

The Caskie affair

By Douglas Gorman

One of the iconic football matches played in Scotland – Rangers versus Dynamo Moscow in 1945 – was embroiled in what was known as “*the Caskie affair*”. Why would a friendly match between clubs from two Second World War allies and only months after the cessation of hostilities create a controversy and bring it close to cancellation?

The cause of the issue was in the different interpretation of the term “*guest player*” by the two clubs and triggered by the use of such players by Arsenal in the Russians’ previous match. Intriguingly for what was to follow, the Dynamo squad included one player from CDKA and two from Dynamo Leningrad.

The tour

The full details of the tour by Dynamo Moscow were not known in advance and it was not until the tour was underway on Monday 19 November 1945 that it was confirmed that the Russians would play Rangers. This would be the first big match hosted at Ibrox Park after Wartime capacity restrictions (around 50% of holding capacity) had been lifted. Discussions with the Chief Constable and the club set an all-ticket crowd limit of 90,000 and ticket arrangements were put in place immediately. It was even later when it became clear that the visit to Ibrox Park would be the fourth and final game of the tour and it would not now include a match against a Football Association XI, Midlands XI or Aston Villa FC at Villa Park, Birmingham, although the Villa club had printed 70,000 tickets. There had been other unsuccessful requests from Belfast, Manchester and Dundee to host a match. The arrival of the Russian visitors was eagerly awaited after the deprivations of war and the Russians were welcome and respected, if unknown, visitors. The team was allegedly asked to visit Joseph Stalin who together with Lavrentiy Beria, chief of NKVD (the Soviet secret police) and Dynamo’s patron, made clear to the footballers the importance of winning their tour matches.

Word of the Russians style of play quickly spread after a 3:3 draw with Chelsea at Stamford Bridge. The Russians played a high energy game with players comfortably inter-changing positions - “*Passovotchka*”. They had a firm belief that their style of play, based around a cohesive team of very good players, would out-trump individual brilliance. They did not use shirt numbers as they believed no one player should stand out from another as the team’s performance was the key to success. A 10:1 victory over Cardiff City brought the visitors back to London to play Arsenal at White Hart Lane and the first indication of problems on the horizon. A match against Arsenal was one of 14 pre-tour conditions laid down to their hosts, the Football Association, by Dynamo. Dynamo coach Mikhail Yakushin said: “*To come to London and not play Arsenal would be like visiting Cairo without seeing the pyramids.*” With 44 out of 46 professionals in the forces, the Gunners invited six guest players, including Stanley Matthews and Stan Mortensen, to play against Dynamo. Stanley Matthews was a late replacement as a guest player and manager George Allison said that “*higher authorities had made a special request [for Matthews to play] as a compliment to the Russians*”. Allison went on to say “*The Russians still regard Arsenal as the greatest English club and we must do our best to field a side worthy of upholding our position in the football world. I cannot, in fairness to them, put out a team of inexperienced boys against such masters of the game*”. The Arsenal manager was between a rock and a hard place. Meanwhile the Dynamo captain Mikhail Semichastny issued a statement and said: “*The composition of the English team published in the British newspapers differs considerably from the Arsenal team which was previously made known to the Dynamo representatives. Taking into consideration the composition of the English football team, we consider that the Dynamo team will meet one of the representative English teams*”.

In a match played in thick fog and with several controversial incidents, including 12 Dynamo players on the pitch at one point, the visitors won 4:3. The Dynamo party turned their attention to continuing their unbeaten run in the next match in Glasgow against Rangers.

Dynamo Moscow in Glasgow

On Monday 26 November 1945 the Lord Provost of Glasgow Hector McNeill, Bailie Robert Smith the Senior Magistrate, and the Third Lanark chairman, Glasgow fishmonger and war-time fund raiser, William Sans Unkles, formed the welcoming party at 06:45 on the platform at Central Station awaiting the arrival of the overnight train from London. The train bringing the Russian party to Scotland was 30 minutes late when the party alighted and Mr Koravayev, First Counsellor at the Soviet Embassy, introduced each of the party to the welcoming dignitaries. The party was supplemented by some embassy staff from London with an interpreter (Alexandra Eliseeva) and an embassy official (Miss Strelkov) who would assist in broadcasting reports of the visit to Russia.

The Russian party then travelled the short distance to the Beresford Hotel ("*Glasgow's first skyscraper*") in Sauchiehall Street where they met up with the advance party of four for a breakfast of porridge and herring. The advance party comprising of coach Mikhail Yakushin, captain Mikhail Semichastny, forward Konstantin Beskov and interpreter Mr Eugrapov, had arrived in Scotland the previous Saturday. Apart from taking in the Motherwell v Rangers game at Fir Park, they watched "*Hot Ice*" at the Alhambra and later danced at the Beresford.

Soon after the new arrivals had checked in the first news reports were made to Russia on the arrival in Scotland. Later that morning the players went on a shopping trip and in the afternoon 18 Dynamo players undertook a training session at Ibrox Park watched by the interested Rangers players. The players' track suits bearing a large capital letter "D" on the breast made an immediate impression. Those watching noted their liking for taking the ball on the run and keeping it low and then shooting at the first opportunity from all angles and positions. The goalkeeper, "*Tiger*" Khomich, also displayed great acrobatics.

Some of the Russian players spent the afternoon watching Rugby Union and the Royal Australian Air Force XV defeat Glasgow High School Former Pupils 9:3 at Old Anniesland.

In the evening of Monday 26 November the Russians were guests of honour in the Satinwood Room of the City Chambers in George Square. The Lord Provost hosted a dinner attended by people from many walks of life. Special mention was made of Alan Morton and James Bowie from Rangers and Jimmy McGrory and Willie McStay of Celtic. The Russians were each presented with a quaich carved in Scottish oak and a framed coat-of-arms of the city. At the dinner James Bowie, the Rangers chairman, had given an assurance that no guest players would be used. Behind the scenes frantic attempts were made to resolve an impasse over Jimmy Caskie's selection in the Rangers side. George Graham, the secretary of the Scottish Football Association, and other officials of the governing body were brought into the discussions. It was explained that Jimmy Caskie's transfer from Everton had followed the correct British procedures and he was now a Rangers player for all competitions. The Russians were adamant that as Caskie was not on the original list of Rangers players submitted they would not play if he was selected. In the end Rangers decided, in the interests of football, to waive their right to select Caskie. Charlie Johnston, who had played his seventh league game of the season on the previous Saturday, was selected at outside left.

The Caskie incident had made the news and the Russian party was to be reminded of it when half a dozen of the group accepted the Glasgow Corporation's invitation for a short trip down the Clyde on

a tug provided by the Clyde Navigation Trust on Tuesday 27 November. The shipyard workers took full advantage and shouts of *"Who's afraid of Caskie"* and *"We want Caskie"* were heard from the workers lining the ships' rails and translated for the Russian visitors. Others chalked messages on the half-completed hulls and they included one prediction of the score – a Rangers win by 10 goals to one and a reverse of the Cardiff result. Despite the controversy the reception was good humoured with red flags waved in recognition of the war-time allies. Mr G A Birkett, lecturer in Russian at Glasgow University, his wife (a Russian-born assistant lecturer) and Mr G Miller (lecturer in Soviet Economics) accompanied the party. While they helped as interpreters they also pointed out that most of the Russian war-time convoys had sailed from the Clyde. It is alleged that one of the reasons for the tour was to ensure the visitors saw HMS Vanguard, the last-ever British battleship, being fitted out and a sign of post-War naval strength. The visitors continued their tour of the city with visits to Kelvingrove Art Galleries, the Mitchell Library and Glasgow University. They also visited Jordanhill Training College that was a direct result of interest by Dmitry Ionov, Director of Athletics in the Soviet Union. The party saw various athletic demonstrations by students before being escorted by former Scottish marathon runner, Dunky Wright, to Whiteinch Swimming Baths for a demonstration by student Nancy Riach, the outstanding swimmer of her generation. In the evening they relaxed at the La Scala cinema in Sauchiehall Street by watching films featuring Donald Duck and triple Olympic ice skating gold medallist, Sonja Henie.

After the match, a bruising encounter with honours even, Rangers entertained the party to a banquet at the St Enoch hotel where chairman, James Bowie, presented a silver cup to Konstantin Andrianov, chief of physical culture in the Soviet Union, as a memento of their visit to Glasgow. The Russian visitors departed from St Enoch station at 21:30 watched only by railwaymen who had seen the party's motor coaches draw up on the platform next to the train.

What was *"The Caskie affair"*?

Behind the scenes *"the Caskie affair"* was boiling up. Having seen Arsenal engage players from other clubs for their match at White Hart Lane the Russians were adamant that this would not happen in Glasgow. The Russians had done their homework on all their opponents. It was reported that before the tour a telephone call to glean information from Billy Birrell, the Chelsea manager, had lasted 23 minutes and cost £92.

Like Arsenal Rangers players had many players still in uniform. However, Rangers manager, Bill Struth, had more success in securing their release. Billy Williamson was on a training course in the Royal Navy and had missed the last two league games against Heart of Midlothian and Motherwell. However, Bill Struth was able to include him for this game thanks to an understanding Commanding Officer and the alleged promise of ten stand tickets for the match. Rangers had played three different outside lefts in the last three games and perhaps the uncertainty over the release of inside left Billy Williamson, who had scored 9 goals in his 12 games that season, caused Bill Struth to think about his left-sided attacking partnership in the run-up to the game? Bill Struth had not selected his team when on Monday 26 November the newspapers reported that *"he has a surprise in store though he will not disclose his secret."* Bill Struth's *"surprise"* was the selection of outside left Jimmy Caskie. Caskie was currently playing for Hibernian and had last played for the Edinburgh club on 27 October 1945 in a Scottish Southern League match with Third Lanark. The Russians said that *"We have come to play the Rangers, and by that we mean the players who helped them regularly. A list of 18 players was handed to us on behalf of the Rangers some days ago and we were surprised when we could not find Caskie's name on it. This is why we objected"*. The Russians said that they would refuse to play the match if Caskie was included in the Rangers team. They asked for a decision from the Ibrox club by the evening of Monday 26 November.

Torry Gillick and Jimmy Caskie

On Sunday 25 November Rangers Chairman James Bowie said in the Sunday Post that there was *"Nothing to report on Gillick-Caskie negotiations with Everton."* However, matters progressed swiftly and on Monday 26 November both Torrance ("*Torry*") Gillick and James ("*Jimmy*") Caskie became registered Rangers players.

In the run-up to the Dynamo match Torry's registration was still with Everton. However, in the eyes of the Russians Torry was already a Rangers player having played in War-time competitions, had played for Rangers in their league game against Motherwell on the previous Saturday watched by the Dynamo captain Mikhail Semichastny and was on the list of 18 players submitted to them. During the War Jimmy had played for St Mirren and Hibernian and was with the Edinburgh club when Rangers submitted their 18-player list. Jimmy was not a Ranger according to the Russians.

Torry Gillick and Jimmy Caskie had already played together on several occasions. While Torry was playing for Petershill and Jimmy for Ashfield they represented the Central Junior Football League in a 5:5 draw with the Irish Intermediate League at Grosvenor Park, Belfast on 6 May 1933. Before the Second World War they were Everton players in the team that won the Football League Championship in the 1938/39 season. On the cessation of League football with the outbreak of War Caskie had returned to Glasgow to continue his career as a draughtsman. Torry was employed as a ships' painter in Liverpool at the start of the War but severe burns in a fire in his garage in December 1939 saw him return to Scotland to recuperate. On his recovery he played his football in Scotland. In 1941 and 1942 they played together in two Wartime Internationals for Scotland against England. With the Goodison Park club's consent under Wartime arrangements, Torry and Jimmy were playing for Rangers and Hibernian respectively immediately prior to the arrival of the Dynamo team in Glasgow. In September 1945 both players had intimated to Everton that they wanted to continue playing in Scotland when official League football returned. Everton at first made approaches to their current Scottish clubs. Hibernian were interested in signing Jimmy as part of a swap deal with Tommy Bogan but their valuation of Caskie (£1,000) was lower than the fee Everton wanted (£2,500). Rangers were keen to secure Torry's signature but indicated that they were interested in both players. Rangers had offered £3,000 for Torry and £5,000 for both players. The Everton secretary was instructed to conclude two separate deals or one combined deal with Rangers valuing Gillick at £4,500 (with power to accept £3,000) and Caskie at £2,500 (with power to accept £2,000). It was expected that Hibernian might increase their offer for Caskie. A combined fee of £5,500 was eventually agreed with Rangers and the meeting of the Everton directors held on Tuesday 27 November minuted that:

"Gillick 181 & Caskie 181 Noted that the transfer forms had been completed."

What was the cause of "*the Caskie affair*"?

I can see several incidents that are likely to have led to the stance taken by Dynamo over Jimmy Caskie's selection for Rangers.

1. The touring officials were in regular contact with Moscow and it is likely that this was the source of the hardening of the attitude on guest players.
2. England centre forward Tommy Lawton had signed for Chelsea from Everton on Thursday 8 November 1945 and played just one league game (watched by the Dynamo party) before playing against Dynamo Moscow. The Russians may have been suspicious over the similar close timing of Jimmy Caskie's transfer to Rangers from the Goodison Park club just in time to play against

Dynamo. The Russians would have known that Jimmy was a Scottish War-time internationalist and had played nine league games for Hibernian that season.

3. Full back Joe Bacuzzi of Fulham FC played as a guest for both Chelsea and Arsenal against Dynamo. At Stamford Bridge he took the place of injured Alex White and for Arsenal he stepped in for Eddie Hapgood who was fog-bound somewhere in continental Europe. They may have been surprised to come up against Joe playing for two different club sides.
4. Two of the 14 pre-tour conditions were a match against Arsenal and they would only play games against club sides. The Russians saw the composition of the Arsenal team as being that of an English representative team and thus breaking these two conditions.
5. Despite the best efforts made by Arsenal manager, George Allison, to explain the difficulties of selecting a team under War-time conditions, perhaps the officials back in Moscow found it hard to believe that the British Government and the British armed forces could not immediately release Arsenal players who were in uniform to play in such a significant match.
6. The British player transfer system may have appeared unusual to the Russians who probably dealt with players moving between clubs in a different way.

At Ibrox Park Rangers' manager, Bill Struth, was probably initially unaware of the looming problem. He had no intention of engaging guest players from other clubs to play in just one match for Rangers. He had played 24 players in the 15 league matches so far in the season and had a reasonably settled line-up except the centre forward and left-sided attacking positions. However, he was intending to select Torry Gillick who had played 13 of the 15 league games that season. Although until the Monday before the match Torry was technically "*a guest player*" playing at Ibrox with the consent of Everton he was not "*a guest player*" in the context of this game. In the eyes of Dynamo he was one of the "*players who helped them [Rangers] regularly*".

Equally, Bill Struth had no intention of selecting Jimmy Caskie unless his registration transfer from Everton was completed by the time of the match.

On the face of it there was not a difference between the two clubs on the status of these players.

But the timing of Caskie's transfer and the Russians' view of the composition of the Arsenal side caused the confusion that created the incident.

Dynamo officials said "*A list of 18 players was handed to us on behalf of the Rangers some days ago and we were surprised when we could not find Caskie's name on it.*" Rangers would have agreed that this statement was factually correct. However, they would have disputed the purpose of the list implied by Dynamo officials and that only players named could be selected for the team.

I have three unanswered questions:

1. How did the Russians know of Jimmy Caskie's selection that enabled them to raise an objection?

Was it through the newspapers speculating on Caskie's expected arrival at Ibrox or was his name on the first version of the shorter list of 15 players released on Monday 26 November? The second version of this list would have excluded Jimmy Caskie and would have been the one published in the newspapers on the day before the game.

2. What was the purpose of the original list of 18 Rangers players provided to the Dynamo officials and when was it provided?

There is no doubt that the significance of the list increased to the Russians after their experience in the Arsenal match and their expectation was that the Rangers starting XI would come from these players. It is probable that the list was provided at some point from Monday 19 November to Monday 26 November, i.e. from the date the Ibrox fixture was confirmed to the date of the Russians arrival in Glasgow but early in the day of 26 November before Jimmy Caskie's transfer had been formalised. If the list was provided before the Arsenal match on Wednesday 21 November then I think it is probable there were no specific conditions attached to the list and its provision was a simple courtesy. If it was provided after the Arsenal match then I am sure that Rangers officials would have been very aware of the importance it had now assumed. If that was the case then it is inconceivable that Rangers would have attempted to change the names on the list due to injury or indeed a new signing without explaining the situation to the Russians. It is clear that Jimmy Caskie's selection had not been explained to Dynamo when his name was put on the team sheet. This leads me to the conclusion that the list was provided prior to the Arsenal match. Rangers would have seen no need to explain how good timing meant that they were able to include a new and properly registered player on the team sheet.

3. Who was on the original list of 18 Rangers players list?

Given what we now know the 15 players announced on the day before the game, and without Jimmy Caskie, from which the team would be selected would have been 15 of those 18 names. They were:

Jerry Dawson (had played 9 out of 15 league matches so far in the season)
David Gray (5/15)
Jock Shaw (14/15)
Charlie Watkins (8/15)
George Young (10/15)
Scot Symon (9/15)
Willie Waddell (12/15)
Torry Gillick (13/15)
Jimmy Smith (2/15)
Billy Williamson (12/15)
Charlie Johnston (7/15)
Jimmy Duncanson (10/15)
Willie Woodburn (8/15)
John Lindsay (2/15)
Tom McKillop (0/15)

Who were the other three players? An educated guess is that goalkeeper John Shaw (3/15) was the second goalkeeper would have been able to come on a substitute in the event of an injury to Jerry Dawson. Willie Rae (1/15), who had made his Rangers debut on the previous Saturday, may have been named as another inside forward. Indeed his name incorrectly appears in the Rangers line-up in the report of the match on the Dynamo website (fcdynamo.ru) that supports the claim that Willie's name was on the list and was the source of the error. Doctor Adam Little (8/15) would have been a good half back selection having played in both right and left positions earlier in the season but he was overseas at the time of the game. So perhaps experienced and long-serving Dougie Gray (6/15) was included as a defensive option? The day before the match the Rangers starting line-up had been virtually decided with only the right full back and the three half back positions undecided. The uncertainty over the half backs probably centred on the fitness of George Young who had only

returned to the team on the previous Saturday from injury. Jimmy Caskie went on to make his Rangers debut against his old side Hibs in the Southern League match at Ibrox on the following Saturday, 1 December 1945.

Match details

Venue: Ibrox Stadium, Glasgow
Date/time: Wednesday 28 November 1945 2:15 pm kick off gates open 12:00
Weather: Fair
Temperature: 12°C
Attendance: 90,000 (all ticket)
Ticket prices: Ground 1/6 (7.5p) Enclosure 3/6 (17.5p) Grandstand 7/6 (37.5p), 10/- (50p), 15/6 (77.5p) and £1 1/- (£1.05)
Result: Rangers 2 (1) *Smith (40m), Young (pen. 78m)*; Dynamo Moscow 2 (2) *Kartsev 2 (3m & 24m)*.
Teams: Rangers: Jerry Dawson; David Gray & Jock Shaw (captain); Charlie Watkins, George Young & Scott Symon; Willie Waddell, Torry Gillick, Jimmy Smith, Billy Williamson & Charlie Johnston. Substitute: Jimmy Duncanson for Smith (76m).
Dynamo Moscow: Aleksey Khomich; Vsevolod Radikorsky & Ivan Stankevich; Vsevolod Blinkov, Mikhail Semichastny (captain) & Boris Oreshkin; Evgeniy Arkhangelsky, Vasiliy Kartsev, Konstantin Beskov, Vsevolod Bobrov & Sergey Solovyov. Substitute: Nikolay Dementyev for Bobrov (63m)
Referee: Tommy Thompson (Lemington, Northumberland)
Linesmen: Robert Calder (Rutherglen) and Willie Livingstone (Glasgow)
Substitutions: A goalkeeper and two outfield players from each team could be substituted if a doctor stated that a player could not continue.

Other tour matches

First match:

Opponents: Chelsea
Venue: Stamford Bridge, London
Date/time: Tuesday 13 November 1945 2:30 pm
Attendance: 74,496 although many others gained unofficial entry and the actual attendance was estimated to be around 100,000
Result: Chelsea 3 (2) *Goulden (23m), Williams (30m), Lawton (77m)*; Dynamo Moscow 3 (0) *Kartsev (65m), Arkhangelsky (71m), Bobrov (83m)*.

Second match:

Opponents: Cardiff City
Venue: Ninian Park, Cardiff
Date/time: Saturday 17 November 1945 2:45 pm
Attendance: 45,000
Result: Cardiff City 1 (0) *Moore (70m)*; Dynamo Moscow 10 (3) *Bobrov 3 (6m, 61m & 69m), Beskov 4 (10m, 54m, 65m & 85m), Arkhangelsky 3 (25m, 62m & 89m), Kartsev (65m)*.

Third match:

Opponents: Arsenal
Venue: White Hart Lane, London
Date/time: Wednesday 21 November 1945 2:15 pm
Attendance: 54,620
Result: Arsenal 3 (3) *Mortensen (Blackpool FC) 2 (12m, 35m), Rooke (Fulham FC) (38m)*;
Dynamo Moscow 4 (2) *Bobrov (1m, 63m), Beskov (41m), Leonid Solovyov (48m)*.

Dynamo Moscow party to Great Britain in 1945

Goalkeepers: Aleksey Khomich, Boris Kochetov, Nicolay Medvedev
Defenders: Vsevolod Radikorsky, Mikhail Semichastny, Ivan Stankevich, Vladimir Lemeshev (Dynamo, Leningrad), Sergey Nikultsev, Aleksandr Petrov
Midfielders: Vsevolod Blinkov, Leonid Solovyov, Boris Oreshkin (Dynamo, Leningrad), Alexander Malyavkin
Forwards: Evgeniy Arkhangelsky (Dynamo, Leningrad), Vasiliy Trofimov, Vasiliy Kartsev, Konstantin Beskov, Vsevolod Bobrov (CDKA, Moscow), Nikolay Dementyev, Sergey Solovyov, Valery Behtenev, Sergey Illin, Alexander Nazarov, Vladimir Savdun
Coaches: Mikhail Yakushin, Yevgeniy Fokin
Referee: Nikolay Latyshev
Radio commentator:
Vadim Sinyavsky
Head of delegation:
Konstantin Andrianov, vice-president of All-Union Committee for Physical Culture and Sport