

There are some topics you should never discuss in public. Religion, football, sex and politics. Oh well, here goes.

We have a new football manager. I know to some of you that this will be news; I also know that it is a piece of news of no interest to you whatsoever. However, our new manager has appointed an assistant. A man with a stunning track record as a player, domestically and at international level. A man with years of experience, contacts at the highest level and a track record with our new manager. The problem? He's English.

Why should that be a problem? We had a German manager before. Admittedly, we never won the World or the European Cup when he was in charge, but I don't see that we can hold that against him. Our national cricket team is benefiting greatly from the skills of Zimbabweans.

Ever since it was announced that Terry Butcher was coming on board, the inevitable debate has begun. How can we be sure he has Scotland's interests at heart? How do we know he's not a mole infiltrating our team to scupper our chances and so lead the way to England's footballing glory? Don't these people realise? England's sportsmen (like their entrepreneurs, and their film stars and their politicians) don't spend all their time looking over their shoulders to see what we are up to. They are just getting on with whatever it they have to do, and trying to do it to the best of their ability. And if that means employing people from other countries, then they just go ahead and do it. For some reason, certain sections of the Scottish media seem to think that employing an Englishman represents some sort of weakness on our part.

I thought we were getting over ourselves. I went to see Runrig this summer, the first time for many years, 'beating the drum' on what seemed like the wettest day of a very wet summer. The interminable wait to get out of the

car park and the long drive home gave me time to reflect on the band's history and how, like many music makers in Scotland, their sounds reflected (drove?) the mood of the country.

In the early days, they symbolised to me the long fight for Scotland's freedom. I would sing my heart out to songs in English and Gaelic, dreaming of the day when Scotland would be free from the shackles of colonialism (and before you write in to point out that Scotland was never colonised, you have to remember I was a teenager at the time and not inclined to allow facts to get in the way of emotion).

As always Runrig were fantastic, mixing the old favourites with new fresh material. And, what's this? A replacement for Donnie Munro? The singer not a native Gaelic speaker? Not even a Scot. A Canadian is probably not that far away, he might even have some Highland blood in his ancestry. But it doesn't matter, as he has a voice like an angel. It symbolised a new confidence. Scotland and Runrig don't have to stick with the old and familiar, but can move on, linking with our friends across the way. Because we know we can do it on our own. We know we are good enough, and it's this that gives us the confidence to welcome others into our group, because we can see the good things that can come about, and because there is no threat to us.

If only the detractors in the football world would grow up. We are a small country. We have some fantastic traditions. We achieve far more than our size would suggest we should. In music, in industry, in the arts and yes, in sport too. Scotland football team at the moment has more potential than any team in my lifetime, probably ever. And that's down to the parents, the teachers and the coaches out there every weekend, helping youngsters, and to the players themselves, who have the skill, the determination and the commitment to keep

working at improving their game. English people don't want to see us fail. Yes of course they want their team to win, but if they don't qualify, its Scotland they will be rooting for (or Wales, or Northern Ireland). We owe it to our boys to give them the best possible chance to do well, and that means getting the best support behind them. The management team the SFA is putting in pace, gives them that chance and its just plain racist to say otherwise. So there.

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