

“Succulent Lamb” Explained

Many visitors to this site who are not obsessed by Scottish football have cause to ask what we mean when we talk about ‘succulent lamb’. It is not something that is easily guessed at from context, so true to form, I thought an overly detailed, but complete, explanation was in order.

The phrase refers to a description of the food served to James Traynor of the Daily Record (a Scottish tabloid) by former Rangers owner, Sir David Murray. In one of the most obsequious pieces of ‘sucking-up’ ever penned in the long history of prostrate journalism in Scottish football, Traynor celebrates the food choices of his host for the evening.

The phrase ‘succulent lamb’ has come to mean *benefits accruing to journalists who write flattering and uncritical articles about Rangers FC and its owner*. Such benefits have more typically included priority access to Rangers’ news, but have included private jet trips to Murray’s chateau in France to sample the output of his vineyard. The original Traynor article is reproduced below. The most offensive paragraph has been put in bold for emphasis:

Daily Record – November 19, 1998 SECRET FEAR THAT DRIVES ME TO WIN 10 IN A ROW:

Rangers chairman David Murray opens up on the highs and lows of his decade in charge of Rangers and promises that the best is still to come

Exclusive James Traynor

RANGERS owner David Murray doesn't often allow his true feelings to surface, but currently he is finding it difficult to disguise a pain which has been gnawing away inside since the end of last season.

After a period of almost total dominance of Scottish football during which Rangers racked up 17 trophies the club met with failure.

Celtic won the championship and the League Cup and Hearts beat Rangers in the Tennents Scottish Cup final, leaving Murray with nothing to show for a massive investment in time and money.

Even now he winces when he thinks of that season, but it is the vivid memory, and the pain of defeat with which he now suffers, that combine to drive him on.

Last night as he looked back on a decade as Rangers' owner – come this Sunday, the 22nd, it will be 10 years since he paid Lawrence Marlborough £6 million for the club – Murray's desire to avoid the miseries of another barren season could not be disputed.

To hear him speak was to listen to a man who believes himself to be charged with some kind of great and mighty mission. Murray, who chose to talk only to the Record about his dreams and ambitions for Rangers, said: "No one should doubt that Rangers are the biggest club in the country, but I know that talk is cheap in this business and that we will have to prove just how big we are.

"That doesn't really bother me because as long as I am able to influence this club we will be the biggest and we will be the best. "I have spent 10 years of my life, and I know that sometimes I gave up too much of myself to Rangers, but I am not about to give up now.

"Neither am I willing to stand aside and allow another club to overtake Rangers. The failure of last season hurt me a lot and that pain was something I didn't need nor want.

"It is also a pain which I never want to suffer again, but by God that sort of thing just makes me even more determined to succeed. I am still as driven, still as enthusiastic and I will welcome the challenge of anyone out there."

Murray was referring not only to the Kenny Dalglish/Jim Kerr consortium who are stalking Celtic, but also the as yet uncovered groups who are bound to make bids to buy out Fergus McCann.

If the past 10 years have taught Murray, who is one of Britain's wealthiest individuals, anything it is how to win and he believes Rangers will continue to grow and prosper.

"I look upon these last 10 years as a having been a great era, but it is over and Rangers are about to head on into a new era," he said over a glass of the finest red.

He was about to take in another mouthful of the most succulent lamb – anyone who knows Murray shouldn't be surprised to learn he is a full-blooded, unashamed red meat eater – when he put down his knife and fork.

It was like a statement of intent and looking directly across the table to make sure I hadn't yet succumbed to the wine, he said:

"Bring on the next 10 years, there's more to come for Rangers.

"Understand that I care passionately about what I'm doing with Rangers and believe that in 10 years time we will still be setting the pace.

"Too many of us have put too much into this club and we won't let someone come along and take it all away.

"What I'm saying here is that no matter who buys Celtic from Fergus, they will need to have the deepest of pockets imaginable.

"The fresh challenge would be good for the Scottish game and lift the profile, but Celtic's new owners had better be prepared to spend.

"In the past, Celtic's people maybe just haven't fancied trying to take Rangers on financially, but if I have to go in deeper to keep my club up there then I will. I have done it too many times to be frightened now."

From anyone else such talk could be dismissed as no more than empty rhetoric, but with Murray you just feel it is more than bluster and besides, he does have a track record as a spender.

There have been times in his 10 years when he has taken Rangers somewhere between £15m and £20m into debt and he knows that if this season goes belly up like the last one he could be looking at a potential debt of £20m. However, having taken the value of Rangers from £6m to approximately £186m in 10 years he knows how far he can gamble in pursuit of success.

This season alone he has allowed his new manager Dick Advocaat to spend almost £30m, but he refuses to lose any sleep over it.

He said: "I don't because I consider spending as much as £5million on someone like Andrei Kanchelskis as a necessity. If a club like ours doesn't do that then we fall by the wayside.

"Look, I have many other businesses so I could find many other things to worry about, but I love sport and I want Rangers to be successful. I know this won't be accepted by some people but this isn't about making money. "£56m has been invested in the stadium and in my time £200m has been turned over and after interest our trading profit is minimal. Perhaps as much as £60m has been spent on players and I have even paid in about £1m in hospitality but never taken a salary from the place.

"I get six complimentary tickets the same as everyone else and if I want extra I have to pay for them the same as everyone else.

"There are no free lunches for David Murray at Ibrox and I have never taken part or been at the centre of any of the numerous victory celebrations we have had."

Murray disappears to celebrate success with a small group of close friends, leaving the roar of the crowd to wash over the players and management.

"Supporters don't want chairmen hanging around, even though they look to people like me to provide some kind of direction and the new ways to keep moving the club on," he said.

"I hope I can say that in my 10 years so far I've been fairly good at that, but the day I run out of ideas is the day I'll know it's over. I'm sure someone will tell me because I have good people around me, I always have.

"But I'm not ready yet to step back and I see enough fresh challenges, staying ahead at home and winning a place at the European table, ahead in the next 10 years to keep my own adrenaline flowing."

He knows roughly how much it will cost him and he's heard the rumours that ENIC, who have invested £40m in Rangers, are uneasy at the club's spending policies but Murray claims these backers have always been supportive of his methods.

He said: "They could kick up a fuss but they don't. Besides, I am the owner of the club and so far most people seem to like what I've done."