

Eddie Turnbull

Having a Ball

Eddie Turnbull with Martin Hannan



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EDINBURGH AND LONDON

For Carol, Valerie and all my family

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Last but definitely not least, my eternal gratitude goes to my wife, Carol, and all my family.

Eddie Turnbull

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Foreword

As a football coach, Eddie Turnbull was light years ahead of anyone else I worked with at club or international level in my career, which spanned 19 years, including the World Cup finals of 1974 and 1978.

After he joined Aberdeen in 1965, he released or sold 17 players at the end of his first season and embarked upon a youth policy whereby he took young hopefuls, many of them local lads like me, and worked us hard. He gave us the most wonderful education in the game, and, in the process, he made men of us. He realised, of course, that he needed experienced players to help bring on the youngsters, and even these hand-picked seasoned pros that he brought in, men who thought they'd seen it all, were to learn more about the game and become better players under his guidance.

When I left Aberdeen to join Manchester United in 1972, after Eddie had returned to Edinburgh to manage his first love, Hibs, I felt I could have gone anywhere in the world and played in any system known to football thanks to the things he taught me about the game.

It's a measure of the man that after all these years, his players from his days at Pittodrie and Easter Road still call him 'Boss'. He's been guest of honour in recent years at a company golf day arranged by my old teammate Ian Taylor, always on the same day as the European Cup final, and he's in his element seeing his 'boys' and presenting the prizes, then giving his verdict on the match in the evening. We almost feel guilty if the occasional 'Eddie' slips into the

conversation, because to anyone who played for him, he'll always be 'Boss'.

Martin Buchan,
former captain of Aberdeen,
Manchester United and Scotland

1

Having a Ball – Capped at 82!

Have you heard the one about the footballer who was awarded his first cap for his country at the age of 82? Well, it's a true story, and I should know, because that footballer was me.

I first played for Scotland on 28 April 1948. I remember that time very well because just four days previously my club, Hibernian FC, had won the championship of the Scottish Football League for only the second time in its history. I was 25 years old and had been a professional footballer for only 20 months. Prior to that, I had served king and country in the Royal Navy during the Second World War. Although I was relatively inexperienced, I knew I had enjoyed a good season as a member of a very fine team and I was aware that I had been watched by the selectors. (There was no national-team manager in those days and selection, like most things in the Scottish Football Association, was decided by committee.)

The news came via a telephone call to Hibs manager Hugh Shaw and was confirmed by letter. I had been selected to play for Scotland and I was told to report to the national stadium, Hampden Park in Glasgow, to play against Belgium. I can remember as if it were yesterday the thrill of finding out that I was going to play for my country. I was fit

to burst with pride, and my family and friends – most of them back in my home village of Carronshore, near Falkirk – were delighted for me. I would like to report that I recall every minute of those heady days, but the truth is that the events all happened so quickly that I only have vague memories of the time.

I went through to Glasgow on the morning of the match in plenty of time to meet the other players. I was among friends in the dressing-room, as there were five of us Hibs players in the team. I knew most of the rest of the side too, from having played against them. There were no special coaching sessions and there was no great deliberation over tactics because there was no management to speak of. Instead, we players were allowed to get on with things ourselves. I cannot recall any big team talk beforehand, just a quiet word from the captain, George Young of Rangers, whom I knew well – we had played in the same school team as boys. There was the usual laughing and joking, as there is in every pre-match dressing-room, but there was also a serious side to things. Everyone there saw playing for Scotland as a great honour and responsibility, and, for someone like myself who was making his international debut, it was even more of an onerous task.

As I pulled on the dark-blue jersey of Scotland for the first time, I swear I felt my chest just about explode. It was an extraordinary feeling, a mix of pride and apprehension and, above all, a determination to do my very best for my country. I had been picked at inside-left – younger readers had better prepare to ask their elders about the antique terms in this book – which was my preferred position for Hibs. But I would have played at left-back, outside-right or even in goal for the privilege of turning out for Scotland.

The match passed in a blur. I can barely remember any details except that the Belgians were better than we thought but we still won, with goals from my fellow Hibs player Bobby Combe and East Fife winger David Duncan.

The crowd of 70,000 or so went home well pleased to see Scotland the winners, but, personally, I had not done as well as I had hoped to do. I wanted to be the best player in the world, but perhaps the occasion got to me; I was not entirely happy with my performance.

Having been selected for Scotland and having played for my country, you would expect that I would then be presented with my cap, football's traditional gesture of recognition to a player who has worn the national jersey. But that did not happen for 58 years, and here's why. Back in 1948, and indeed right up until 1976, the SFA had a rule that you could only get a cap if you had played in the Home International Championship against England, Wales or Northern Ireland, and, being stingy tightwads, they granted each player only one cap per season rather than one per match.

The championship was the oldest in international football, but it is long since gone, having died a death of indifference in 1984 as international matches multiplied and the more important World Cup and European Championship qualifying tournaments became marathons. Back in the '40s and '50s, however, the Home International Championship matches were the biggest games of the season and, in a blinkered fashion which I would come to learn was typical of Scottish football, caps were awarded only for these games, not for matches against 'foreigners'. Apparently, we Britons were superior to teams from outside the UK; within a few years, we would see how wrong that thinking was.

I will describe my international career in full later, but suffice to say I kept my place in the team for the next match against Switzerland and then played against France and Austria, the latter match taking place in 1950. I did not play again for Scotland for eight years, and then I played five matches in a row, including three in the 1958 World Cup finals in Sweden, the last of which was my international swansong, at the age of 35. At no time did I play in a Home

International match, so I never earned a cap. I would have liked one, not least because they are attractive items, with gold thread and a gold tassel over blue brocade embroidered with the initial letters of the countries that you played against. Some players I know have had to pawn or sell their caps after their careers, so they are valuable assets, too.

But we all knew the rules back then, and I accepted them and just got on with playing. I very nearly did get that elusive cap near the start of my Scotland career, as I was selected to play against Wales but got injured the day before the match and had to miss out. That was just bad luck, but what robbed me of many more caps was an act of sheer malice. For, until very recently, there was within me a deep sense of injustice about the way I had been treated by the SFA and it was nothing to do with the cap issue. That was merely an irritant; the real damage done to me is something that infuriates me to this day, some five decades later. Some friends and family know what happened to me, but I have never revealed in detail how my Scotland career went down the toilet – make that ‘down *in* the toilet’ – in December 1950.

In the last match of the first of my spells with Scotland, Austria came to Hampden and beat us 1–0, and again I did not play as well as I wanted to and certainly not to the level of my own expectations. There were reasons for my below-par display, not the least of which was that I was playing with unfamiliar teammates, some of whom were good enough players but not fit to play for their country. I was still annoyed with myself when, after a post-match drink, I went into the toilets deep within the stadium. The man who came in to do his business next to me was none other than a member of an SFA committee, Walter Johnston, who later became chairman of selectors.

Now, Johnston was one of those ‘blazers’ who thought he knew it all about football. He was a potato merchant from

the Dumfries area who rose through the SFA's ranks of committeemen to gain his exalted position. I've no doubt he gave many hours of service to football, but, as far as I was concerned, he was just a blazer-wearer, a time-server on a committee that was full of its own importance.

The chairman of selectors in effect picked the Scottish team at that time, after hearing the arguments of the various representatives on the committee, who all had their own agendas. Many players were selected or dropped on a whim or because a committeeman wanted to push a vested interest. In the '40s and '50s, for instance, Rangers and Celtic were often outplayed in domestic competition by clubs like Hibs and Hearts, but it was an unwritten rule that players from the Old Firm would be selected so as to guarantee the interest of their vast support.

It also irked me that players were treated like serfs by the SFA. The committeemen always went first class and stayed in the best hotel rooms, while the players were lucky if they didn't have to sleep in bunk beds.

So here was I in the toilet with a member of this amateur organisation that I already knew was full of bunglers and bores. I should have kept my mouth shut, finished my business and left, but Johnston decided to make a cutting remark out of the side of his mouth to the effect that I had let the side down.

As you will come to learn, I am one of those people who never backs down and always stands up for himself. I did not give a damn who Johnston was or even that he might have been to some extent entitled to make his criticism. Still urinating, I gave Johnston a verbal volley right back. I am apparently known for the saltiness of my language on occasion, a legacy perhaps of my naval days. I'll try and keep it to a minimum in this book, not least to keep the asterisk count down, but you will be able to guess that some exchanges have been censored. I will certainly give you the 'expletives deleted' version of what I said to Johnston.

Suffice to say I queried his knowledge of football, his motivation for being on the committee and also his parentage, if you catch my drift. Basically, I accused him of being a self-serving ignorant bastard. Only my language was not so diplomatic. I was spoiling for a fight with this blazer, and if he was stupid, he would give me one.

Shaking with anger, or was it fear, he did up his flies and uttered these words, which have remained lodged in my mind ever since: 'As long as I have anything to do with picking the team, you'll never play for Scotland again.' He stomped out of the toilet, leaving me to seethe at his arrogance and ignorance. I wanted to run after him and thump him, but I controlled myself in time.

Walter Johnston duly became a selector and was as good as his word. Even though I played for Hibs at their peak, scored an average of more than 15 goals a season and became the first British player to score a goal in European competition, I never played for Scotland while he was a selector. Yes, there were other fine players in my position at that time. The great Billy Steel of Dundee – you will read more about him later – often occupied the Scottish inside-left berth, and I could have no complaints about that. Over the following seasons, however, many pundits and fans questioned my exclusion from the Scottish team, especially as I was a member of the 'Famous Five' forward line of Hibs and the other four were selected more often than me; Willie Ormond played fewer full internationals but gained several more Scottish League 'caps' than I did. They did not know what I knew – that I had an enemy at court, so to speak, who would always block my selection. I did not immediately regret my remarks to Johnston, but, when I was left out of the squad for almost all of the next eight years, I did occasionally wonder if my life would have been different had I said nothing in that Hampden toilet.

When Matt Busby of Manchester United brought some managerial professionalism to the Scotland set-up, and the

manager began dictating things to the selection committee rather than the other way around, I was re-called to play for the Scottish League representative team prior to returning to the full Scotland team in time for the 1958 World Cup. Indeed, Busby made me captain when we played the English League. I played in two preparatory internationals against Hungary and Poland, and in all three World Cup matches in Sweden.

That long exile from playing for Scotland at Johnston's behest hurt me a great deal, bothering me much more than the mere absence of a cap. Even though I captained my country's League team, I long ago resigned myself to never owning an actual international cap, and indeed it was a matter of some indifference to me. I had the memories of those games I did play, and I still have the crystal vase presented by the Swedes to every player who took part in that World Cup. Apart from an SFA blazer and flannel trousers, that was the only souvenir we got in 1958. I don't have a Scotland shirt – the SFA insisted we return them after every match – but I do have pride in knowing that I pulled on that sweet dark-blue jersey nine times.

Even that number – nine – was denied to me for a long time. For some bizarre reason, the official records showed that I had played for Scotland only eight times, but I was certain I had played nine matches – I should know, I was there!

What happened was that my appearance against France in 1948 was not listed in the newspaper reports of the team for that match, which in turn led to the various records being distorted. The events of that day in the Stade de Colombes in Paris are crystal-clear in my mind: Billy Campbell of Morton damaged a boot before the match, and in those days there were no spare pairs lying around, so Billy had to sit it out while Sammy Cox of Rangers took his place at left-back. But, somehow, it was reported that Charlie Cox of Hearts was the late replacement, and, as he

played in my position for Hearts, it was assumed that I had dropped out to make way for him. But that was simply wrong. I definitely did play, and I remember the game well, because I hit the bar – the closest I ever came to scoring for Scotland.

The confusion over the two Coxes thus led to it being reported for years that I had only eight international appearances. Indeed, some records still show that to be the case, so anyone reading this who is in charge of websites or whatever, could you please adjust the figures beside 'E. Turnbull, Scotland' to show 'nine' instead of 'eight'? But I never did get nine blue cloth caps, as all my matches were against those pesky 'foreigners', and had it not been for a remarkable book, I might still possess none at all.

Gary Imlach is a very fine journalist and broadcaster whose father Stewart I had known way back in the 1950s. Imlach senior had played alongside me in the Scotland team at the 1958 World Cup, and I remember him as an affable, laid-back laddie, a product of the north-east fishing community of Lossiemouth who had gone south to make his name at Nottingham Forest. Stewart was a pacey left-winger and a valuable player in that Scotland side which so nearly achieved something in Sweden.

But we never did make the second stage, and, like me, Stewart Imlach played in the group games against Yugoslavia, Paraguay and France but never played for Scotland again. Stewart went on to coach at Everton but sadly died of cancer in 2001 at the age of 69.

Not too long ago, Gary Imlach called me with an amazing story. He was preparing a book called *My Father and Other Working-Class Football Heroes* (it's a remarkable read for anyone who loves football) and had realised that myself, the late Archie Robertson of Clyde and his father, Stewart, had all been denied caps even though we three had played for Scotland in the World Cup. It turned out that his father had written to the SFA in 1994 asking for the rule to be relaxed,

but then chief executive Jim Farry had written back to say the rule had to stand, as if an exception was made, it might invite demands from a lot of former Scotland internationalists. To my amazement, it turned out that there were around 90 of us in the same position – we had played for Scotland but not against home countries, so we did not have caps. Among the names were some very famous footballers, such as George Connelly of Celtic, Alfie Conn of Rangers and Celtic, Alex Cropley of Hibs, and many more.

I told Gary that it had all happened a long time ago and that I had accepted the rules at the time and didn't think they would be changed. I kept my resentment towards Walter Johnston to myself.

The story then took a real twist. Since it is his book, he is best to tell it himself, and Gary has given me permission to quote his own words about what happened next:

I was inclined to agree with Eddie's stoic acceptance of the rules as the rules, and the players simply victims of the period in which they'd played.

Then I spoke to Tommy Docherty, who had gone on to manage the national team in the early '70s, and heard the story of how he'd intervened to help get a cap for Bob Wilson. Bob, he told me, had played for Scotland but never against the home countries.

What? The Scottish Football Association, with its fear of floodgates and its respect for tradition, had been dishing out retrospective caps on a selective basis? It was only Tommy Docherty's famous assertion that the best football managers are liars that kept me from calling Hampden Park there and then. Instead, I contacted Bob Wilson. He cautiously declared himself unaware of any intervention by Docherty on his behalf, but otherwise confirmed the story, which apart from the outcome sounded exactly like my father's. He'd written periodically to the SFA over the course of two decades with no success. It was only after Craig Brown took over as national manager that he'd got his cap. Jim Farry had also been helpful.

I mentioned this discovery to Eddie Turnbull. 'The English keeper? He got a cap? You're kidding.' He was scarcely less incredulous by the time I'd outlined the sequence of events to him. 'That's ridiculous. That takes some believing, that Wilson got a cap.'

To many people, Bob Wilson – born in Chesterfield and a key member of Arsenal's Double-winning side of 1970-71 – was an English keeper and a very good one. In fact, he was perfectly well qualified to play for Scotland through his parents and turned out twice for the national team: in a

European Championship qualifier against Portugal and a friendly against Holland, both in late 1971. His cap, inscribed with the initials P and H, finally arrived in 1996. That made it two years after Jim Farry had first written to my father, all sympathy and tied-hands, to say that it simply wasn't possible.

The implication was clear: a well-known, well-connected television presenter who could call on the Scotland manager to lobby on his behalf was worth an international cap in the eyes of the SFA; an older name could be safely fobbed off with the official line. I wondered how many others had received the same treatment as my father. And how many exceptions had been made. According to Craig Brown, Bob Wilson's wasn't the only one.

Hearing this from Gary and then reading it in print when his book came out convinced me that an injustice had been done to dozens of us. I did not begrudge Bob Wilson or any other player a cap, but it began to rile me that the SFA had favoured some people and not others. And all the time, I knew within myself that a much greater injustice had been done to me by the SFA in the person of Walter Johnston.

I wasn't the only one who was upset at this apparent double-dealing by the SFA. Newspapers picked up on the story, and, though I prefer to live quietly nowadays, I was prepared to be quoted about the slight done to those 'uncapped' footballers. The first paper to carry the cap story by Gary Imlach was *Scotland on Sunday*, and its sister papers, the *Edinburgh Evening News* and *The Scotsman*, did a remarkable job in unearthing the facts.

Other papers joined in, and soon there was a clamour for us to be capped. Rod Petrie, chairman of Hibs, has been a great friend to me in recent years. He is an office-bearer with the SFA, and he took up the cudgels within the organisation. My old colleague Lawrie Reilly, a man who had played alongside me in the Famous Five and who had been capped for Scotland, also weighed in on my behalf, and I quickly became the most high-profile 'victim' of the SFA's intransigence.

For, at first, the SFA stuck to their guns and trotted out the old argument that they could not change the rules

retrospectively. But chief executive David Taylor is a lawyer by trade – surely he could see that the Wilson case had set a precedent? A friend of mine who knows Taylor also thinks he was well aware of the damage the issue was doing to the SFA's often-battered image.

As more stories appeared, that same friend met Taylor at a Scottish Cup match, which is how I got the first, off-the-record hint that something was about to happen. In early February of 2006, the SFA board discussed the issue and, though there were some who wanted to stick by the original decision, the majority voted to award a commemorative cap to those players who had played for Scotland but never received one. In the case of deceased players, their families would be asked if they wished to be given one.

Most remarkable of all, the SFA decided that I would be asked to attend the next international at Hampden and receive my cap in a symbolic ceremony at half-time during the friendly match against Switzerland on 1 March.

Now, as you will learn, I occasionally do not do things the easy way. During the period in which I was writing this book and just before the SFA's announcement, I was out for my normal walk on a Sunday morning when I felt very unwell and keeled over. Shortly afterwards, I was in Edinburgh's Western Infirmary being treated for a heart attack. At the age of 82, no heart attack is mild, but the damage was apparently quite minor, and I was soon up and about.

I was absolutely determined to make my date at Hampden. Having beaten cancer not once but twice – lung and bowel – I certainly wasn't going to let a little thing like a heart attack bother me. I was able to do the exercises given to me by the physiotherapist, and each day I felt stronger. Eventually, I confirmed to the SFA that I would attend, and when the big day came, I was feeling pretty good. Hibs' PR man David Forsyth and Rod Petrie took me through to Glasgow, and, as the SFA had said I could bring two guests, I

took my daughter Valerie and grandson Graeme Low with me.

It was a chilly evening, but I got a very warm reception at Hampden from the SFA officials, and a lovely lady called Sandra was assigned to look after me. In the SFA's hospitality suite, I finally met David Taylor, who was a quite charming fellow. I was also delighted to meet Ernie Walker, the former secretary of the SFA and an old acquaintance who for many years has been a major player in European football's administrative body, UEFA (the Union of European Football Associations).

After a good chinwag, we made our way to the VIP seats in the stadium. All around me in the stand were well-wishers who congratulated me and also some familiar faces from my career. At one point, I heard a shout of 'Hey, gaffer' and turned to see Tommy Craig, the brilliant player I had once made the most expensive teenager in British football. That was 37 years ago, and I'll tell you about it later in the book. I said to him, 'Where are you now?', and he told me he was coaching at Newcastle United and 'still using things you taught us'. There's a lot of players and coaches say that!

At half-time, I made my way slowly onto the pitch with Graeme and Sandra in attendance. It was an emotional moment for my family, but, I have to tell you, I was absolutely loving every second of it. As SFA president John McBeth presented me with my cap, I think I said something like 'Better late than never', but we could hardly hear each other for the noise of the crowd. The ovation was long and loud, and certainly the Tartan Army seemed to approve of the gesture the SFA had made. Someone suggested later that perhaps I milked the applause. Well, of course I did! I enjoyed every minute of the occasion, and it was great to be back centre stage. That's the one thing retired entertainers always miss – the appreciation of the crowd.

The only disappointment on the evening was that Scotland lost to Switzerland. I will have some advice for

Scotland manager Walter Smith later.

The cap is now under lock and key, and, though I'm not the sort of sentimental person who gets worked up about a mere hat, I do like to look at it now and again. I suppose the really wonderful thing about getting the cap after all these years is that I have something tangible from my playing career to leave to my family, and it is destined for my grandson Graeme. I know he will look after it, and, after reading this book, he will know how hard-earned it was.

Above all, I have a sense that, 50-odd years on, an injustice has been corrected and it's time to let bygones be bygones. No one in today's SFA could possibly have known about my clash with Walter Johnston, but, by giving me this cap, they have gone some way towards making me feel that a wrong has been righted.

And that is the story of how I am now in the record books for gaining my first cap at the age of 82. It seems an appropriate time to look back on things, as I have had a long and mostly wonderful life in football. In fact, I have had a ball, as you are about to find out.

2

Starting the Ball

This is my story, the life of a football man. Some parts of it will be familiar to those who know their footballing history or who shared the experiences that were common to so many of us down the decades. Many other things that I will tell you have never been revealed before, and I trust you will find them interesting.

In one way or another, I have been involved with football for nearly 80 years, either as a player, trainer, coach, manager or spectator. Apart from my family, the game of football has been the most important thing in my life. At the outset, I want to say how grateful I am for the 34 years during which I was gainfully employed in football and for the many other joys the sport brought me. I had plenty downs but many more ups, and I love to think back on those special days and nights – memories I hope I'll never lose.

Football became my life, but it did not make me who I am. That happened in a family and a community of which I remain proud to this day. Later, I would be moulded in the larger family and community that was the Royal Navy in wartime, but my roots were deep in the surroundings of my childhood.

I was born in Carronshore, a little village on the banks of the River Carron in what is now Falkirk district, on 12 April

1923. I was the youngest of five children of James and Agnes Turnbull. I was born at home – there were no NHS maternity hospitals back then.

It is important that you know that my father was a miner all his days. They were a unique breed, those who toiled down the pits, and the influence of my father and the greater mining family has stayed with me into my ninth decade. The 1920s were a time when central Scotland still had heavy industries, and Carronshore was at the heart of an area dominated by coal mining and iron foundries, with the population roughly split between miners and ironworkers. In those pre-war days, Carronshore was home to around 1,000 souls and it really was a close-knit community where everybody knew each other. The village had grown up at the time of the Industrial Revolution, when the great Carron Iron Works, just a mile away from our home, was the largest foundry in Britain. Among other things that they had manufactured was the carronade, the cannon that secured the British Empire.

The nearby coal pits, which supplied the foundries with their raw power, were numerous and very deep, and employed many thousands of men, one of whom was my father, James. Like so many of his fellows, he died at a comparatively young age. I have no doubt that the harsh life down the pit was the cause of his early death. He smoked a pipe, but that was a trivial danger compared to the constant menace of the coal dust which invaded his lungs day in and day out. I always remember that, though he would shower at the pit and bath at home, he never considered himself to be entirely free of the grime that came with his job. And, as happened with so many miners, the damp conditions down the pit combined with his dust-affected lungs to weaken his heart, which is what eventually killed him.

Although he was no academic, like so many miners my father had a life away from the pits which was full of culture. He had finished his formal education early, but he was a

clever man and taught himself many things, including music. He played the trumpet and was a member of the local brass band, the Kinnaird and District Silver Band. As a child of a band member, I would share in the terrific excitement in the village when the band marched through Carronshore each Christmas-tide. All his life, he was devoted to the works of Scotland's national bard, Robert Burns. He could recite passages of Burns' poems and songs from memory and was a member of the Burns Club at Kincardine, whose premises he frequently visited. He also delighted in taking part in many of the Burns Suppers held annually around the date of the poet's birthday, 25 January.

But the truth is I never actually saw a lot of my father when I was growing up. He worked nights and came home at about 6.30 a.m., or 7 a.m. at the latest, and would go off to sleep. When I got home from school in the afternoon, he would be getting ready to go off to work again. It was his pattern of life and we were used to it, but an ordinary working man nowadays would have much more time with his family. I don't think the present generation would understand how anyone could live like that, but it was a common way of life back then.

He was a tall man, around 6 ft, with broad shoulders, which he needed to wield his tools down the pit. I did not inherit his height, but I think he passed to me some of the strength and stamina which would become important elements in my footballing ability. I cannot say that I got my love of football from him, as my father did not take much interest in active sport. Gardening was his hobby, and he spent much of his spare time tending his plot, where he grew vegetables which were an important part of our family diet.

One of the proudest days of my life was when I was able, as a player with Hibernian FC, to get him a ticket for the Scottish Cup final of 1947. It was played on 19 April at Hampden Park in Glasgow and was the first post-war final,

the competition having been suspended from 1940 to 1946. Some 82,140 people attended the final, and my father was proud as punch to be there to see me play for Hibs against Aberdeen, even if the score went against us.

I'll tell you more about the game later, but I remember my father came with us to the hotel at Queen Street Station in Glasgow where the Hibs players and official party met before heading off to Hampden. He was able to get a lift on the team bus to Hampden and just sat there saying very little as we made our way through the busy streets of Glasgow. Afterwards, on the journey home, he was as down as the rest of us, but I could see that he was quite proud that his youngest son had taken part in a Scottish Cup final, though he would not boast about it – that was not our way in Carronshore.

With my father working long hours, our home life centred around my mother, Agnes. My father and my mother both hailed from a small village called Kinnaird, a few miles from Carronshore. Just as he was tall, so she was petite and lovely. She was very kind-hearted and a great mother to us all, dedicating herself to the care of her family as a housewife. My mother, too, died at what would now be considered a young age. It was cancer which took her, though she never smoked.

My mother had one hobby, and even that was useful for keeping house. In those days, there was no money in our household for buying carpets, so she would collect scraps of material and make them into rugs, carefully stitching the patches together with great patience. Old clothes would be cut up and after she had sewed them all together, there would be a lovely rug for the house.

We needed her skills, because a miner's wage was not much. My father was a contractor miner, which meant he had men working under his management. Wages were earned on piecework – you were paid by the amount of coal you had hewn each week. Even though he was a contractor,

however, he did not have a very much greater income than the average pit worker, and there were five of us Turnbull children to look after. The eldest was my sister Nancy, then my brothers, James and Alec, with my other sister, Mary, the nearest in age to me. Only Mary still survives, and she now lives in Bonnybridge, not too far from Carronshore.

Ours was a typical small house in the kind of 'miners' row' that you can still see around the former coalfields of Britain. It was a lot of people to squeeze into a house with just two rooms. We children would sleep in one room, where there were two beds. The boys would sleep in one bed on one side of the room and the girls had the bed on the other side. My mother and father would sleep in the main living room of the house. That main room also contained the kitchen area, where there was a sink and the fire. Though we had a small gas cooker, most of the cooking was done on the fire, in pots suspended over the flames. There was no washing machine or anything like it. To the rear of our house was a communal washhouse, where the mothers who lived in our row would take their turns to do the family washing in a great steaming tub.

I suppose, by modern standards, we were probably living on the breadline, but we did not consider ourselves to be poor or deprived. I know it is a cliché, but we were too busy getting on with life and being happy as a family to be envious of people who were better off than us. Nevertheless, there were no luxuries in our house. Nothing was wasted and my mother and father were always careful with money. We may have had no double cream in our porridge, but we were always properly clothed and we always had food on the table, including my favourite – mince and tatties. For those not aware of this delicacy, it is simply minced beef and potatoes, and a healthy meal it is, too. In those days, a 'miner's steak' was a block of cheese, and many's the miner who was grateful for his 'steak'. We

had one regular luxury on the table: just a wee pat of butter to do us over the weekend.

As I say, we didn't really know we were impoverished, and we were all happy together, but we did know there could be a brighter future. Ours was not a particularly religious or political household, but my father's love of Burns and that poet's form of socialism was one reason why ours was a Labour-voting household. Back then, they were the party of the working class, and we respected our local Labour MPs and councillors for the work they did on our behalf.

We also respected our parents, and there was never any need for them to discipline us physically. If I was a naughty boy, as I frequently was, my mother would simply say, 'I'll tell your father when he gets in,' and that was enough to keep me quiet for a while. My father did not believe in belting us. He knew how to command respect without using his hands – as you will discover, I wasn't always able to follow his example with recalcitrant footballers.

We were not the sort of people to make a great play of birthdays and other anniversaries, and I suppose the only regular ritual was my father's weekly night off. Every Saturday night, he would go off to Kincardine to the Burns Club. While he was there, my mother would go to visit her family, who lived about a mile and a half from our house. As the youngest, I would have to go with her to visit her sister, my lovely Auntie Jenny. She had three daughters, my cousins, and usually there were one or two of them around and we could play together. Every Saturday night, without fail, I would ask my mother, 'Can we catch the bus to Auntie Jenny's?' and she would always reply, 'Aye, but it's a Walker's Bus,' meaning we would have to walk to their house at Long Dyke, which, again, was a miners' row.

All of my brothers and sisters were clever people – a lot more clever than me! They all got good jobs and were industrious people all their working lives. And looking back

on it, because I was the youngest, I suppose they did spoil me a bit, especially my sisters.

I imagine I was like every other wee boy and could be a bit mischievous. My eldest brother, James, had a bicycle and sometimes he would cycle home for lunch from his job as a fitter – he would rise to be foreman in his department – at the Carron Iron Company foundry. It would only take him a few minutes to cycle there and back, and he would leave the bike outside. It was too much of a temptation for me . . .

James's bike had a bar on it, and if you ever tried to ride such a contraption when you were only a wee lad, well you'll know that sure as God made little green apples, an accident is inevitable. Sure enough, when I was ten and had had my fair share of devilment, the inevitable happened and I took a hefty tumble. I got a fair old row, but fortunately I wasn't too badly hurt and the bike wasn't too badly damaged.

My other brother, Alec, was particularly smart and he got an office job in a foundry at Larbert. To be a white-collar worker was quite something in those days when most young men could only look forward to going down the pit or into the heat and mess of the foundry.

Not far from where we lived were two confectionery manufacturers, McCowan's and McNichol's. McCowan's was the more famous of the two and its Highland Toffee is still popular today. My elder sister, Nancy, was a senior worker in the quality-testing department of the latter, and that proved to be very good news for me. Every Friday, I would wait for her to come home because she would have a big bag of boilings and I would get my share, which was a real treat for me. She married a man called Arthur Ewing, and later, when I was playing with Hibs, he would come to the games.

My other sister, Mary, was also a clever person, and she ended up doing her bit for the war effort after 1940 by working at the giant Rolls-Royce plant at Hillington, near Glasgow.

All four of my siblings ended up in promoted posts in their various jobs and that stemmed from their dignity and capability for hard work, which in turn came from their upbringing in that miners' row in Carronshore. Come to think of it, I suppose I was no different, except that my trade was football and my work took place in a rather more public forum.

Football was very important to me in my childhood. It was literally the only game in town – we didn't have access to rugby or cricket and wouldn't have thanked you for it, while golf came much later, when I could afford it. Modern children have so many more opportunities, with access to all sorts of sport, plus computers and PlayStations and the like, but back then we only had football. That's the main reason why Scotland doesn't produce as many professional footballers as it once did; in our day, we had no choice but to play football, while nowadays kids often seem to think of football as just another sport among many they're able to choose from.

I had a few good friends in the village back then, and we all played football almost incessantly. I gradually lost touch with them over the years as they and I moved on. My best pal was called David Kemp, and, sadly, I know only too well what happened to him. David joined the Royal Marines and was killed aboard HMS *Charybdis*, a cruiser which was sunk in 1943.

Another of my close friends was Alex McLaren, who played centre-half for the school team and who would later join Falkirk FC. Though he never made the highest grade as a professional, he was still a fine player, and the fact that two of us out of a handful of chums did sign for senior clubs shows how Carronshore produced more than its fair share of footballers over the years.

Philip Campbell was another of my mates and, like my father, he was a great lover of Robert Burns. At school he would recite the bard's poems and he really knew his stuff

about the ploughman poet. He passed on some years ago, but I still remember how he could speak of Burns.

Football was the game we all played and our main 'pitch' was the street, although there was a fine football field near by. Our house was at the end of the row and adjoining it was the Vennel, a Scots word meaning 'alley'. It was an alleyway of a fair width which had a brick wall down one side and on the other a fence made of railway sleepers. There was just one entrance or exit, at the bottom of the Vennel, and it led onto the village football pitch. When the local juvenile team played there, the club's officials would set up a table almost blocking the Vennel and collect the entrance money. Who needs turnstiles when you only have one way in or out?

It was there I started playing football. Of course, in those days, you rarely saw a real leather football, except when playing for the school team. If you got a ball as a Christmas or birthday present, you were really lucky. I once was fortunate enough to get a small ball and I would go off and play with it for hours, all by myself, kicking the ball against the wall and learning how to trap and control it.

But mostly we boys would take a whole pile of used newspapers, crush them into a rough ball shape and then wrap it in string to make a rough-and-ready 'football', which would last a short while before it came apart. It was always us boys who played football. There were girls in the village, of course, and we would play games with them such as tig - life was a lot more innocent in those days - until their mothers came to call them in, presumably to remove them from the bad male influence. Actually, they just got in the road of the football!

There was also no traffic in those days. Hardly anybody in Carronshore owned a car; the street lighting was very poor, but there was no need for it. In summer we would play football in the street until bedtime, and in the darker days of winter we would have a game of 'kick the can' under the