

Celtic's Corner Bhoy

Charlie Tully was the man who put the 'Tic into Celtic in the 1950s and stories still abound of his adventures – so much so that his son is setting up a new website in his honour

WORDS: GREGOR KYLE

CELTIC Park has long stood as the home of football's great entertainers, players who married courage and talent with a precocious determination to play for the supporters.

Throughout 'The History' there is a long cast of characters who fit the bill, men such as 'The Mighty Atom', Patsy Gallagher, a diminutive figure who danced his way through ranks of violent defenders between 1911 and '26, once somersaulting the ball into the back of the net in a national final.

The 1960s and '70s had Jinky, the Greatest ever Celt, whose feats have been immortalised in bronze at the entrance to the stadium and whose name still echoes in the stands, usually on a day when Celtic are winning with style.

There are others, players who are championed by their peers and, despite the passing of half-a-century, the legend of Charles Patrick Tully remains as vivid as ever.

The mere mention of Tully's name still brings a smile to the faces of supporters, even those who followed in later generations and never witnessed his extraordinary performances.

There was his goal at Falkirk scored directly from a corner kick, which the referee initially disallowed, until Charlie curled home the retake. Then there was the tale of 'Tully and the three Gers', where he single-handedly 'bewildered, badgered and mesmerised' the Rangers defence in a virtuoso display.

No matter what the occasion, there seemed to be no end to his audacity and he was a player who revelled in 'the banter' and in life as the club's most high-profile player between 1948 and 1959.

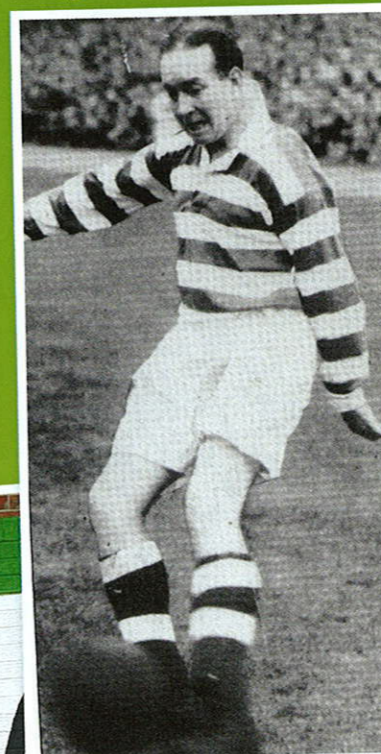
All of these tales and more bubble down the phone line from Belfast to Glasgow as his son, Charlie Tully Junior, recounts the feats of his famous father.

"The frightening thing is that I spent the first 10 years of my life in Glasgow. I was born in 1950, but I was so young I was unaware of what was happening," said Tully.

"I missed out on a lot of the things that I would have been able to grasp later in life, but the stories are endless, as was the joke factory that followed.



The legendary Charlie Tully



Charlie Tully Junior

"There was a newspaper hoarding at the time which was said to have read: 'Pope dies, Tully gets new honour'. There was also the one about how he was walking down Sauchiehall Street and the Rangers keeper was on the other side of the road, he nodded over and the Rangers keeper dived through a shop window. That was just part of the banter that built up at the time.

"Looking back, I think it's fair to say that my dad was one of the first of the real celebrity footballers," Tully continued.

"That 'fame' was something unusual at the time, even though it's common practice now with the likes of David Beckham and what have you. But he was the first of his kind to have the celebrity and combine it with the myths and cheeky stuff on the park.

"There are a host of legends, the remarks he made in games, the scoring from the corner kicks, the things that he wrote in *Tully Vision*, his weekly column in the *Evening Citizen*, these were all things that I believe he worked on and deliberately developed to build his own reputation and his charisma with it."

Tully's ploy certainly worked and in combining his ability as a player and working on his 'personality' and appeal off the park, a phenomenon was born.

Thousands of extra supporters rolled up at the ground for what would previously have been regarded as 'routine' fixtures, over 412,000 watched Celtic's opening 10 games of the 1948/49 season – despite the club not winning a championship in the preceding decade.

Then there were the Tully ice-creams, Tully ties, Tully cocktails and a host of associated merchandise.

However, he was hardly what you'd call a cynical or calculating businessman and at the heart of it, Tully cherished the relationship he had with the Celtic supporters.

"The important thing then was rivalry of the game itself, the personalities and characters, the things that went on, on and off the park," explained Charlie Junior.

"But the most important thing was the fans, they are what make any club special.

"One thing that hasn't changed over the years is the fans, they were the most important thing back then and certainly today, at Celtic, they continue to be.

"The Celtic fans have been great to Charlie over the years and they adored him as much as he loved them. He loved the support, there was no two ways about it.

"But I think it's forgotten that there was a serious side to him and his whole enjoyment was pulling on the green and white hoops and going out and playing. ☺