

I understand why fans are so angry but Rodgers left great legacy

Coaching pedigree made his exit inevitable, insists Miller

KENNY MILLER knows what it means to burst 'the bubble'. To leave behind Glasgow, the Old Firm, European football and an annual quest for honours, in search of an environment that demands more. To step up by stepping away.

Three times he quit Scotland for pastures new, with Wolves, Derby and Bursaspor in Turkey. Each were gambles — a mixed bag of promotion, two relegations, just 11 goals in 70 top-flight games and no major trophies after a steady diet of silverware in Glasgow.

But those moves were about more than just a safe, secure playing career. Which is why Miller (below) could understand the motive behind Brendan Rodgers swapping Celtic, a club the Northern Irishman had led to the brink of a 50th league flag, for Leicester.

Having experienced both sides of the Old Firm divide for eight of his 21 playing seasons, however, he also recognises the anger of the Parkhead fans.

'When you're in this bubble up here, your club is one of the biggest in the world,' he says, now 39 and almost half a life away from his first move south, to Wolves in 2001.

'Yeah, you're not playing in the biggest league but you're one of the most-supported, most-decorated clubs in the world, so they (the Celtic support) don't see maybe any other kind of point of view, any other perspective.

'I'm sure that's why Celtic fans thought: "Why would you want to leave us for Leicester?" That's

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

by George Bond

Glasgow, it's a crazy environment — everything gets magnified, everything gets blown out of proportion. The timing of it is the thing for a lot of fans and people in Glasgow. You're in a cup semi-final, eight points clear in the league — fans would just have liked him to see the season out.

'I think because of the success and the relationship he'd built up with the club and the fans, they just feel hurt.'

The move arguably hurt the league's standing as much as Celtic's, coming at a time when a resurgent Rangers and all the clamour that came with Steven Gerrard's Ibrox appointment was putting the Premiership back on the European map.

The former Liverpool manager's arrival in 2016 was a coup for Scottish football, no matter what boyhood affections he professed for Celtic at the time.

Seeing him lured away to the bright lights of a club tenth in the English Premier League will do very little to curb sneering assessments of the Premiership from south

of the border. The alternative outlook on this loss, of course, is that it may well signal the end of the green-and-white stranglehold on success in Scotland. Rodgers won every championship, every cup, every cup tie in his time in charge. Without him, will Celtic's iron-clad monopoly start to crack?

'The fact Brendan's left, it will hit Celtic,' Miller, whose Dundee side face Celtic under caretaker boss Neil Lennon on Sunday, tells *Sportsmail*. 'At Rangers, Stevie (Gerrard) will have a year under his belt assessing the league.

'Stevie, I'm sure he'll have looked into it and done his homework beforehand, but if you've not been in the league, you don't really know too much about it, what the other teams are going to bring.

'I'm sure he's sussed it out now. I think Rangers will be in a far better position next year to go and put up a sustained challenge.

'There's no doubt they'll improve. They signed 15, 16 players this season and a lot of these lads had never set foot in Scotland before. They'll be better for what they've done this season, far better-equipped next year for the challenges they're going to face.

'With Stevie being there and Brendan being there, you've even got the relationship with manager and captain of Liverpool, it brought a focus on to the Scottish game which was great.

'Brendan will be missed for a lot of things but that alone will stick, the profile he brought. The Scottish game was far more in the spotlight this year than it has been.'

But by no means has Rodgers' exit left Celtic high



Mutual respect: Miller hailed the partnership of Rodgers and Brown (inset above) but the likes of Jamie Vardy (inset right) is now his focus



Brendan's departure will hit Celtic...Stevie will soon have had a year under his belt to assess this league



Next-season trophy quest is key to Gerrard survival

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during the last two transfer windows. But his hopes of winning the Betfred Cup were ended by Aberdeen at the semi-final stage, while Rangers trail champions Celtic by eight points in the Ladbrokes Premiership with just nine games left to play. On Tuesday night, Aberdeen's 2-0 Scottish Cup quarter-final replay win at Ibrox effectively ended the season for the hosts by mid-March.

Yet, while Miller expects Gerrard to still be leading the team next season, he warned the heat will be on him to end the club's eight-year silverware drought. 'If you don't win a cup at the Old

Firm it's a failed season,' said Miller, who won three consecutive league titles, a Scottish Cup and a League Cup with Rangers, in addition to the league and cup Double in 2007 at Celtic. 'Rangers need to win trophies, whether it's Scottish Cups, League Cups or leagues. They need to be in European competition. It's where the club belongs. That's what the club, the fans, everybody, demands. 'But I don't think Stevie needs it this year. Next year will be the acid test, where silverware is required.'

After 29 games in the league, Gerrard's team is just one point better off than Rangers were at

the same stage under Pedro Caixinha and then caretaker boss Graeme Murty. However, for Miller, the team's unexpected progression to the Europa League group stage was a sign that Gerrard is taking the club in the right direction.

Now the Rangers boss needs to work on adding consistency on the domestic front.

Miller said: 'The Europa League campaign was great. It was a big achievement to get there, because that's a gruelling process and I thought they held their own. They were very unfortunate not to get through. 'League-wise, inconsistencies have held them back. They've

only won four games in a row in the league once this year — it's not enough. You can't just win three or four games in a row and expect to be winning the league. You need to be stringing eight, nine wins in a row to keep the required level of points.

'Managers want their teams to play the best football and win, but ultimately you need to win ugly sometimes. You need to ride your luck and do whatever it takes to get the job done. 'If you're going to win a league, you're going to need to show that on a number of occasions. 'At the moment, the consistency has just not quite been there to put up a fight.'

FOXES IN HUNT FOR PARKHEAD TALENT SPOTTER

By **STEPHEN MCGOWAN**

CELTIC head of recruitment Lee Congerton is a target for Brendan Rodgers at Leicester City.

The English Premier League club have confirmed the departure of Bordeaux-bound scouting chief Eduardo Macia. And Welshman Congerton, a close friend of Rodgers, is expected to end his two-year stay in Glasgow to take up the vacant post with the Foxes. Reports claim Leicester's hierarchy agreed to pay £9million to release Rodgers, assistant Chris Davies, coach Kolo Toure and fitness coach Glen Driscoll from their Celtic contracts.

The acquisition of Congerton and colleague Mick Doherty is expected to cost a further £300,000, paving the way for former recruitment chief John Park's anticipated Parkhead return.

Confirming the news of Macia's departure, Rodgers said yesterday: 'When I first came in, this was something that I was made aware of, something that was pre-Christmas that Eduardo was going to move on. 'He wants a fresh challenge and he's a really good guy. 'The club will go through the process of finding a replacement.

'I'm sure there will be a number of candidates that could help us make the next step. 'Over the coming weeks, we'll go through a process. 'I will be involved. 'It will be a club appointment but it is important the manager is involved.'

Belgian sources have played down reports linking Congerton (above) with a move to Anderlecht to reunite with sporting director Frank Arnesen.

Asked about Congerton last week, Rodgers said: 'There's always speculation because I brought Lee in to Celtic. 'Our relationship goes back a long way and he's very good at what he does.'

Meanwhile, reports in Germany claim Borussia Dortmund's interest in Kieran Tierney has cooled because of the £25million price tag put on him by the Parkhead club.

Seeking a long-term replacement for Marcel Schmelzer, Dortmund's Italian scout Nicola Liguori is reported to be an admirer of the Scotland international defender, branding him the 'new Patrice Evra'.

German magazine *Kicker* claim the Bundesliga giants won't pursue the matter, however, because Tierney is 'too expensive'.

