knackered. No taxis were stopping even though they were empty, which we thought strange. Eventually one did stop, another wee Asian chap, "How much, mate"? "£80"...."We'll take it".

George MacDonald

As it died down we searched for a taxi back to the Rugby Club, searched and searched to no avail. Eventually after what seemed like an eternity we got one. Were charged £50 for what ultimately by that time would only have been another 20 minutes walk up the road. Turns out, these taxis in Manchester aren't taxis at all but opportunists who put a sticker on their car. A lesson learned for future trips to Manchester.

Greg Martin

We didn't meet up with any of my friends who had hotel rooms booked, so we had nowhere to go for the evening. When we arrived back at the car, we put our seats back, took in what we had experienced that day & night and drifted into a decidedly uncomfortable sleep. Around 5am after much tossing & turning, we decided to make a move back up to Edinburgh before the rest of the traffic and we left Manchester as the sun was breaking through the clouds.

Mick Bradley

The main roads were heaving heading north & out of Manchester. We were blissfully unaware of the carnage that went on after the game & were still on a bit of a high despite not winning. After a while the driver was babbling on about us having to get out the cab. We were on a dual carriageway, nowhere near our destination.

Obviously he was getting reports about the disturbances & thought we were going to do him some damage. After a few forceful words the guy continued his journey & dropped us off in Leyland town, where we got another cab to the "campsite". It was only then I found out about the trouble after the game & even then didn't think it was going to be much of a story.

Colin McHarg

I finally managed to jump on a Stockport bound bus (along with another dozen bears) driven by a Polish driver who certainly wasn't interested in taking fares and knew very little English. Which is why, when you're hungry and make eating gestures in the hope that a foreigner will understand, you should at least ensure that a nod of the head to KFC doesn't automatically mean the premises are open for business.

Lads - the look on your face when realising the place was closed and your futile attempts to reboard the bus was priceless! I doubt whether an anabolic induced Ben Johnson would have caught up with that Wacky racer who seemed desperate to reach the depot in record time. Maybe he was related to Boruc. Unlikely as he took a detour and avoided the cross!

Jordan Dallas

We trundled back to the car, heavy hearts in tow and made our way back to East Midlands, stopping at a service station for something to eat.

Christopher Cairns

The place was just packed with hung-over bears...and the line to burger king was longer than the Ibrox subway at 4.50 on a Saturday! It will never cease to amaze me how no transport was made to go back up north when they knew the size of the travelling support would be large. If they did put anything on they made very little effort in advertising it. I hate Manchester...and Manchester probably hates us back.

Jordan Dallas

Having got a bite to eat we noticed on the television there had been trouble between some 'fans' and the Police, some of the scenes weren't nice to watch and the group of 'fans' who engaged in the violence should be ashamed of themselves.

Adam Ross

We were relatively sober by the time we arrived at the bus and were last on; being met with the dejected faces of those who had been there. They were dejected but to me at least they had been there. I couldn't face talking much and fell asleep.

Fraser Munro

Eventually around 2am they put up signs saying that there were no more trains for the night. My brother thought that walking might be an option, but when I pointed out it was about 15 miles along a motorway we managed to

convince him against it! Therefore back into the station where it was just a sea of bodies trying to get a seat somewhere on the floor.

Lawson Barrie

It resembled a morgue with thousands of bodies lying on the rock hard floor trying to get a nights kip!

David Frew

I have to say it was and still is to this day the worst night's sleep I have ever had! We had to sleep on the floor as seats, benches, stairs and even the flower beds had Rangers fans sleeping in them so we were resigned to trying to sleep on the tiles. Every time I was about to dose off another group of Rangers fans would arrive singing and I would be woken up by them coming in. I think in total I must have slept for about 15 minutes that night.

Fraser Munro

We waited there until around 5am or so before eventually managing to get a taxi home.

Iain Harding

After trying to hail around 30 cabs and hugs from very happy Zenit fans we were tired, slightly drunk, sun burnt and starving we headed along the road I thought we had come. My brother was now vomiting in bins and wanted to lie down and sleep but I wanted to get back.

After hundreds of attempted calls to taxis, mates and the hotel we were struggling to find a way home, not even knowing how long it would take or far away it was which would come as shock later on.

My mate, who we lost due to the fact he went for a Chinese and got the bus to the airport, was in a taxi at the airport being fleeced by a cabby who pretended not to understand him and instead of driving him the 5 minutes from the airport to the hotel took him on a tour of Manchester, threatening him with the police after my mate got very mad and eventually dumping him and fleecing him of £30.

We were on an unknown road, tired and angry when a car stopped on the opposite side of the road. I ran over and he said, "I'm not a taxi mate". I explained our situation and hoped he could give us directions or a lift. He

agreed, for a £10 he would drop us off at the hotel. We didn't know but this took us 45 minutes in the car, that's longer than Edinburgh to Kelty where I stay.

I can't imagine how long walking, not knowing where we were going. This man was our hero and gentlemen. He will always be one of the best memories from that day because I don't know how we could have got home without his help.

Alan Hutchison

Only 5 of us managed to make it back together and one was luckily dropped off by some Leeds based bears as he attempted to walk back along the Oldham Road.

Donna Sevwright

Finally we decided to head back and see if our lost friend would make his way back there. We let the staff know he was missing so they knew to let him in if he turned up. We all enjoyed the rest of our night, drinking and having a laugh until our door was thrown open at 2am by one of the staff saying "look what I've found" and in wonders our lost friend who had returned minus my brother's rangers top he had been wearing and with a different flag to the one he left with.

I tried to catch some sleep after more than 2 days without any but was wakened around 3am with the wanderer screaming as 2 of our group had lifted him from the floor where he had fallen asleep and carried him into the bathroom and turned the cold water in the shower on him which was quite funny.

Alan Wardlaw

We managed to get a taxi, £55 back to the hotel. A few beers later and I hit a brick wall. Made my way to the communal room where already there were bodies everywhere. Probably the worst night's sleep of my life, I had the Wilderbeast snoring like a horse farting in my ear and some other fat cunt farting in my coupon. Fuckin unbelievable.

I remember getting up in the middle of the night and standing on someone's glasses, I recounted the story the next morning to the guys, saying that I hadn't a clue whose specks they were. Then this guy comes through the door with glasses on with a smashed lens and a bent leg hanging off his nose, the whole place was doubled over.

Billy Farmer came down for breakfast not long after, looking kind of fresh considering we had crashed. He explained that he was on the second floor which

had 8 double bedrooms which he had paid for all of us. Not one of us used them; the room we crashed in was only for our bags etc. Unbelievable!!

Christopher Cairns

Eventually getting to Preston at crazy hour, we found a taxi rank and got a taxi to the nearest accommodation which was a Travel Inn. My dad went in first and spoke to a guy who being honest was a right cunt and told us to be on our way. He then tried again and this time a Scottish woman was serving us. She said we could sleep in the travel inn lounge and she'd give us duvets and pillows.

Whilst sitting there going over what had just happened, 2 bears came down and started chatting to us at the bar, we explained our situation and they amazingly offered us to sleep in their family room. Two genuine top class guys, as the next morning they even offered us a lift back up the road to Glasgow, the nicest bears I have ever met.

Craig R Morton

We didn't even have a hotel to go back to, a pillow in the passenger seat of a Volkswagen Passat was a good as it was going to get.

Steven Wilson

The day had took its toll and I quickly crashed out only to be awakened by loud shouts of "Wake up Willie" Unfortunately for the passengers on the bus Wullie was the driver of the bus and I was quickly informed that this was the second time that this had happened in the last 20min. I was happy to be dropped off at Waterloo, near Wishaw, with my life still intact.

Iain MacLeod

The journey home was a bit of a nightmare as we were held up in the traffic on the motorway because of an accident near Chorley, on the radio it said the accident was a bad one, so we realised in the car that some poor sods would probably love to have nothing other than getting on holiday to worry about.

After all this and only one pit stop I got in the house for 3:30 am, needless to say the wife hadn't slept even with regular text messages telling her where we were, she and I got to Lanzarote without a hitch, apart from her telling me my snoring on the plane during the flight was embarrassing. I would have flown

somewhere and back if necessary to see Rangers in a European final with (or without) a ticket, but try explaining that to the wife.

Gary Scott McGregor

It was a crawl out of Manchester. We then got onto the motorway, drove through England then realised we needed petrol, so we had to stop. Again, it was a crawl into the service station and a crawl out of the service station.

The journey home wasn't exactly the party we had been hoping for. Realisation crept in, I would be sitting in a hall, at a small desk with a very important exam in front of me and Daz was looking forward to a 12 hour shift in the kitchen in only a couple of hours.

By the time we got home it was 6.00 am, it was nearly light and I would, at maximum get 2 hours sleep before my exam.

George MacDonald

Back at the Rugby Club, the Club House was still open; we went in for a couple more pints. Well that was the plan. I couldn't even manage the first. I decided to head back to the tent. The tent with the big "Johnstone Castle Loyal" homing beacon draped over it. I had no idea where it was. Thankfully my brother who'd managed his couple of pints found me wandering around aimlessly amongst the tents and guided me home.

Keith Thomson

At our hotel someone said there's Jorg Albertz sitting there with a band member of Wet Wet Wet (must have been the Clyde connection as he was playing with Clyde at the time), I bought him beer shook his hand, he was eating a pizza so I said Jorg I will leave you alone, he said no take a seat and he spoke to me about Dick Advocaat and how he was great coach but as a person he didn't like him.

So we had a couple of beers with him and as he got up to go to his room upstairs everyone stood up and applauded him he just looked emotional and obviously surprised but a great gesture from small group of bears.

Donna Sevwright

We actually spotted Jorg Albertz the next day in town and he was only too happy to stop for photos and to have a chat (saying no surrender when shaking

my brothers and friends hands), he was a gentleman and made our time in Manchester all the more memorable.

Craig Kirkwood

At our hotel the 4 Germans dad had been talking to earlier in the day had just got back with some food. Dad asked if they enjoyed the game and they said they hadn't gone. When they got into the city centre they realised just how many Rangers fans had come to Manchester without tickets and so had decided they couldn't go to the game when so many guys weren't going to see their team.

Dad said to them that they must have made a healthy profit and they told him they had sold all 4 for face value as they wouldn't rip off fellow football fans.

Dad cursed them all the way back to the room.

Lenny and Shirley Scott

When we got back to our hotel my wife went to her room but I decided to go to the bar for a few drinks. There were around 10 Zenit fans in there celebrating like mad and they invited me to join them. Fantastic is the only way to describe my night.

My wife informed me that I did not return to my room till it was daylight. She was woken by someone snoring in the hallway and when she opened the door, there I was. Dressed in a tiny Zenit top and clutching a zenit CD and a Russian camera.

Scott Jacobs

Cold, depressed and by now fully sober, we went to our kip, he on the left side of the right and me on the right. And when I say I was on the far right? I could have been visiting the Vatican. The party was over, we had to go home! But fate had another wee surprise in store for us. We're settling into our slumber when Steve (Gordon and Graeme's brother in law) a-rat-a-tat-tats on our door.

Steve

Are Gordon and Graeme here?

Bruv and Me

(Bleary eyed reply in unison)

Do you see them?

Steve

It's just that I was supposed to meet them back here.

Bruv and Me

(Reply in unison)

Well, they ain't here.

Steve

I'll just go back down the stairs and see if I can find them.

Me

If you can't find them, then get back here, at least you've got a floor for the night.

As the door closes

Bruv

Are you fucking crazy, apparently this bampot can snore for Russia.

Ten-Fifteen minutes later the door a-rat-a-tat-tats once again

Steve

I couldn't see them

Gordon and Graeme had already given up on this pillock who was happy to watch the Russians' cup celebrations after the match

Me

Well, just bunk down on the floor.

Steve

Cheers mates. But I do have to warn you that I'm supposed to be a helluva snorer.

Bruv

Shut the fuck up and get to sleep!

Three am in the morning (There is snoring aplenty going on) I've been given a kick on the back of the leg from Cuba

Bruv

Have you got anything at hand to whack him with?

Me

Naw

Bruv

His napper is at your side on the floor at the bottom of the bed, have a boot at it.

Me

Okay

Have you ever witnessed, or been in the company of a Wart Hog who has throat problems as well as possible acute Tonsillitis? Very well then, let me introduce you to Steve. Fate wasn't done with us just yet though.

Morning came around all too soon, the sun was up and all that. It was 8:00am and the wart hog sodded off into our toilet, as we thought, to have a morning slash. Two minutes later a sloshing sound was heard in our bedroom and the conversation between siblings resumed;

Bruv

Is that noisy, snoring bastard taking a fucking shower?

Me

Bloody sounds like it!

Bruv

That fat bastard is going to use up all our towels!

My brother had a fair point; it was after all **OUR** hotel room and it was **OUR** towels that had been paid for. At the very least he could have asked first. After a full ten minutes the toilet door opens

The Wart Hog

Cheers lads, I only used the two wee towels.

Me

But they were our two WEE towels.

The phrase; 'that vacant look' came all across him at this point.

Me

Are you married?

The Wart Hog

Yes, why?

Me

I can only assume your missus must be stone deaf then, or do you have separate rooms?

The Wart Hog

I have to admit, I was conscious of the fact that I DO snore, and thought I slept very lightly last night.

Bruv

The only people who slept lightly in this bedroom last night was me and my brother because of the noise coming from you!

Colin McHarg

Following a long wait at Stockport railway station for a cab, decently priced given the circumstances, the night was finally over.

Iain Harding

After a good night's sleep and a cracking fry up we headed for the station. Avoiding sleeping fans vomit and beer cans we got on and sat down for what seemed a very very long journey.

Craig Kirkwood

The next day dad decided that since David hadn't been to the game we would drive over to the stadium and let him have a look around. This turned out to be a great idea because the guys who put up all of the UEFA signs and so on were dismantling it all and throwing it into skips. Me and David ended up with some huge wooden posters and cloth material signs with the UEFA Manchester 2008 logo on them for hanging in our rooms and also got given some UEFA skip caps from a guy passing in a van that rolled down his window and asked if we wanted them.

After this we discovered they were doing stadium tours so we booked ourselves on one and had a wander around the Man City museum while we waited on it starting. We didn't get in the dressing room area because they were

still a mess from the night before but we went everywhere else and when they took us into the stand behind the goal the floor was just a mass of small Union Jack flags left over by the Gers fans.

We got to go onto the trackside and had our photo taken alongside the giant Rangers crest that had been placed next the one of the dugouts. We also sat in the seats where the trophy was presented and dad spotted the 2 seats that had been used by Gordon Smith and Lex Gold. He commented Gold must have enjoyed his comfy seat after refusing to extend the season to help us.

The Times, 16th May 2008

A CLUB WITH A POISON AT ITS CORE

Utterly predictably, the fate of Rangers is once again to find excitement on the field marred by loutishness and delinquency off it. Losing the Uefa Cup final in Manchester on Wednesday night was no disgrace for Walter Smith or his team, whose very presence at the game was a triumph in itself. Beyond the stadium, however, before and after the match, events told their own story of how accursed Rangers remain as a club.

Gregg G McKee

The day after the game we were all nursing serious hangovers and before we left Manchester decided to head back up to Eastlands. Six had travelled down from Harthill in our party but only three had tickets therefore we wanted to go up to the stadium and have one last walk around and also see if we could get a stadium tour.

As we walked past the main entrance a load of workers were taking down various signs etc and one guy was starting to work on the massive blue "UEFA Manchester 2008" carpet that the teams and dignitaries had walked up after being dropped off outside the stadium. Cheekily I asked "What are you doing with that mate?", "Nothing, you can have it if you like" the guy said jokingly.

So five minutes later queue six of us rolling up and taking this huge carpet back to the car. We must have looked a right state as we struggled "to me, to you" style with this carpet and then subsequently tried to fit it into the back of the people carrier we were in. Somehow we got it in the car and all the way back up the road.

The plan was to give the carpet to a local pub or that (as it was too big for any of our houses!!) but again it just could not fit anywhere! (There is a pic somewhere of it rolled out and on the floor of the 30 Club in Harthill). A couple of weeks after Manchester we heard a local guy was holding a charity Sportmans Dinner for Cancer Research. His wife had recently been diagnosed. We decided to donate the carpet as an auction item at said dinner and I believe it got around £600 in the auction!!

Gary Scott McGregor

I woke, tired, heartbroken, lifeless and with no real motivation. The Uefa Cup final was meant to be lifted by Barry Ferguson and I was supposed to be still full of adrenaline going into the exam. Instead I was full of Red Bull, trying to keep me awake.

I slid into the exam hall, weary and depressed. I was relieved when it was over. I thought, however that I had done well...8th August 2008, exam results. I got a "D" in my Higher English. Gutted is an understatement. Why did I support Rangers? Why did they have the final the night before an exam? Why? Why?

A couple of years later, I'm in a good job, getting on with my apprenticeship. Sometimes you just need to grab the bull by the horns and go for it. I did on the 14th May 2008 and it's not done me any harm.

Robert McQueen

I made my exam with an hour to spare. I fell asleep halfway through the exam, only to be woken up by the invigilator. I scraped my pass and all was well.

Susan MacMillan

We had to leave directly after the game as my son David had his higher maths exam the next morning. We were extremely proud of his achievements that summer as he passed both highers and his teachers told many a pupil about the lad in the school who travelled to the UEFA cup final in between two highers and still passed.

Mark Gourlay

As we travelled back home in the deathtrap taxi we arrived back in Glasgow and woke up to the news that Tommy Burns had sadly passed away. A group of us went down to Celtic Park and were joined by buses coming back from Manchester. We paid our respects and acted in a manner which totally summed up why WE ARE THE PEOPLE.

David Frew

We got the train back up to Edinburgh and it was on that train journey we learned of the death of Tommy Burns, with all due respect to Mr Burns, I just didn't care at that time; I was devastated that we hadn't been able to win the final and I'm sure even Tommy would have loved to have seen us bring a European trophy back to Scotland.

Craig Kirkwood*

He sounded like a decent guy who loved his club and that was backed up a few days later when I saw Walter and Ally carry his coffin with great dignity at the funeral. That's the way things should be in life with people able to cast aside their differences when it comes to more important things.

****In memory of Craig Kirkwood, who tragically lost his life age 17.***

Murdo Euan MacLennan

The train back to Edinburgh went via Newcastle. We arrived in Newcastle and the station was full of Rangers fans, trying to get across the border and get home. It was quite remarkable. I got off the train at Haymarket and made my way up to work where my car was. I was wearing a Rangers strip and union jack so it was pretty obvious where I had been. Quite a number of folk stopped me and said they wished we had won, that normally they dislike Rangers but on this occasion had been taken away in the romance of it all.

Douglas McIntosh

On the way home I stopped off at the local supermarket to get a few things for dinner and a few essentials. I wandered around the supermarket and kept seeing boys with Gers tops on. It was obvious they were just back too....you could tell. There was a nod of shared experience as we passed each other on the aisles.

Kenneth White

I had two return flights booked to Dublin. I had one for the day after the game and another for two days later from Glasgow, in anticipation of a trophy parade down Paisley Road West. In the aftermath, the decision was easy. Back to Dublin as soon as possible. The subdued 'See Ya Pal' goodbyes said outside the hotel, I went to the airport only to bump into the majority of the Zenit support, obviously still jubilant from the night before. Brilliant, just brilliant.

Andrew Hunter

Before we left to return home a discussion was had on whether we should remove the flags- Conclusion leave them on we having no ashamed of.

Malcolm Clark

As I passed the 1st Motorway bridge in Scotland a banner proclaimed 'Welcome Home Losers'. A shit way to finish what had been a great day.

Douglas Dickie

Over the next few days everyone had a story to tell. Some were basking in their own misery, others looking to blame anyone else for what happened. Me? I just wish the result had been different.

BBC News England, 15th May 2008

CCTV SHOWS FANS ATTACKING POLICE

Police in Manchester have released CCTV images showing up to 200 football fans chasing officers and attacking one of them after the Uefa Cup final. The footage shows Rangers supporters tripping up the Greater Manchester Police officer and jumping on him after the match with Zenit St Petersburg. Assistant Chief Constable Justine Curran described the fans as being "like a pack of baying wolves".

Christine Sommerville

It wasn't until the next morning that the full horror of what had happened became apparent. The images on the television were sickening. We had been all around Europe that year without a single arrest and now this. Hundreds of

thousands of supporters had travelled from all over the world and our reputation was being tarnished by a tiny minority that made up no more than 0.01% of the travelling support.

George MacDonald

That morning we were told we could get a bus back into town at the top of the road. Hence how we realized it was only 20 minutes walk from where we picked up the taxi. Hungover, dry, we needed a hair of the dog. In and out of a few shops to find shelves with next to nothing stocked. It was unbelievable, like a scene from Zimbabwe.

Finally we got a store with a couple of bottles of cider left which isn't my normal tippie but any cure would do at this stage. We got some paper cups and sat at a wall round the corner from the bus station and sat in the sun having a cup or two before going on the bus.

Just down the road we saw a cameraman and a blonde reporter. We shouted them over jovially, not expecting them to come over at all. To our amazement they did come over. The woman asked us our thoughts on the trouble the night before. We were astounded. All that walking about we had done looking for a taxi, we never seen any trouble. We told the reporter that all we had seen were skirmishes between fellow Rangers fans at the screen that didn't work. Nothing that could be construed as riots though. The reporter and cameraman thanked us and went on their merry way. We now had to catch our bus back up the road.

As we were boarding, we recognized the driver as our driver on the way down who subsequently warned us he wanted a dry, quiet bus back up. In other words, no alcohol and no singing. Which of course we assured him would be the case. Up the back of the bus, cracked open the last bottle of cider we sneaked past him and sat quietly, subdued until half way up the road our mobiles start going off. People phoning us to tell us we are on Sky News.

The chants started, we're on Sky News, we're on Sky News (to the tune of 9 In a Row, 9 In a Row).

Scott Jacobs

The phone calls to home were made to find out the actual fall-out from the night before. You just knew it was the land of milk and honey for timdom.

Andy Cumming

The media spin was in overdrive, attempting to portray the Rangers fans in as bad a light as possible. The clowns involved in this nasty incident deserve to be caught and punished but showing it umpteen times a night served their purpose; to blacken the good name of the Rangers fans and to ensure that the general public would believe that this was how most fans in Manchester behaved which could not be further from the truth.

Adam Ross

The radio let us know what had happened and what was about to come re the screens. Most were of the same view: we would be hung out to dry and the Dhims would have a field day.

Fraser Munro

I couldn't believe my eyes watching Sky Sports News in the morning and seen the running battles in the street. You see for me, the day was incredible with the exception of the result. So to see some of the things that happened made me even more grateful for the ticket, the fact I didn't witness any problems and just the fact that nothing that happened could put a dampener on the day for me.

That day I spent the whole day watching the news and reading papers. The sad thing is it wasn't anything to do with the game and the media concentrated on the negatives. I think it took till the evening time just to see the goals.

Douglas McIntosh

It was bad enough to see the goals again and hear the news broadcast to the nation that we had lost, but we also had the over the top reporting on the isolated spots of trouble that had broken out in the city.

Nothing about the fact that an estimated 250,000 supporters had made the journey to the city. Nothing about the boost to the local economy, nothing about all the good natured fun that we had had in the city over the past two days, no, it was all about a small group of thugs who were hell bent on causing trouble.

Still, did we expect anything less from some media outlets? Probably not. Driving home we knew that we were going to take a battering in the press.

Andy Cumming

The repeated showing by the BBC of those thugs chasing a police officer will be many people's lasting impression of Manchester and that is wrong for so

many reasons. Why many of the good stories of Manchester were never broadcast and why were the overcrowded fan zones and lack of facilities as well as police brutality and downright rudeness hardly touched upon in the following days and weeks?

Only the top brass at the TV stations and newspapers can answer that but it would appear that Rangers and it's fans seldom get a fair hearing from many of these sources and it would be better for the public to know all the facts rather than snippets that they choose to show or write about in which they hope to influence the viewer or reader and hide the truth about what was a historic and remarkable day, blemished by the actions of a few idiots but certainly not tainted for the majority of people present.

Robert McQueen

It is easy to shift blame upon others, but the stark reality is I saw sights that night that made me sick to my stomach. As we walked back from the stadium through town, I saw the absolute dregs of humanity posing beside a smashed up car in their Rangers top. Posing like some kind of achievement. The other events are well documented but that image will stay with me. It was sickening. I would love to sit these morons down and tell them about the Rangers and what it means. The history, the struggles, the disasters and the triumphs. It makes us who we are. But the simple fact is these guys are not interested.

Robert McTeer

I've never dwelt too much on the incidents of violence seen that night. The Manchester authorities as far as I'm concerned got it so horribly wrong. All the organizational skill of a monkey's tea party. I generally got the feeling we were as welcome as a lump to the testicle. A mixture of all day drinking, appalling organization and heavy handed Policing will always spell trouble.

James Slater

Stevie Wonder could have seen what was going to happen, when the screen didn't come on, but instead of showing a presence, with riot police, to the countless thousands of fans trying to vacate the fan zone, they used force, which in my opinion was the catalyst for all of the trouble. Thousands of people standing around, all day, drinking, with no proper facilities, herded into what was merely a pen, spending countless amounts of pounds in their city, and then

missing the one thing wrong that everybody was there to see, is an absolute joke, and a recipe for a disaster.”

Douglas Dickie

When I turned on the TV the full aftermath of what had happened hit me. This was bad, really bad. I had seen trouble, but it had been caused by the Russians, I had been in Piccadilly Square a few hours after the trouble and had seen nothing to hint at what had went on, but the pictures where there, right in front of me.

George Macdonald

When I got home and seen the bulletin I was shocked. As I said to the reporter all I saw were small skirmishes amongst Rangers fans and some idiots were throwing bottles in frustration at the screen. Like, yeah guys, that's gonna get the screen working aint it?

All that walking about I had done in Manchester looking for a taxi that night when these 'riots' were meant to be taking place and I never saw anything of the sort. Only Rangers fans having a great night out.

I think the scenes on that bulletin were confined to one or two streets involving a couple of scores of fans. Grossly exaggerated in my eyes by the police to cover up their bad handling of an outbreak that I believe Strathclyde police would have dealt with very quickly and with less carnage.

Stephen Macleod

Our reputation had been mugged by a combination of idiot fans, outsiders and incompetent authorities. The TV pictures gave the usual media glee club enough ammunition to batter us relentlessly. I was so gutted I barely registered the frittering away of the league in a competition that had lost all integrity some time earlier.

Alan Spiden

In hindsight the actions of a few dozen morons shouldn't be allowed to besmirch the good name of the Rangers fans that made that trip but, predictably, the Scottish media couldn't wait to stick the knife in and all the good work (no arrests in any game during that whole European campaign) we had put in was immediately thrown in the bin. The fact that Celtic had more arrests in their run

to Seville was quickly forgotten and once more it was open season on the Rangers and their fans.

Andy Cumming

It's also worth mentioning that out of an estimated thirty eight to forty thousand people who had travelled across Europe, from Montenegro to Florence there had been not one solitary Rangers fan arrested. This is an amazing statistic and one which every Bear that travelled should take immense pride in but sadly though not surprisingly this has been completely ignored by the Scottish media.

Just why this magnificent statistic is overlooked is beyond me but the so called sports journalists with their strange opinions and blatant agendas would be advised to actually report on facts and positives when describing Rangers fans rather than making up slanderous garbage and continually seeking out or inventing negative stories to run with. They ran their poisonous reports about litter in Barcelona yet largely ignored the praise coming from the authorities in Bremen and Florence.

The Times, 15th May 2008

THIS BLIGHT ON RANGERS

These recurring incidents of delinquent behaviour with Rangers fans on the road are becoming tedious as well as depressing for those of us who chronicle this football club's fortunes. It doesn't seem to matter what Rangers as a club try to do - and the Ibrox board have explored every conceivable road recently - they simply cannot gouge out the primitive element among their followers.

Lawson Barrie

The way we (the Rangers support) were portrayed in the days, weeks and months after the final was nothing short of a disgrace. Manchester simply wasn't ready for such an invasion and although the actions of some were regrettable, the majority behaved themselves and relished the opportunity to see our heroes in such a showpiece occasion.

Fraser Munro

The thing that does bug me though is how under prepared Manchester was that day. In so, so many ways it was an embarrassment. While I'm not defending

some of what happened, the people who were responsible for the organisation should be utterly ashamed and embarrassed at their shoddy attempt to host a European Final. Maybe had it been Fiorentina V Zenit in the final, their preparation would have sufficed. But it wasn't, it was The Rangers and they should have known better just how many fans would travel.

James Slater

How they cannot see that one of the biggest clubs in the world, who just happens to be 3 hours up the M6, would not bring the numbers we did, is amazing. They did not plan the whole thing properly, from fan zone location, size, facilities, policing, transport, backup plans, I could go on, and they buggered up big time.

Andy Cumming

How much consultation happened to try to judge how many would descend upon Manchester? Who was consulted and what was Rangers role in this? In the end it appeared that the authorities adopted a let's see what happens approach and prayed it would go ok.

Christine Sommerville

More questions should have been asked of the local authority and the police. Why were they so unprepared for the numbers travelling when they were warned? Why was Old Trafford not opened and local parks, anywhere away from the city centre? The Rangers support ploughed millions into the Greater Manchester economy over those few days yet no questions were asked about the lack of organisation and the heavy handed policing. We deserved better.

Colin McHarg

Despite all the pre-warnings and doubts, Salford's elected representative Councillor Pat Karney continued to insist that: "*Manchester is excellent at hosting major events and we want people to welcome our visitors.*"

Now I'm no expert as my cholesterol levels certainly exceed the number of brain cells I have at my disposal, but declaring "we don't want you" tends to suggest that open armed hospitality and being receptive to thousands of Rangers supporters, isn't exactly what's on offer.

There's also a world of difference between arranging security for Celine Dion

at the MEN arena and policing a football invasion, a fact, which unfortunately, given the repercussions of that evening, has damaged the reputation of the club regardless of whether accompanied by a "we told you so" or not.

It could be argued that very few Cities could cope with a support of that magnitude, but realistically, Greater Manchester council were not prepared for even a quarter of the estimated 200,000 travelling bears. Basic facilities were woefully inadequate, and whoever thought that the standard litter bins, generally concreted into the ground and situated throughout most City centres, would be sufficient enough to contain mountains of rubbish, need their head examined. Surprisingly though it may seem, and contrary to the belief that most Mancunians have adopted regarding our recent visit, many Rangers fans will dispose of waste properly in receptacles or skips if provided. By the same token, don't expect us to go green and recycle just because organisation is lacking. We're not exactly the Wombles, though in all likelihood you stood a better chance of seeing Orinoco or Tobermory than an employee of the cleansing department!

The lack of urinals was another aspect of how unprepared the hosts were in attempting to accommodate the number of people present. Believe it or not again, Mancunians, and regardless of the nonsensical notion that the majority of Scots have bladders like elephants (well apart from me) those partaking in a few shandies do on occasions have to relieve themselves. I have to say that I saw no toilets within the confines of Albert Square though presumably areas were set aside for that purpose.

Difficult to venture and search when it's nearly impossible to move. The nearest gents was situated in adjacent street. Sixteen single toilets used on a one in one out basis - no wonder the waiting queues were thirty deep. Exercises in pelvic muscle control must have been a requirement for the cross-legged bears bursting for a slash. When you consider how busy one toilet area at Ibrox can become at half time, then it's difficult to comprehend how someone reckoned that a few portaloos could cope with thousands. Must have been taking the piss.

On a more serious matter, bluenoses who decided to seek out these particular facilities rather locate a wall or shop window, were prevented from re-entering the fanzone later because the square was heaving. I'm sure many readers have their own tales to tell about those separated from their mates through no fault of their own.

I can understand why locals were incensed having awoken to what clearly resembled a war zone, but I must take issue with the view that Rangers should

foot the bill for the cleanup operation. The cynic in me suggests that the cost be deducted from the £25 million profit. After all, had a portion of that windfall been spent wisely when planning the event then I'm positive even the seagulls would have been forced into bringing their own sandwiches - well almost! But indulge me for a moment as I try to put the accusations of litter louts into context and hopefully deflect criticism of our support by offering a hypothetical scenario as a defence.

Imagine if you will an experiment in Denton, a town in the metropolitan borough of Tameside in Greater Manchester, where 3000 selected citizens enjoy gala day festivities yet have access to only one toilet and bin for a 24 hour period. How long before streets are clogged with waste and alleyways are used as temporary lavatories? But more importantly, how would those residents react when accused by others of lacking social responsibility? Would they offer a defence, cite poor facilities, be outraged at slurs directed towards them? Undoubtedly I'd say - just as we are. Sometimes you have to look at the bigger picture. Houses on occasions may become flooded but don't assume that a tap has been left running.

Robert Watt

I have covered Scottish football for close to thirty years but it was as a Rangers fan I attended the UEFA Cup Final in Manchester. What had been a day to remember for all associated with the Ibrox club was only marginally marred by the result of the big match but some incidents of disorder in the city, subsequent exaggeration of the trouble and the ongoing 'spin' from Greater Manchester Police prompted this heartfelt response;

The mood was sombre in the car on the way home from Manchester last Thursday. Defeat from Zenit St Petersburg in the UEFA Cup Final was being aggravated by a constant flagging up of a few ugly incidents in the city the previous night, everyone was queuing up to stick the boot into Rangers fans, then Manchester City Council, whose enthusiasm for the occasion had never risen above tepid, announced they had consequently abandoned plans for a public screening of Wednesday's Champions League Final between Manchester United and Chelsea.

"Surely an over-reaction," said BBC Radio 2's Chris Evans, to rapturous applause from within the car. "C'mon, there were 250,000 Rangers fans in Manchester and only 40 arrests, that's zero point zero zero zero something in percentage terms."

The DJ's assessment of the numbers was perhaps slightly excessive but conservative estimates are that no less than 200,000 Rangers supporters had descended on England's third city. And Greater Manchester Police's subsequent announcement that only ELEVEN Ibrox fans were facing charges put all the 'riot, 'rampage' and 'war zone' stories into some perspective.

The genie, however, is once more out of the bottle. Subsequent reflections on events have been outrageously hyped up, all the usual suspects - from attention-seeking politicians, journalists with an axe to grind, discredited anti-sectarianism bodies, the butchers, bakers and candlestick-makers who administer the game and, not least of all, Manchester City Council and Greater Manchester Police - have jumped on the holier-than-thou bandwagon and put Rangers F.C. on the back-foot yet again.

Let it be made clear right now, no right-thinking person would dream of condoning the actions of those morons whose response to the blanking of the big-screens in one of the fanzones was to hurl bottles at the screens and turn on the police. It is indefensible and nobody would lose any sleep if those responsible were to be locked up and the key conveniently mislaid.

It is the reaction to it all which has been so disappointing, yet wholly predictable. For the bulk of the past 25 years, Rangers and their fans have been under attack from all angles and it is a relentless drip-drip-drip process which has eaten into any feel good factor the fans have enjoyed, with every high being clouded by dubious side-issues, while their traditions have been rubbished and abandoned, songs outlawed and individual fans and supporters groups subjected to harassment or worse.

Of course, Manchester was an accident waiting to happen from the moment Nacho Novo slotted home his penalty kick to beat Fiorentina and take Rangers through to the final. As soon as it became clear the Gers were Manchester-bound, the messages coming out of the city were unfriendly in the extreme. If you don't have a ticket, stay away; there will be no big screens and no fanzones; the pubs will be closed, drinking in public is not permitted; the police will stringently enforce the local by-laws. Welcome to Manchester? You must be joking!

"It took the intervention of respected politicians like Ian Davidson MP, the Manchester business community and various representative groups from within the Rangers support to force both the council and the police authority to soften their stance," explained Steven Smith, media spokesman for the Rangers Supporters Trust. "Wednesday's brief disorder was disappointing but, had the

local authorities had it their way, one shudders to think what might have happened."

Realizing that a human tsunami was about to descend on the city regardless, Manchester made a dramatic u-turn. But already their position as reluctant hosts was exposed. Yet in a city which claims to be football-mad, home to one of the most passionately supported clubs in world football, they seemed incapable of interpreting the mood amongst Rangers fans. Put it this way, if United were in a European final at Hampden, how many of their fans would travel to Glasgow, with or without tickets? They would surely come close to matching the numbers who travelled south last week, although it is fairly safe to say Glasgow District Council would have laid out the welcome mat from the outset, unlike their Mancunian counterparts.

No Rangers fan will need to be reminded that Greater Manchester Police have a history where their club is concerned. In 2003, when the Light Blues visited Old Trafford on Champions League business, every pub in the city was ordered to close, yet the visits of Celtic prompted no such clampdown, despite their fans' overt support for the terrorist organization which bombed the heart out of the city centre no more than twelve years ago. And in the summer of 2006, in a most abysmal abdication of responsibility, GMP ordered the cancellation of a friendly between Bolton Wanderers and Rangers because they claimed policing the match would stretch their resources. If they can't handle a pre-season kickabout, one wonders why they ever backed their City Council's bid to host a high-octane event like the UEFA Cup Final.

When the Cup Final went out to tender, it would have been part of the city's sales pitch that they are experienced in hosting such events, no doubt citing regular glamour games at Old Trafford, the 2002 Commonwealth Games and the Champions League Final of the following year. Clearly they expected two foreign sides to arrive in town, enjoy a cozy get-together, and then head off home with the minimum of fuss. In a perfect world, it would all work out that way but, of course, we live in a different world entirely. Walter Smith's men stunned Europe with their progress this season and suddenly Manchester City Council wanted to change the rules.

Two things immediately bothered Rangers fans. With the City Stadium holding only 44,500 spectators, tickets would be like gold dust and, inevitably, a flourishing black market sprung up. Was it out of the question to switch the event to Old Trafford, with a capacity of close to 80,000? Whatever the logistical problems with ticketing etc, the increased revenue would surely have

made the switch financially viable. And if that was impractical, why not set up Old Trafford for a big-screen showing, taking more than 70,000 ticketless fans off the streets? Furthermore, with the city being so accessible from all parts of the UK and beyond, the volume of incoming fans outstripped all the estimates of the local authority, they constantly disregarded the ever-escalating but wholly realistic figures being quoted by the more informed sources in Scotland.

Quite simply, Manchester did not have its finger on the pulse and, even as late as Wednesday afternoon, with the town centre grid-locked with fans, heads were buried in the sand. The volume of humanity in the vicinity and the workload on an inadequately prepared area meant a breakdown in the system was almost inevitable.

Prior to the match, the city centre was just a giant beer garden and the mood amongst the crowd was so good. Sure, various nit-pickers with previous convictions in this area have been able to focus on the sentiments of some of the songs being sung and embark on their usual long-winded tut-tutting about the ethos of the Rangers support. They conveniently overlook the impeccable behaviour of the vast majority who were simply out to have a good time, soak up the sun, savour the occasion and cheer their team, whether at the City of Manchester Stadium or at one of the fanzones.

The loss of transmission at the screens at Piccadilly Gardens was unfortunate - there are growing suspicions that the police ordered the switch-off! Again it must be stressed that the misconduct of a few idiots cannot be excused. However, long before kick-off time, the security company in charge of stewarding had simply given up, the orderly gathering of the afternoon became a free-for-all and many of those in the area were expressing concern about how events might unfold. The organizers had ignored advice from those who knew better; consequently they were unprepared and were inevitably overwhelmed by the volume of the crowd. Claims from the City Council that they subsequently bussed 11,000 fans to the Velodrome are laughable. Where on earth could Manchester find the required number of coaches at such short notice? Disgracefully, short of a 'we are doing our best to solve the problem' message on the screens, fans were left in the dark and, inevitably, the more sinister elements among the crowd reacted.

"This is what quite a few Scottish media men would have been hoping for," sighed Steven Smith. "I'm sure a few of them are already compiling dossiers which they'll submit to UEFA in the hope of landing the club with a big fine, a ban, or both. Let's not forget that it was Scottish journalists who highlighted an

incident which led to a Rangers player (Alex Rae v CSKA Moscow 2004) getting a five-game ban or that is was Scottish journalists who were only too happy to act as interpreters of a song to land the club with a big fine following our Champions League game in Villarreal two years ago. Yet they were strangely silent when the fans were indiscriminately attacked by the Spanish police in Pamplona last year. Indeed, one reporter even suggested we deserved to be battered for the songs being sung.

"And it reflects very badly on the integrity of those who, while quick to get up on the soap-box and criticize Rangers fans for last Wednesday night, omit to mention that we have just come through the longest European campaign any club has ever faced - 18 games prior to the UEFA Cup Final, nine away from home at some notoriously hostile venues - without there being a single arrest."

Those who went to the game were totally unaware of any trouble in town. As they walked back into the city, despite the disappointment of defeat, the mood was still laid-back and light-hearted. Given the quality of opposition in their Champions' League group, nobody had seriously expected Rangers to be playing European football beyond Christmas so the positives of going all the way to Manchester undoubtedly outweighed the negatives of falling at the final hurdle.

However, closer to the centre, at a business park on Great Ancoats Street, fleets of police vans were parked up and officers were seen changing from their day-to-day uniform into riot gear. The sound of one of them laughing "Its showtime!" betrayed an unhealthy relish for the events which followed.

A group of Scots heading for Victoria railway station found all the side streets blocked off by riot squad officers. Any attempt to inquire about a safe route to the station was met by a loud and menacing "Keep moving!" Thinking a female might have more luck in getting a courteous response, a lady approached, only to be told "Keep moving or I'll fucking move you!"

And at Piccadilly station, where those hoping to travel were herded by police up an escalator into a dangerously confined area, only some quick assertive action by fans in forcing a gate open prevented a very serious, potentially fatal, crush.

Launching an unrelenting damage limitation offensive, Greater Manchester Police released CCTV footage showing one officer being tripped and set upon: "...like a pack of wolves," lamented Assistant Chief Constable Justine Curran. Once more nobody could possibly defend the despicable actions of the thugs involved but, rather than making selective clips available to the media, perhaps ACC Curran should check out some of the footage on the Youtube

website. One fan, clearly having no wish to be involved in what was going on, raised his hands above his head submissively and tried to step aside, only to be knocked off his feet by an officer and there are numerous other clips of individuals being isolated then set upon 'like a pack of wolves'.

Nor should Manchester City Council's bleating about the way events unfolded be allowed to pass without comment.

Hosting the UEFA Cup Final was said to be worth £5 million to the local economy. Subsequent calculations have seen the figure rise to a whopping £25 million, all of which is no surprise given the hiking up of the prices for food and drink, the rip-off taxi rates and the outrageous costs of hotel accommodation. They have been quick to complain about the actions of a minute minority, whilst simultaneously tucking away a king's ransom from their free-spending visitors.

Manchester should beware of squealing too loudly. It is widely accepted that England will be in the bidding to host a future World Cup Finals but when FIFA see how arguably their number one soccer city couldn't cope with events last week they might be prompted to ask more than a few poignant questions. Or will Manchester demand to know exactly who will be playing in their city before they accept any future prestige fixtures?

Meanwhile, Rangers have repeatedly stated that only a misguided few were involved in the trouble, stressing that stringent action will be taken against any who are registered supporters.

As a club, however, they have capitulated at so many levels over the years. There has been no effort to defend the image of the club or the fans against often groundless allegations and the absence of any significant response from chairman Sir David Murray, chief executive Martin Bain and those they employ to look after the PR side of things has effectively sent out a signal that they are a legitimate target.

Those who run the club are now seen to be distant from the fanbase and elements who take a distinct anti-Rangers stance clearly see no need to hide their contempt for the club. There is no hidden agenda; it is open season on Rangers, a point highlighted by coverage of events in Manchester.

"The Supporters Trust meets regularly with Sir David Murray and Martin Bain and this is an issue which certainly bothers us," Steven Smith pointed out. "However, the club seems to prefer to go for the dignified silence approach, rather than give those concerned the satisfaction of knowing they've struck a nerve. We prefer to identify those pursuing an anti-Rangers agenda and will

continue to challenge their innuendo and blatant lies. Hopefully, someday soon the club will adopt a similar strategy."

As always, when Rangers are under attack, the critics play the sectarian card, although it is hard to see what part sectarianism played in any disorder last week. But some just can't resist putting Rangers' Protestant traditions in the firing line, their fans' so-called bigotry and the songs they sing are highlighted, as if a different mindset would induce instant sobriety and a more placid response to being ruthlessly ripped off by their hosts, regularly demonized in slanted media circles and abused by the police.

Big-screens have blanked on numerous occasions in the past, most notably during the screening of World Cup games in various towns in England, and the reaction of those at the venues was almost identical to that of the Rangers fans in Piccadilly Gardens on Wednesday night. Yobs act as yobs because they are yobs, not because they support a certain football team or claim allegiance to any particular religion.

If Manchester had occurred twenty years ago, Rangers' enemies would have focused on the club's refusal to sign Catholic players, placed responsibility for the trouble at the door of sectarianism and called on the club to open its doors to all. In 1989 former Celtic favourite Mo Johnston was signed amidst much controversy and the Ibrox dressing-room has long since become a multi-cultural workplace. Rangers have had a Catholic captain, a Catholic chief executive and a Catholic manager (although Paul Le Guen's ill-fated time in charge probably did more for anti-Catholicism than it did for integration!) but sectarianism is still the stick used to beat Rangers.

"The signing of Johnston was a very significant point in how our club was portrayed," Steven Smith pointed out. "Rangers had done what so many had been calling out for them to do, the club had deprived the critics of their ace card, yet the attacks have continued incessantly and no less vociferously, perhaps even more so. The motives of our club's critics have been exposed as a sham."

The harsh facts of life are that, regardless of the religious make-up of the team, Rangers will remain a Protestant club, just as Celtic will continue to be the flagship for the Catholic population despite the prominence of so many Protestants in their history, because the bulk of the fanbase comes from one community.

This may change with the passing of time but, when kids are separated at the impressionable age of five and educated differently, the clever money will always be on the great divide being maintained. Any suggestion that a more

ecumenical outlook from Rangers fans would have led to events unfolding differently in Manchester last week is, at best, misguided...or more probably and more sinisterly, further evidence of an ongoing demonization of Rangers and their supporters.

As the journey homewards continued with growing exasperation from the within the car, the news that Manchester City Council won't be screening the Champions League showdown at Piccadilly Gardens was nevertheless welcomed from the back seat. "The screens probably wouldn't work anyway, trouble would kick-off...and they'd blame it all on us!"

Greater Manchester Police's subsequent denial of a victory parade for United's Champions League winners is confirmation, if ever it was needed, that the force just can't handle big crowds. The F.A. would do well to minimize Manchester's inclusion in any future bid to bring a major football occasion to England

The Guardian, 15th May 2008

***MANCHESTER FOOTBALL VIOLENCE A
DISGRACE, SAYS BROWN***

The prime minister today condemned the violence caused by football fans in Manchester last night as "a disgrace" and said that a review of UK laws might be necessary to deal with future violent episodes. He also suggested that fans without tickets ought to stay at home rather than travel to the location of a match where trouble might be likely.

Andy Cumming

The club and in particular, those running the club have not covered themselves in glory before, during or after Manchester. It still allows its good name and that of the fans to be dragged through the gutter without fighting our corner. This is unacceptable and a major failing. It's been happening for years now but we got slaughtered in the media after Barcelona where there were zero arrests and the club sat back and took it.

We've been portrayed as all sorts since Manchester and the club meekly accepts most if not all allegations flying about regarding the support or customers as we're sometimes referred as. While the club is right to make a

stand against anyone involved in the trouble, which is of course correct, it should be praising the fans that went that did behave which would be around 99.995% of them and actually start appreciating the size of our fan base, the passion and love for the club the fans have instead of allowing us to be slated at every turn.

As recently as August the 14th, the Daily Express printed that “thousands of Rangers fans rioted in Manchester” That is a blatant lie and an attempt to mislead readers and is unacceptable. Murray and Bain need to develop a backbone and stand up to the liars and sensationalists in the media and look after the fans in a manner they deserve.

Perhaps we’ll get to another European Final again in our lifetime, perhaps we’ll get a fair crack of the whip from the media one day and maybe, just maybe we’ll have a regime in charge of Rangers that cares as much as the fans do and are proud of our history, traditions and values as much as we are as in football you just never know what’s round the corner.

Stephen Macleod

As the dust settled some perspective was regained. It had been a wonderful achievement by the players and management and in typical Rangers fashion destined to be understated. Their spirit and efforts deserve to be preserved, honoured and celebrated. Furthermore, the Rangers support had shown in all previous rounds that it is dedicated, loyal and true to the values of Rangers; thoroughly decent, hard working, and with a will to win second to none. We will follow in the footsteps of our team.

Chris Thorburn

Manchester, for me, will be remembered for the run of games to the final and being in amongst the greatest support in the world in Albert Square.

Douglas McIntosh

What did I learn from the whole experience? Well, I learned that Rangers are possibly the best supported club in Britain. I learned that Walter Smith must be some sort of miracle worker. I learned that Manchester has very few MASSIVE pubs. I learned never to place too much trust in my mate Gary or my brother Gordon! But most of all, I learned that I love Rangers for giving us that experience – and I always will. We knew we had had the best trip ever to follow the footy and nothing could take that away from us.

Robert McQueen

99% of the bears will remember the tremendous experience with family and friends and watching their team on the big stage. That is how we should remember this event. We should look back with fondness and reminisce about the magnificent journey and memories created.

Alan Slater

Although not the fairy tale ending we all had been hoping for, the road to Manchester had a lot more highs than lows for us now we ALL have the memories Father, Daughter and Son of seeing Rangers in Barcelona and watching them in the UEFA Cup Final something none of us ever thought we would see.

Steven Hogg

What a couple of days, and what happy memories that'll live with me for the rest of my life. I don't say this lightly, as since those heady couple of days, one of our party of four, Big Boab, has since left us to watch the Gers from the great Rangers end in the sky. I'll always be proud to say I made it to Manchester, along with a quarter of a million other Teddy Bears, to see The Rangers.

Alan Wardlaw

Florence was probably the best Rangers experience in my life. Getting to the UEFA cup final was something that I didn't think I would ever experience but to get there with my mates was an experience of a lifetime. My biggest regret is, I had two tickets and although I took my mate Skin who was over the moon, I wish I had taken my son Jack as he may never get to experience a European final, even if he went to the game with Skin, I wouldn't feel so guilty still.

Innes Walker

My only regret was that my late beloved brother Martin, a Rangers man to the core, who died a few years earlier at the tender age of 33, couldn't be there physically with me that day. However if there is a hereafter I know he would have been looking down with the hundreds of thousands of our absent friends and relatives who have gone before us.

Alan Spiden

That Thursday was my birthday and when we got home I was pretty shattered and early to bed ready for work the next day.

When I awoke on the Friday morning my wife told me that she had phoned my work and that I wasn't working that day. When I asked why she sat down and told me that on the day of the final my father had been diagnosed with cancer in his spine, and not wanting to spoil the match, or my birthday, had told my wife not to tell me until the Friday.

I went straight round to see him and all thoughts of the game were quickly erased from my mind as I realised how seriously ill the man, who had introduced me to the joys of being a Rangers fan, really was.

A few weeks later he was admitted to St Columba's Hospice in Edinburgh and he passed away on the 13th of July, exactly 2 months since I had made the trip south with so many other Rangers fans. The fight and determination he showed in those final few weeks was unbelievable but in the end the foe he was up against was just too strong.

My father taught me many things, but most of all he taught me that you don't give up, no matter what the odds, and that fight and determination was echoed that year by My Rangers team, the team that took me to Manchester and a UEFA cup final. I'll remember those players with an extra fondness for that fight and for providing me and my father with one of the best, and last, memories we shared.

Andrew Hunter

Little did I know but circumstances resulted in Manchester being the last football trip I would ever make with my best mate John Willock. Kaunas meant no trip the following year and the year after that work, health and family problems precluded a trip.

On December 29th 2009 I got the news that John had passed away suddenly. It really floored me, we had travelled to many rangers games and been regular visitor across to Belfast to watch the parades, the Glens and meet up with friends.

While I wish the big man was still here, I guess if my last significant trip to mainland Europe was going to be anything, then I am so glad it was Florence, the ultimate triumph and something I will be eternally grateful that we shared.

Mick Bradley

Many images of that day will stay with me forever & even now they are as clear as if they were yesterday. By the way, that sleeping bag cured my sciatica.

David Hamill

We never won the final, but I have yet to hear a Rangers supporter who never enjoyed the journey. The flat screen TV was donated to Ward 23 as a thank you for all the excellent treatment I received. I still follow the Rangers home and away, but the European adventures are ruled out unless I can drive to the match as my health does not allow me to fly.

Del McDuff

As we all know, the trophy was one step too far for Rangers, but the run to that final, the Blue Tsunami and that team of heroes will always bring warm memories for this Bear. RANGERS TIL I DIE. Oh and Fuck Peter Liewell and the SPL maggots.

Brian Taylor

True we may have lost but the adventure the thriller of getting to Manchester is something I don't expect to see again, so I thank god and Rangers that I got that chance. God bless the Rangers.

Fraser Munro

I went back to the Algarve with only memories of what I would still say were the best couple of days of my life. To get to spend a few days with my dad, brothers and 200,000 other Rangers fans, watching our team in a European final was brilliant and something that will stick with me forever. The whole journey from that moment when Nacho scored the winner in Florence till my touch down back in the Algarve was just filled with memorable moments.

I think I could have written double what I have on my few days with other bits and pieces that happened throughout the days. Like I said at the beginning, although we lost the game, that Rangers team gave me the best day of my life to date!

John Macaulay

We had a laugh when we saw the various media interviews with guys who had travelled back from Spain etc. only at the point of the gate opening for boarding to Vegas did the nice and helpful lady mention that we would not be allowed back to the states unless we could prove we were only there on holiday (we had not brought our holiday airline tickets with us),

So we had a frantic hour getting the Thomas Cook staff to provide us with confirmation that we had return tickets, I confess, at this point I thought if I phone my wife to say we were not getting back I would be heading for the divorce courts. Anyway eventually all resolved and we arrived back in Vegas Thursday lunchtime. Not perfect but as any bear knows there was never an option of not being there!

Jordan Dallas

After an arduous few days of study and travel, suffering the heartbreak of defeat in the UEFA Cup Final to the previous high of stepping out to sample the pre-match atmosphere, it had been a wonderful few days in May. They will live long in the memory and nothing will sour what was a wonderful trip and experience in Manchest-GER to see The Rangers in their first European Final since Barcelona '72, something I thought I may never be able to say!!

Steven Clifford

We were all tired but proud of the players, emotionally we were drained and even now I can't watch that game again as it would be too painful. Manchester will always be amongst the highlights of my Rangers supporting life. Yes it didn't have that fairytale ending but it really was that fairytale trip

Ian Nicol

I wouldn't have traded it for the world.

Douglas Dickie

The events of that day will go with me to the grave. But it's caused so many arguments and so much heartache since. Two years on it still acts as a divisive event, and that can't be a good thing. Maybe we'll be allowed to look back on it with fondness some day, but for now the memories remain bittersweet.

Adam Ross

I have seen the goals and have watched a little of the highlights. The DVD sat there to be watched but two days later I wiped it. My wife watched me do it and said nothing. I have never watched the whole game, the build up, the aftermath etc and I don't think I ever will. I do not have the Rangers DVD of the occasion though I usually buy every other one for me and the youngest.

It gets me down when the day is ever discussed I sense myself attempting to change the subject to another Rangers or footie related subject. I think a little bit of my undying love for Rangers went that night. I still go to roughly the same amount of games but maybe my passion has been dampened. I dunno. Maybe this just comes with getting older. Who knows?

I still defend my club...even when sometimes it is wrong but that's what being in love is: isn't it? The Rangers will always have me...just not the full 100% after Manchester.

Susan MacMillan

Well the rest is history I still cannot watch that game even now and I have also never read my cup final programme, maybe one day.

Fraser Munro

When I look back at the 14th May 2008 you will always find a big grin on my face! For me I'm not one of the people who 'never wants to watch that game again on DVD' or listens to the Scottish media put its negative spin on the Rangers as per normal! Whether it is Walters's tactics or the problems that unfolded during the final. What I think about is a fairly average Rangers team, let's be honest! Who managed against all odds to defeat Panathinaikos, Werder Bremen, Sporting Lisbon and Fiorentina to make it all the way to the final. Along with which, providing me with the best day of my life!

Robert McQueen

I doubt many seasons in Rangers history could conjure up such stories of emotion, passion and belief against all odds. It was a privilege to be part of, and I hope the history will look back fondly on the management, players and real fans of the Rangers Football Club season 2007 / 2008.

David Frew

It is a day I'll never forget. The excitement during the build up to the game, the nerves as the game approached. Then the disappointment and the tears as our dreams were shattered, all of these emotions, however, are dominated by the feeling of pride and I'll never forget how proud I was of my team and the vast majority of our fans that day. Thanks Rangers for one of the greatest days of my life.

Bryan Polland

I have reflected on the event many times since and despite the two obvious changes I would make to that glorious day I still cannot disguise my immense pride at what was and still is my greatest day as a Rangers fan, I don't believe any club in the world has fans as good as ours and 25,000 in Barca and 200,000 in Manchester proved that, we follow follow wherever our team takes us and hopefully one day that leads to another European final. I am 34 years old and I truly want to believe that I will see our side glorious in Europe once more because WE ARE THE PEOPLE.

David Wilkinson

Overall it was an experience that I will never forget for the rest of my life and I think I can say that was the same for everyone of us that was there in Manchester. It was an emotional rollercoaster with plenty of highs and lows. I just hope that this won't be the only European final that I see in my life time and I hope I am like the guys we spoke to on the Tuesday night telling younger fellow bears for years to come about the famous Glasgow Rangers team that got to Manchester (it may not just be big enough!)

Scott Jacobs

Despite the negativity of the manager, his team selection and a garbage performance from the team in general, I wouldn't have missed Manchester for the world. But I am left with the feeling that only Rangers FC and a section of our fans could fess up the largest ahem, mass displacement of people witnessed in this country for more than half a century. So if Manchester, on the park was dire, then Manchester, the experience just had to be lived out.

Lawson Barrie

I spent a fortune between this and my previous trip to Barcelona but it had all been worth it. The sea of blue which was witnessed upon our arrival in Manchester will never be forgotten and the sense of pride at the team's achievements will live with me forever. In my 24 years on this earth, I can honestly say that Nacho's penalty in Florence has been the happiest moment of my life. Let's hope that we can reach another European Final in the not too distant future and this time go one better. One thing's for sure, any team would struggle to show the same courage and desire that we showed that season under Walter Smith's guidance.

Robert McQueen

It is easy to put down the squad who got there. But I feel we as a support have listened to too much hype about that day and the squad. A lot of performances should go be looked upon in Rangers folklore as some of the greatest ever. That night in Lisbon, Florence, the McGregor heroics in Bremen, 3-0 in Lyon, holding Barcelona at Ibrox. Those heroes deserve enormous praise and the history of Rangers Football Club should look upon them favourably and of course most notably Mr. Walter Smith.

John Macaulay

Still wish we had thrown caution to the wind and really attacked the Russians but to be fair to Walter his tactics had got us there.

Murdo Euan MacLennan

Walter Smith and the players performed miracles getting there. Yes there was trouble. Greater Manchester Police ruined what was a brilliant day. Some Rangers fans acted like morons and were given the excuse they needed by the riot police to act like morons. But that's not the Manchester I experienced. At least 200,000 Rangers fans arrived in Manchester for party. In three days Rangers fans pumped nearly £40m into the local economy of Manchester. I'm only 25 just now and I really hope it's not the last European final I get see Rangers play in my lifetime, at the next one I want my dad and uncle beside me.

Kenneth White

Looking back on it, it was a herculean effort by Walter Smith, his staff and the players to get us to Manchester. I never thought I would see my team in a European final and sitting here today writing this it seems as far away as it ever did.

It feels wrong attaching blame for something that gave so much happiness to so many people, so I won't. The people responsible for enabling me to see Rangers in a European final deserve all the credit in the world. That and my eternal thanks are all they will ever get from me.

Every year we buy the tickets and travel the miles dreaming of events like 14th May 2008. Despite the result, that by the way I'm still not over, I think back to those five minutes after Nacho Novo put us through against Fiorentina and I would not swap that for anything in the world. The day of the match in Manchester will remain one of my best ever collection of memories, not just of a football match but of a lifetime.

Ultimately, we lost, but just writing down my recollection of events brings home that Manchester 2008 was much more than just a game, it was an event that united everyone connected with Rangers Football Club in a way that no other has. It was worth it.

Alistair Gourlay

Fiorentina was the best experience I have ever had as a Rangers fan. I hope it won't be long before we do it again.

Douglas Dickie

The song I had listened to in the lead up to the final had been a simple choice. We were going to Manchester and this was the one for us, so *This is the One* by the Stone Roses became my personal, unofficial UEFA Cup Final anthem. Two years later I stood watching a Stone Roses tribute band playing it and I allowed myself a wry smile and reflective glance back to that May evening.

Alex Campbell

Now, I live in Manchester. I don't think there will ever be another time in my life where I walk into the centre of my home town with my mates at my side and my team about to embark on a European final!. A truly unique experience as a Ranger fan and one that makes me proud to call myself a fan of The Rangers!

Colin McHarg

In years to come will remember Manchester the way music enthusiasts recall Live Aid. Sometime in the future I'll visit my aunt in Denton again and I'll obviously end up in the city centre at some point. I suppose when I pass Piccadilly, Albert Square and other places I visited, I'll feel like Jimmy Cooper - wishing the occasion could be repeated but realistic enough to know those days will never return. The sheer numbers of supporters and consequences of that day's events will become a thing of the past for us anyway and that's where regret kicks in. Having said that, at the very least I can say - I was there.

Murdo Euan MacLennan

My work had a football tournament in Manchester on the Saturday after the final. I made my way down on the Friday with a colleague who had been at the game.

The Manchester we arrived in was very different to the Manchester of 3 days previous. We sat in the Piccadilly fan zone on the Saturday. On one of the statues, one Rangers fan 3 days earlier must have climbed to the top and tied some red white and blue string to this statue. There it was fluttering in the wind, a remnant of Rangers support that day.

My friend and I had a good laugh about it, sharing further memories of such a special day.

Alan Fineran (Manchester City Fan)

A few years on, a week at most, Mancunians had forgot it and moved on. I prefer to remember the incredible atmosphere that this City witnessed, the like that will probably never be seen again. Mancunian's you witnessed a once in a lifetime event, amazing support that will never be equalled.

In conclusion; would I have Glasgow Rangers fans back for a similar event, an unequivocal YES , to the Rangers fans, you should be proud of the support, and thanks for the memories.

(10)

END OF DAYS

We do not profess to be angels and we certainly don't crave phony praise nor do we claim to be the best fans in the universe however on our European trips we are there to support Rangers, see a bit of the place, meet people and have a great time. We've a fantastic core of people that follow Rangers everywhere and the club and media in this country should acknowledge and accept this.

ANDY CUMMING

In the week that followed, Rangers lose the league title race on the last day of the season, and overcome a scare against Queen of the South to lift the Scottish Cup.

Despite guiding Rangers to 3 finals, in just a year, Walter Smith has turned a team who finished 3rd in the league and took them to a European final and within 3pts of the title, boosting Scotland's co-efficient in the process.

All of this is not enough for the PFA who award their Manager of the year prize to Billy Reid manager of Hamilton Academicals for winning the Scottish First Division title. The fallout from the final also continues in the days, weeks, months and years culminating in Rangers returning to Manchester in September 2010.

Thursday 15th May 2008

A spokesman for Greater Manchester Police said Up until the screen went down in Piccadilly Gardens, there had been a total of eight arrests across the city centre since the UEFA Cup final operation began at 2pm yesterday. Two arrests have been for common assault, one for possession of an offensive weapon, one for theft, one for possession of drugs and two for public order offences.

Eddie Smith, managing director of Lightmedia Display Bradford, which provided the Piccadilly Gardens screen, said: "We deeply regret and are very disappointed at the failure of the signal to the screen in Piccadilly Gardens last night — it was due to a technical signalling problem that we are still investigating. Despite all our efforts to strengthen the signal to the screen it proved impossible. Our other screens in the city worked perfectly. We are extremely sorry and we fully recognise what a blow this was to the thousands of fans hoping to watch the match."

Murdo Fraser Deputy Leader of The Scottish Conservatives demanded an inquiry into the policing of the final, claiming the decision to deploy riot police was an overreaction which may have inflamed the situation.

Assistant Chief Constable Justine Curran responded by saying "It was challenging and we were stretched. I had 15 officers injured last night. Our officers did come under a degree of violent attacks. I am happy we responded appropriately."

Delwyn Wray from the North West Ambulance Service said his crews had dealt with 52 assaults during the match adding: "There were more incidents last night than we have on New Year's Eve."

Rangers Security Chief Kenny Scott insisted the club would "take the appropriate action" against trouble-causers. "But unfortunately the catalyst for the disorder last night was the breaking down of the screen and though by no means do we condone the behaviour of the supporters who became involved in violence, particularly when police officers were injured and we particularly abhor that type of behaviour, we still have got to reflect back on the fact that in the stadium the atmosphere was fantastic".

Rangers had planned an open top bus tour through Glasgow however these plans were abandoned with the news of the passing of former Celtic player and manager Tommy Burns. The Club then issued the following statement;

‘It would be wholly inappropriate to take part in a public procession through Glasgow. The club would like to extend its sincere condolences to the family of Tommy Burns at this very sad time’.

Monday 16th June 2008

Kenny Scott, head of security at Rangers, said ten supporters have been banned from the club as a result of the trouble. They received significant feedback from fans complaining of heavy-handed policing, and hoped such concerns would be addressed.

The Rangers Supporters Assembly had also received reports regarding police overreaction and raised their concerns over the way Greater Manchester Police appeared to switch from "helpful mode to riot mode".

A Greater Manchester Police spokeswoman said 38 complaints were received about officers' conduct, the majority of which were for excessive force. She said all complaints were being investigated by the force's professional standards branch.

These include a 43 year old soldier from Dunfermline who told how he came home unscathed from a mission in Afghanistan only to be beaten by police truncheons in Manchester as he bent down to pick up a hat.

A 50 year old from Morecambe, with severe bruising to his leg, hip and arm, after he who was rammed in the chest with a riot shield and attacked with a baton. The Police Complaints Commission, claim he did nothing to provoke the policeman's "over the top" actions.

And a 60 year old from Lynn who suffered a broken hip and perforated bowel after being knocked down while sheltering in a doorway. He was treated at Manchester Royal Infirmary for his broken hip and spent ten days in intensive care following an emergency procedure on his perforated bowel. The retired postman, who now walks with a stick and is still waiting for compensation from Greater Manchester Police more than two years after he was caught up in the mayhem.

A spokesman for GMP did say his claim was "ongoing".

To date no officer has been charged with the use of excessive force from the night.

Wednesday 25th June 2008

The Manchester City Council inquiry into the events of the evening is released despite some newspapers particularly the times carrying the findings 9 days earlier; The report covers amongst other things that Manchester United were approached by UEFA in April about the possibility of screening the match in the stadium or in the car parks. The request was declined due to other commitments. Similarly, the MEN Arena and Manchester Central both had existing commitments.

Heaton Park was also rejected due to the intelligence from UEFA, Rangers and supporter associations that fans would still make for the city centre and the stadium, and that with no controls over the travel arrangements of ticketed and unticketed fans, the distance from the park to the stadium and city centre would negate the impact of such a venue on their movements on the day. In addition the requirements to park, the anticipated number of coaches and vehicles around the park would be weather dependent given the need to use grassed areas.

The Council reports it had received 167 complaints in total about the day. These did not include the 63 complaints, 38 of which were for excessive force received by Greater Manchester police about themselves.

It also states that 39 police officers were injured and 39 fans were arrested for a range of offences across the city from 7am on the 14th May 2008 to 7am on the 15th May 2008.

The report included an isolated incident of a Zenit Saint Petersburg fan being stabbed prior to the game at the stadium. It said six arrests had been made and none of the six were charged as enquiries continued.

It later transpired the fan had been fighting with another Russian fan and rolled onto broken glass, this did not stop almost every newspaper and website in the country and beyond prior to the report claiming six Rangers fans had stabbed the man many with conflicting reports of where it took place (the metro newspaper were the only ones who used the words 'believed to be Rangers fans'), none of the newspapers or websites ever printed a retraction.

This was also supported when the report concluded that of the believed 37,000 Rangers fans inside the City of Manchester stadium all were well behaved and that 99 per cent of Rangers fans had no involvement whatsoever in the antisocial behaviour in the city centre, with many rival fans and neutrals gathering together to celebrate the occasion.

Friday 12th September 2008

A leaked report by the National Policing Improvement Agency claims officers suffered from a "lack of co-ordination" during the disturbances which followed the Uefa Cup Final in May.

Police who clashed with Rangers fans in Manchester were criticised as poorly trained, inexperienced and lacking proper equipment. Police Federation chairman Chris Burrows said: "We have been pushing the force to increase the number of protected vehicles and equipment and training is an issue."

Deputy Chief Constable of the GMP, Justine Curran, admitted problems but said public order training was made compulsory for all officers in April.

Even being kind that means a mere 6 weeks at most to have all officers trained up before the city hosted a major sporting event? Which they would have applied to host and been awarded more than a year before.

The report, compiled after complaints from frontline officers, was leaked to force magazine Police Review. One officer claimed the police response was hindered by a "lack of co-ordination and a mix of skills, experience, vehicles and equipment".

Another said: "Training needs to be more realistic and more frequent with outside venues for officers to have a taste of public disorder using bricks and bottles, not cotton wool." The report recommended Greater Manchester Police should review its "availability" of officers trained to deal with riot situations.

Tuesday 27th January 2009

Greater Manchester Police claims it spent six days a week scrutinizing 4,500 hours of video footage frame by frame from CCTV, YouTube, camera phones and television companies, highlighting those suspected of being involved in the night's 'mayhem'.

With an appeal on the BBC show Crimewatch they reveal a 'rogues Gallery' of 49 people they wanted to speak to about the nights events. Detective Superintendent Geoff Wessell says he hopes the appeal would result in prosecutions for a number of incidents, including serious assault, criminal damage and looting.

No footage is ever released of attacks by police on fans despite the number of complaints to the GMP, Manchester City Council and Rangers Football Club.

Monday 16th March 2009

Five men are arrested in Scotland in connection with violence at the Uefa Cup final. Police say the men, aged between 21 and 36, were detained in early-morning raids after an investigation into disorder at the event, in May last year. The arrests came more than a month after police issued CCTV images of 49 men believed to have been involved in the violence. The five are taken to Manchester for questioning. Police said more arrests would follow.

The morning's arrests followed a joint operation by Strathclyde and Greater Manchester police forces. The men detained were a 24-year-old and a 21-year-old from East Kilbride, a 34-year-old from Bearsden, a 36-year-old from Glasgow and a 27-year-old from the Greenock area.

Detective Superintendent Geoff Wessell, who is leading the investigation, said: "The appalling events of 14 May 2008 have not been forgotten by GMP or the people of Manchester. We want these arrests to send out a clear message: if you bring violence to the streets of Manchester, GMP will stop at nothing to bring you to justice."

Tuesday 17th March 2009

Police make a further seven arrests. Five men and two teenagers are again taken to Chadderton police station in Greater Manchester for questioning. They are a 29-year-old man from Airdrie, a 17 and a 16-year-old boy, both from

Ruchazie, a 42-year-old man from Dalkeith, a 27-year-old from Haddington, a 20-year-old man from Shotts and a 24-year-old from Airdrie.

The arrests bring the total detained to 12. Five other men we're also arrested over the previous six weeks in connection with the trouble. They we're a 44-year-old police officer from Essex, a 30-year-old man from Glasgow, a 42-year-old from Cumbernauld, a 20-year-old from Manchester and a 34-year-old man from Chorley, Lancashire. All are bailed until 2 June.

Saturday 14th November 2009

The Manchester Evening News reports that Chris Burrows, chairman of the Greater Manchester Police Federation, said the big screen showing the match in Piccadilly Gardens was deliberately switched off.

Mr Burrows made his comments at the Federation's annual open meeting in the V&A hotel in Manchester. It included a question-and-answer session with Chief Constable Peter Fahy, Councilor Paul Murphy, Mr. Burrows and other Federation officials who were also on the panel.

Asked by one officer who had been to blame for the Uefa cup 'fiasco', Mr. Burrows said: "It was the local authority. I was listening to the police radio that night. That screen was switched off." No-one on the panel rebutted Mr Burrows' comments.

After the meeting, Councillor Jim Battle, deputy leader of the council, said: "The claim that the screen was switched off by the council is entirely unfounded. The screen broke down and as the technicians tried to fix it they were pelted with bottles.

Mr. Fahy later said: "A council investigation revealed the signal failure was responsible for the screen not working. No blame can be apportioned to any organisation.

Thursday 29th April 2010

It emerges that Manchester United had abandoned plans to invite Rangers to be the opposition for Gary Neville's testimonial match due to objections from the police and council officials about supporters of Rangers returning to the city. Neville's representatives had asked United to approach Rangers because the presence of the Scottish champions would virtually guarantee a sellout crowd at Old Trafford. United then made "unofficial soundings" with the relevant authorities.

The police were concerned about the prospect of another mass invasion of Rangers fans and United were informed that, for such a match to take place, it would require a huge policing operation. United also sounded out Manchester city council as well as the security firm that supplies the club's match-day stewards and concluded that, the costs of organising the match would take up too great a percentage of the ticket profits.

Thursday 26th August 2010

Rangers and Manchester United are drawn together in the group stages of the 2010 Champions League in Monaco. Valencia of Spain & Buraspor of Turkey makes up the rest of group C. The first game of Group C is to be played on the 14th September 2010 at Old Trafford.

Thursday 2nd September 2010

Ranger's fans are to be kept out of Manchester city centre before their Champions League game with United. The aim is to prevent Police fears of ticketless Rangers fans again travelling in large numbers to Manchester. The measure has been brought in after a series of meetings involving Rangers, United, Greater Manchester and Strathclyde Police and fans groups.

The fans will gather at The DW Stadium (Wigan Athletic's ground) as an official holding ground before kick-off with catering and rest facilities. A police escort will then take the fans the 25 miles to Old Trafford in a convoy of buses.

Dave Whelan the Wigan Owner has dismissed fears of crowd trouble and stressed that a similar operation took place in Wigan before Rangers' last Champions League match with Manchester United in 2003. He said: "Last time Rangers fans came to Wigan they were absolutely brilliant and weren't an ounce of trouble. I've no concerns at about their behaviour. We'll welcome Rangers supporters to Wigan as we did before their last match with United a few years ago. The fans will go into one of the lounges and have something to eat and drink. They'll no doubt want to stretch their legs after their coach trip. These are real Rangers supporters. I'm not expecting any trouble whatsoever."

Rangers have been given 3783 tickets and only registered travelclub members will be eligible. Ranger's chief executive Martin Bain said: "It is an entirely different situation to the UEFA Cup final two years ago. We are confident that all appropriate measures will be put in place for the match. We do, however, want to

make it absolutely clear that any Rangers fans, apart from travel club members who will be allocated tickets, should not travel to Manchester."

Friday 3rd September 2010

Eleven people are jailed for their part in the violence of the 14th May 2008. Nine men are jailed, two were sent to young offenders' institutions, and another man was given a suspended sentence and community service.

Judge Andrew Blake before sentencing said "By 8.45pm that evening Piccadilly Gardens had become a battleground. Riot police were deployed and struggled to contain the trouble and restore order. What followed was the worst night of violence and destruction suffered by Manchester city centre since the blitz. The damage, the filth and the litter was apparent to all who arrived in the city for work the next morning.

"It had nothing to do with football rivalry and everything to do with drink." On mentioning the blitz he clearly forgets June 15, 1996, when a bomb, planted by the Provisional IRA, on Coronation Street outside the Arndale Shopping centre exploded, injuring 200 people seven of them seriously, including a pregnant woman thrown 15ft in the air.

Never the less Scott McSeveney, 22, of Shotts, Lanarkshire, was jailed for three-and-a-half years for violent disorder and the assault on PC John Goodwin and given an eight-year football banning order. Rangers fan, Sharon Gibson, who lay across PC Goodwin to shield him was awarded £200 by Judge Blake, who thanked her and paid tribute to her "enormous courage".

Mark Stoddart, 27, of Westmuir Street, Glasgow, was jailed for two-and-a-half years for violent disorder and assaulting PC Regan. He was also given an eight-year football banning order.

Seven others were jailed for violent disorder. They were:

John Saunders, 32, from Fullarton Road, Cumbernauld, Glasgow, was jailed for 15 months.

Gordon Forrest, 36, from Ledi Drive, Bearsden, Glasgow, was jailed for 14 months

Thomas Murphy, 28, of Flatterton Road, Greenock, Renfrewshire, was jailed for 14 months. Murphy also held amongst others an unspecified football-related conviction.

Greg McKenna, 23, of Falkland Drive, East Kilbride, Lanarkshire, who was jailed for 18 months.

David McCullough, 21, of Moorcroft Drive, Manchester, was jailed for six months.

Michael Hindle, 22, from Westmorland Close, Leyland, Lancashire, was jailed for eight months. Hindle, a Blackburn Rovers fan, was caught on camera throwing a bottle at police. Lancashire police classed him as a "risk supporter" and he had served a football ban for shouting abuse at rival fans.

James Bell, 43, of Corrie View, Cumbernauld, Glasgow, was sent to prison for 12 months. All seven were given six-year banning orders.

Two others - Brian McVicar, 20, of Falkland Drive, East Kilbride, and William McSporran, 18, of Craighouse Street, Glasgow - were sent to a young offenders' institution for 21 and 12 months respectively. They were also given six-year banning orders.

David Annette, 35, of Yarrow Road, Chorley, Lancashire, was given a six-month sentence, suspended for 12 months, and ordered to do 180 hours' community service. He was also ordered to pay £500 costs.

Tuesday 14th September 2010
Uefa Champions League Match Day One
Manchester United 0 – 0 Rangers

Wednesday 15th September 2010

Greater Manchester Police and Wigan FC join Rangers in praising the club's fans for their behaviour in Tuesday's Champions League match.

Chief executive Martin Bain said: "Our fans knew there was a lot at stake and their response was tremendous. I would like to thank all the fans who travelled and made the trip enjoyable. Going to Wigan did cause a degree of inconvenience for fans, but they really responded well and worked with us through the supporters' groups.

"They made the best of going to Wigan and enjoyed the facilities that were laid on for them."

Greater Manchester Police assistant chief constable Ian Hopkins, whose force had laid on an extra 250 officers, said the plan had "worked well", adding: "The night has shown the fans in a really good light. The supporters responded positively and many of them complimented GMP and the clubs on the handling of the operation. Given the limited number of arrests for fairly minor offences, it reiterates the fact that most acted responsibly and are genuine fans".

According to Greater Manchester Police's website, ten arrests were made during the match, (5 Manchester United fans and 5 Rangers fans) four suspected ticket touts were held, one person was arrested in connection with a public order offence, three people were arrested for being drunk and disorderly and two were held for drinking in sight of the pitch.

Ray Johnston, the safety officer at the DW Stadium, said: "The Rangers fans were absolutely tremendous. The supporters had a great rapport with the stewards at the stadium and made the most of the facilities on offer around the ground. Rangers fans are welcome here any time in the future, because we had a superb reaction from those who travelled."

Prior to the match, some Rangers fans felt the precautions were too extreme, with one describing the operation as being "overkill" and "herded like cattle". Rangers fans were also kept in the seats after the game, until all Manchester United fans have left the stadium.

At the time of writing it's now nearly 3 years since the Uefa Cup final. Regardless of the heavy handed police response on the night and the subsequent lack of action in the disciplining the officers responsible, there can be no defence of the people who shamed Rangers and I'm not talking of just the ones who we're eventually convicted; their actions drunken or otherwise embarrassed us all and gave certain journalists obsessed with Rangers the excuse they needed to well and truly put the boot in, something they continue to do to this day with their lies of 'thousands rioting all day' and 'a fan being stabbed' all the while enjoying Rangers hospitality every other Saturday.

These people not only let down our wonderful club but they let down the tens of thousands of people who went from Montenegro to Manchester as wonderful ambassadors for the club.

Never the less they will never nor should we ever let them take away from the achievement of actually getting there and the journey we all enjoyed emotionally together.

I realized a lifelong ambition that day in Manchester of seeing Rangers make a European final in my lifetime, now I have a new one...I want to see them win one.

