

Rangers v Celtic: good sport and bad enemies

Scotland's two top soccer teams are bitter rivals. Their fans often behave like tribes at war. Of course violence and crime are always wrong. But is a bit of 'edge' sometimes justifiable?



The agony and the ecstasy: Rangers players celebrate their shootout win. ©PA

The Celtic player blasted the ball over the bar and a deafening roar went up from one end of **Hampden Park**. The penalty shootout was over, and Rangers had beaten their great rivals for the first time in four years. Euphoria for one half of Glasgow, devastation for the other. And between them, permanent contempt.

The Scottish Cup semi-final yesterday was a memorable game. Rangers, in a **lower league** and heavy underdogs, took the lead twice with goals from Kenny Miller and a stunning strike by Barrie McKay. Celtic's equalisers came from Erik Sviatchenko and Tom Rogic, but eventually it was Rogic's dreadful penalty that gave the tie to Rangers after a draining shootout.

Rangers and Celtic tower over Scottish football. **Eighty-four percent of Scottish league titles** have gone to the two Glasgow giants. But the rivalry has huge importance off the field. It stems from the birth of Celtic as a team to represent the Roman Catholic population of Glasgow, many of whom were Irish immigrants.

Rangers then took on the identity of the club of the Protestant, **unionist** majority.

It is real hatred. Many of the songs sung by fans reference Northern Ireland, and 'The Troubles'. Rangers have been known to sing about the Irish hunger-striker **Bobby Sands**, while some Celtic fans sing in praise of the IRA. Violence in the run-up to matches is common.

The nastiness is part of what makes the **Old Firm** famous, but many famous rivalries are known for the strange contrast between fierce competitiveness on the field and friendliness off it.

Watching Andy Murray play Rafael Nadal, you would think they despised each other – such is the ferocity of the tennis; in fact they are said to be fond of each other and mutually respectful. Both speak like perfect gentlemen after matches.

Rivalries in cricket and rugby also lack the toxicity of football grudge matches, while retaining an ultra-competitive edge.

Many find it sad that Scotland's historic

rivalry often descends into an orgy of vitriol, but fans of Rangers and Celtic say the mutual dislike is what makes the games between the clubs so memorable. Are they right?

Worst of enemies

Sport needs a bit of enmity. If a boxer had sympathy for his opponents he would probably lose most of his fights. But it goes beyond sport: humans function better when they are fighting against something they dislike. It brings out the best in us, not the worst.

What nonsense, say others. Yes, everyone loves a rivalry, but hatred has serious consequences. On Saturday 12 fans were injured after a football match in Serbia, all thanks to a blind dislike of rival fans. Let's keep matches competitive, but any animosity should be forgotten before and after the game.



Q: I don't really like football. How does this affect me?

A: The question of whether competitiveness is important goes beyond sport. Take politics, for example. Many politicians are spurred on by dislike of their opponents and a fervent desire

to destroy their arguments. Competition is everywhere in life. Indeed, many would say there is too much of it.

Q: Are Rangers and Celtic playing each other again soon?

A: Rangers have just been promoted from the Scottish First Division to the Premier League, so next season they will face Celtic at least

four times.

Q: And who will win?

A: That's very difficult to predict. Rangers have a very good young team, but Celtic will almost certainly go in as favourites to win the Scottish Premier League.

YOU DECIDE

1. Can hatred sometimes bring out the best in people?
2. What is a more powerful motivator: fear of failure or the will to win?

ACTIVITIES

1. List what you think are the three biggest rivalries in the world, and explain your choices. They do not have to be limited to sport.
2. Research the history of the Old Firm, and decide what you think is the main cause of the rivalry.

SOME PEOPLE SAY...

'Sport is war for peacetime.'

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

WORD WATCH

Hampden Park – Situated in Glasgow, Hampden Park is Scotland's national stadium and the venue for Scotland's cup finals and semi-finals.

Lower league – In 2012 Rangers went bankrupt. A new club, bearing Rangers's name, colours, crest, fanbase and stadium, was formed, but it had to start in the fourth tier of Scottish football. Four years later they have

climbed up the ladder and have just been promoted into the Scottish Premier League.

Eighty-four percent of Scottish league titles –

Rangers have won 54, while Celtic are closing in on their 47th.

Unionist – Rangers tend to identify as 'British', and as such their fans display Union Jacks at matches. Celtic fans, meanwhile, tend to wave Irish tricolours. The Scottish flag is curiously absent.

Bobby Sands – A member of the Provisional IRA who died on hunger strike while in prison in 1981.

Old Firm – The Old Firm is the collective name for Celtic and Rangers. The origin of the term is unclear but may derive from the two clubs' initial match in which the commentators referred to the teams as 'like two old, firm friends' – ironic in retrospect.

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