



Books – Jock Stein – The Definitive Biography

Archie MacPherson - Highdown - ISBN 1-904317-73-1

Jock Stein might have only held the reins at Elland Road for 44 days (spookily the same length of time as Old Big 'Ead), but there's no way I could really exclude this book from those covered on the Mighty Leeds website.

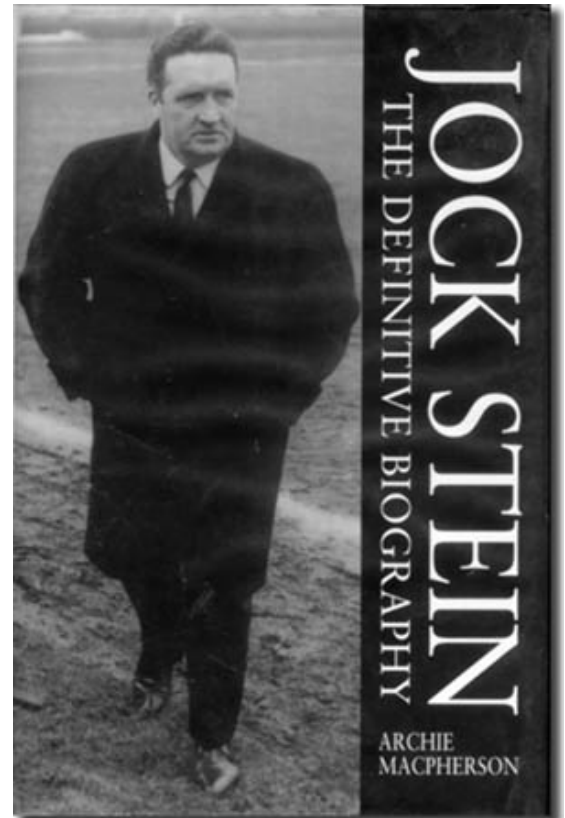
You see, this site is about much more than just football and this remarkable club, it also attempts to cover a little bit of the social history of the last 100 years or so, and the 1960's and 1970's, when Stein reigned supreme as the peerless manager of Glasgow Celtic, is a rich period indeed for study of people.

The Scot was one of a multitude of genuinely great managers around at the time ... Busby, Ramsey, Nicholson, Revie (of course), Shankly and even Cloughie, although he came right at the end of the period.

Broadcaster Archie MacPherson bravely titled this tome "Jock Stein – The Definitive Biography", but he certainly came up with the goods with one truly great piece of work about a truly great man.

Just to get the Leeds United stuff out of the way first, there are only a couple of pages included on Stein's time in charge in 1978, but it's all enthralling stuff, and we also get a great insight into the clash between Celtic in Leeds in the European Cup semi finals in 1970:

"Stein had great respect for Don Revie, the Leeds manager, as an original thinker in the game, but he did not think Celtic deserved the treatment they received both before and after the match. The English press annoyed him by writing off his team as 'no-hopers'. Revie did not help matters by being irritating. As both teams normally wore white stockings the visitors had to change, but as Celtic did not have an adequate replacement the Leeds manager offered them two alternatives that were to hand. The colours were blue or red. 'Aghast' was certainly not the word bandied about the Celtic dressing-room at that choice. A Celtic team with red or blue would have tested the loyalty of their support to the limit. What to do? Stein's humour soothed the savage breasts. He kept any anger about that confined to the dressing-room so that Leeds would not detect they had been upset. 'We'll wear the red stockings,' he said. 'Under their floodlights they'll show up more orange than red and our supporters will think we're wearing the colours of the Irish tricolour. That'll please them.' It did ... 'Revie's shitting himself,' he told them. 'I've never seen that man as nervous in all my life. He's as



The Big Man

white as a sheet. If he's like that, what do you think his players are like? They are there for the taking, believe you me.”

Now enough of such horrible memories...

MacPherson has produced a quite remarkable thing here, a real rarity – a footballing biography which actually hangs together as a decent piece of writing, happily bereft of all the clichés and dross that normally accompanies such things. He writes remarkably well, and belies his rather comical public image, with a deep and thoughtful pen portrait of one of the truly great football men of the last century.

282 pages brim over with affection and yet remain remarkably objective about Stein, skillfully bringing out the best and the worst of the man ... and there certainly were an awful lot of faults with a guy, who was often considered akin to a saint in at least half of Glasgow.

MacPherson also captures the fall from grace of Stein and his shameful ejection by the Celtic board, a sad period indeed in the man's life, but not as sad as the end, when he died at pitchside during a World Cup qualifier.

“I felt a little bit as though I were sitting beside the tattooed man from Ray Bradbury's *The Illustrated Man*: the pictures on his body told different stories. Stein had no tattoos that I know of, and certainly not of King Billy on his chest as was widely rumoured at one time, but out of every pore on his body could stream a thousand stories relating to the most significant era in Scottish football and to the attitudes of a society in which his father never wished him well when Celtic played Rangers and his best friend shunned him because he signed for the Parkhead club. I was with a man who had really begun to alter people's perceptions on bigotry in such a practical way that it challenged the ineffectiveness of pious utterances from various pulpits. A consistently successful Celtic side under Stein put Celtic scarves into 'Protestant' school playgrounds where previously they would not have been found by tracker dogs.”

STRONGLY RECOMMENDED ... a most remarkable book.