

# McCall's happy homecoming

## MOTHERWELL

Appointment has merely accelerated new manager's plans to return to Scotland, writes **Stewart Fisher**

**S**TUART McCall is, in a way, right back where it all started. The midfielder may be best known for his connections to Rangers and Bradford City, the clubs where he made the majority of his 763 senior appearances as a player, or Sheffield United, where he learned the coaching ropes under Neil Warnock. But in becoming manager at Motherwell he is returning to the ground where he watched his first football match north of the border.

McCall's parents both hail from Lanarkshire and the first senior game he saw up here was at Fir Park in the 1970s. "Funnily enough my first-ever Scottish game was Motherwell v Celtic. I think Peter Marinello scored a couple and they drew 2-2," McCall said. "It was a day when it was absolutely pissing it down. What end was I in? I think every end was a Celtic end that day!"

Twelve-and-a-half years have passed since McCall left Ibrox for a return to Yorkshire, but a large chunk of his heart has always remained in the country for which he made 40 international appearances. In fact, even if the Motherwell job had not come up, the 46-year-old intended to move his family north this summer in any case, having never intended to stay away so long.

He was tentatively approached through a third party earlier in the season to sound out his availability for a Scotland youth coaching role in the event that Billy Stark became Aberdeen manager. So it was somewhat ironic that it was Craig Brown and Archie Knox's decision to move to Aberdeen that presented him with the opportunity at Fir Park. "My wife remarked about



Stuart McCall saw his first Scottish football match at Fir Park in 1970s Photograph: Bill Murray/SNS

a week-and-a-half ago that three years has turned into 12-and-a-half," McCall said. "She said, 'you are sat on your ass here, so you might as well sit on your ass up the road'. So it was probably always the plan to come up to Scotland in the summer, even if I had nothing in target, just to come back home really. Then out of the blue this all came about."

McCall's family will move in the summer, despite the fact that his 14-year-old son Craig, a promising young footballer, currently plays with Bradford's youth set-up.

"I am 100% going to move the family up," McCall said. "My son is 14, my daughter is 13 and they are going to stay at the school they are at until the summer. That is one of the downsides [of the timing of the Motherwell

vacancy] in a way, because we are very close knit as a family. Not having football every weekend, I have been taking my lad to games. He plays for Bradford Under-14s and has been doing well, and I have been helping to coach them.

"He texted me last night, because I said I would take him to the Old Firm game. He is quite crafty, as he said, 'dad, obviously you play Rangers in a cup semi-final soon, so you really have to go scouting'. At least he can just keep his Bradford claret and amber scarf, it won't look out of place here."

McCall's first task was yesterday's Lanarkshire derby this afternoon, as he endeavoured to halt a run of defeats in which Motherwell lost to Hearts, Rangers and Celtic following the departure of Craig Brown for Aberdeen. The



We wanted to come back in the summer anyway. Then this happened out of the blue

forthcoming Co-operative Insurance Cup semi-final is a reminder that his move to Motherwell will necessitate a partial loosening of the ties with Rangers which defined his career.

"I've not given it a thought," McCall said. "I am sure when we come to play Rangers or Celtic it will come up but I will be saying that I am Motherwell manager and it will give me as much pleasure to beat Rangers as it would to beat Hamilton or Celtic."

Immediately after the final whistle yesterday, McCall intended to return to Yorkshire, to be with his mother, who was admitted to hospital in the lead-up to Christmas, and to gather more of his belongings. After that trip, one of the items on his agenda will be appointing an assistant.

Tommy Craig, who has filled the role at Celtic, Aberdeen and Hibs in the past, is among those has been linked with the post but McCall will take his time in making an appointment. "I have asked people who are in the game in Scotland to have a think and I am sure they will be putting names forward," McCall said. "It would be nice if it was someone I knew, but it is an open book."

He also has a few team issues to deal with. Nick Blackman's loan and Alan Gow's contract need renewed if that can be done, or, if not, replacements found must be found. There will only be money to bring players in if others leave. And while McCall was nothing if not a great servant to Scotland, excelling in most of his international appearances, it hasn't taken long for him to find himself at loggerheads with the SFA in his new role.

Steve Jennings' suspension for that controversial sending off against Hearts expired after yesterday's game, but there have been suggestions that the governing body could impose an indefinite ban while they investigate allegations concerning suspicious betting patterns. McCall is determined that will not happen. "As soon as the game has finished on Saturday, he is back in," he said. McCall never was one to shirk a challenge.

## Secret deals in Doha and Blatter's Trojan pony

### FIFA

President gets set to repel another bid to weaken his grip on power, writes **Andrew Jennings**

TINY Qatar, victors of the opaque contest to host the World Cup in 2022, will be the venue on Thursday for Sepp Blatter's next manoeuvre to tighten his chokehold on Fifa.

Blatter has been infuriated for the past decade by the independent-minded Korean Fifa vice-president Chung Mong-joon and his frequent threats to challenge for the presidency. Blatter has never had the courage to confront billionaire Chung, a member of the family controlling the Hyundai conglomerate. Now he has found his Trojan pony, an Arab princeling, and he's running him at the congress of the Asian Football Confederation this week.

It smells like a deal done in the Doha souk. Blatter steered 2022 to Qatar – in return the gas-rich, money-no-object statelet does the "persuading" to enlist enough votes to rid their benefactor of his pestilent adversary.

The wannabe Fifa veep is Prince Ali bin Al Hussein of Jordan. He's 35, a

Sandhurst-trained chap who appears to have been passed over for the chance to join other sporty royals at the Inter-national Olympic Committee. Prince Ali, president of the 13-strong West Asian football federation, has opted instead to be elevated to Fifa's elite. There are 46 Asia-wide votes available and topping his list of election pledges is the exciting idea of a regional professional women's league.

Practically, that may be a step too far for some of his sponsors – principally Yemen, Oman, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates who, according to fifa.com, currently don't employ a national women's coach. Neither does World Cup winner Qatar and in Saudi a leading religious scholar condemns the game because it "could damage a girl's hymen". How does he know?

Those concerns aside, though, Prince Ali is making the big play. Check out his YouTube video. Some might find it unconvincing. His managers never give

him the chance to speak more than a few words without abrupt picture changes, giving the unfair impression he can't easily manage a stand-alone sentence.

The Prince's manifesto can also be confusing. "I continue to believe in the power of unity to develop football," he tells us, whatever that actually means – but his proposal for an easy-to-access development fund will be popular.

Back in the sandpit, Blatter has been determined to rid himself of Chung since 2002 when the Korean accused him of "arrogance" because the Fifa president won't reveal what he pays himself. The animosity boiled over again this autumn when Chung shouted about the ISL bribes scandal.

Prince Ali says that he wants "transparency, openness and integrity" at Fifa so I've emailed to ask if, elected or not, he will agitate to have Herr Blatter's salary and perks extracted from Fifa's list of state secrets and made public – one day he might even get back to me.

I'd be happier trusting Prince Ali to fill one of Fifa's most important positions if he would announce plans to refer the scandal of the \$100 million in kickbacks for World Cup contracts, that I revealed in a BBC Panorama programme a few weeks ago, to their Ethics Committee. The IOC is on the case – can Fifa be far behind?

Prince Ali makes much of his devotion to youth, but many young Jordanians are unsure after cops gave a good clubbing to 250 of them following disturbances three weeks ago at a top league game in Amman.

If the plan dreamed up by Blatter and Qatar's executive committee member Mohamed bin Hammam to replace Chung with the young prince succeeds it will put the control of Asian football firmly in the Gulf and remote from the rest of the vast region. But if Chung survives he may launch a bare-knuckle fight to oust Blatter at Fifa's congress at the end of May.