

= Scottish Challenge Cup =

The Scottish Professional Football League Challenge Cup, commonly known as the Scottish League Challenge Cup or Scottish Challenge Cup, is an association football knock out cup competition run by the Scottish Professional Football League (SPFL). Traditionally contested by members of the SPFL and its predecessor, the Scottish Football League (SFL), below the top level of the Scottish football league system, the Challenge Cup is being expanded to 54 entrants for the 2016 ? 17 tournament with the inclusion of under 20 teams of the twelve Scottish Premiership clubs, and four teams each from the Highland League and Lowland League. There will be also be two teams each from the NIFL Premiership and Welsh Premier League, the first time the competition has featured teams from outside Scottish football.

The competition was first held during the 1990 ? 91 season as the B & Q Centenary Cup to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the formation of the SFL. It was intended to be a one off competition but was continued due to its popularity. The first winner of the tournament was Dundee, who defeated Ayr United. Falkirk are the most successful team in the tournament, with four wins, most recently in 2012. The most recent winner was Rangers, who defeated Peterhead in the 2016 final.

= = Format = =

The Challenge Cup is a knock out tournament. Within a regionalised format, clubs are paired at random and the first club drawn listed as the home team. The winner of each match progresses to the next round and the loser is eliminated from the tournament. Every match, including the final, is a one legged tie that lasts 90 minutes plus any additional stoppage time. If no clear winner has been determined after 90 minutes of normal time, 30 minutes of extra time is played. If the score is still level after extra time then the winner is decided by a penalty shoot out.

Beginning with the 2016 ? 17 season, the competition has been expanded to 54 entrants. All Scottish Professional Football League (SPFL) clubs will participate, with the thirty clubs from the Championship, League One and League Two now joined by under 20 teams from the twelve Premiership clubs. Also participating by invitation will be four teams each from the Highland and Lowland Leagues and four entrants from outside Scottish football ? two each from the NIFL Premiership in Northern Ireland and the Welsh Premier League in Wales. Teams are seeded to enter the competition over any of the first four rounds, after which eight teams will remain to contest the quarter finals. The final is played at a neutral venue.

= = History = =

The competition was created in the 1990 ? 91 season to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the formation of the Scottish Football League in 1890. It was intended to run for only one season but continued due to its popularity. This was reflected in high attendances at matches in the later rounds of the tournament including a full capacity crowd of 11,500 at Fir Park in the first final. The cup was sponsored by DIY retail company B & Q and named the B & Q Centenary Cup for the first year and continued as the B & Q Cup for four seasons afterwards. The competition was run for three seasons without a sponsor due to the league covering the tournament costs and prize money, but was unsustainable and resulted in it being cancelled for one season in 1998 ? 99 before being re established in 1999 with a new sponsor. Although it is not as popular as competitions like the Scottish Cup, it provides smaller clubs with a realistic opportunity of winning a trophy due to the absence of top tier clubs from the tournament. When Stenhousemuir won the final in 1995 it was regarded as the club's greatest achievement in its 111 year history. Attendances at matches in the earlier rounds of the tournament are not dissimilar to average home attendances in league competition but as the competition reaches the latter stages they generally increase; Annan Athletic's record attendance of 1,575 was set in a semi final match against Falkirk in

2011 .

The number of competitors has varied in relation to the number of clubs with Scottish Football League membership . The first tournament featured the 28 clubs in the First and Second Divisions which reduced to 26 until 1994 when the league was expanded and restructured into three divisions ; increasing the number of eligible clubs to 30 . In the 2010 ? 11 competition the two highest ranked clubs from the Highland Football League with a Scottish Football Association licence were invited to compete , in order to bring the number of competitors to 32 . Before the change in 2010 , several clubs received a random bye in the first round in order to even out the number of fixtures . The Challenge Cup continued under the auspices of the Scottish Professional Football League after the Scottish Football League merged with the Scottish Premier League in 2013 . One change at this time was that the two invitational places were split , with only one place filled by a Highland League club (with a valid SFA club licence) and the other place going to the winner of a preliminary round tie between clubs from the East of Scotland League and the South of Scotland League . This was simplified in the 2014 ? 15 season , with the two additional places going to the Highland League champion (Brora Rangers) and the Lowland League champion (Spartans) . From 2016 ? 17 the competition has been further expanded with the addition of Scottish Premiership under @-@ 20 teams , additional places for the Highland and Lowland Leagues , which now have four representatives each , and two teams each from Northern Ireland and Wales .

= = Venues = =

In the rounds before the final , the venue of each match is determined when the fixtures are drawn ; the first club drawn in a fixture is named the home team and chooses the venue for the match , usually its own home ground . The venue may be switched to that of the away team or changed to a neutral venue for security reasons such as being unable to host a club with a large travelling fan base or the venue being unavailable .

= = = Final venue = = =

The final match of the tournament is played at a neutral venue , usually one that is geographically close or equidistant to where the clubs contesting the match are based . Eight different venues have hosted the final . Fir Park in Motherwell was the first , in 1990 , and has since hosted three more finals , the last in 1997 . McDiarmid Park in Perth has been the most frequent venue , staging it nine times between 1994 and 2015 . Other venues to host the final more than once are Broadwood Stadium (Cumbernauld) , Excelsior Stadium (Airdrie) and Almondvale Stadium (Livingston) . The 2016 final was held at Hampden Park , the national stadium in Glasgow , due to the large support of finalists Rangers .

= = Winners and finalists = =

A total of 24 clubs have reached the final , of whom 16 have won the competition . The first winners were Dundee in 1990 . The most successful club is Falkirk with four wins from four final appearances . Ross County , Hamilton Academical and Queen of the South have also reached the final four times , all winning and losing twice each . Three clubs have reached the final in successive seasons ; Ayr United did so in the first two years of the tournament but lost both . The only teams to have successfully defended their title are Hamilton Academical and the original Airdrieonians . It is possible for the winner of the tournament to be unable to defend their title ; if a club is promoted from the Scottish Championship (second tier) in the same season to the Scottish Premiership (first tier) , the club becomes ineligible to compete in the tournament . This has happened to Falkirk twice , Inverness Caledonian Thistle , St Mirren and Rangers .

Most winners and finalists have been from the second tier , while only four teams have won the competition from below this division . Stenhousemuir became the first team to do so in 1995 , followed by Stranraer a year later in 1996 and Alloa Athletic in 1999 . The most recent club to win

from below the second tier was Queen of the South , in 2013 . All winners and runners @-@ up from below the second tier have been from the third tier .

= = Finals = =

The winner of the tournament is decided by a final elimination match which lasts 90 minutes plus any additional stoppage time . If the score is level and a winner has not been determined after 90 minutes of normal time , 30 minutes of extra time is played , followed by a penalty shoot @-@ out if the score is still level . Eight finals have gone to extra time , with two being decided in this period of play . The further six have been decided by penalty shoot @-@ out .

= = = Results = = =

= = = Performance by club = = =

Clubs shown in italics are no longer in existence .

= = Sponsorship and media coverage = =

The Scottish Challenge Cup has been sponsored several times since it was introduced in 1990 . The sponsor has been able to determine the name of the competition . There have been four sponsors since the competition 's formation as well as several name changes within the duration of each sponsorship . The competition relies on revenue earned from sponsorship although it has been able to run without a sponsor over two periods but had to be suspended for one season in 1998 ? 99 as a consequence .

1990 ? 1995 : B & Q (B & Q Centenary Cup (until 1991) then B & Q Cup)

1995 ? 1998 : No sponsor

1999 ? 2006 : Bell 's whisky (Bell 's Challenge Cup (until 2002) then Bell 's Cup)

2006 ? 2008 : No sponsor

2008 ? 2011 : MG Alba (ALBA Challenge Cup)

2011 ? 2014 Ramsdens (Ramsdens Cup)

2014 ? 2016 : Petrofac (Petrofac Training Cup)

2016 ? Present : Irn @-@ Bru (Irn @-@ Bru Cup)

Selected games have been broadcast live on the Scottish Gaelic language television channel BBC Alba since 2008 , which is run jointly by former sponsor MG Alba and the BBC . Every final since the 2008 final has been broadcast live on the channel and the arrangement was extended for three more years in 2012 despite the end of MG Alba 's sponsorship of the competition in 2011 . With the expansion of the competition to include teams from Northern Ireland and Wales from 2016 @-@ 17 , additional contracts for live match coverage have been agreed with Premier Sports and S4C .