

One Club Man

June 2012

Scottish Cup action returned to Tynecastle on March 10th with the visit of St Mirren in the Sixth Round and Hearts deviated from their normal cover to include a photo of 2006 Cup Winner, Rudi Skacel alongside the trophy itself. The Cup covers this season have a certain, retro simplicity if nothing else. Unlike the last round's issue, the previous clashes feature made the programme this time and Gary Cowen covers some cup medals he has in his collection.

A week later it was another lunchtime kick-off and not satisfied with sending Hearts to Perth on Valentines Day this meant a Derby on Mother's Day! This was another standard issue but there was a programme related feature in the News items which announced that editor, Paul Kiddie had been awarded the SPL Editor of the Year award by the North Programme Club. The article stated that the award was given after considering content, design and value for money and they noted that the Hearts issue had seen "significant improvements in the last two seasons." Indeed, they further described the changes as "phenomenal". I would be interested to see their comments on other SPL programmes – not least to see if they match my own! – but I do find it hard to see beyond the Aberdeen issues as best in the SPL; albeit the award of Editor of the Year does not necessarily equate to the best programme. The same article had previously appeared on the Club website. A crowd of 15,128 watched Hearts triumph in the Derby too, 2-0.

Indeed, it is generally award season in the programme world not least Programme Monthly's own which were published in April's edition. Just prior to that George Peters of GPFootball.com announced his own awards and I am pleased to say that he recognised Hearts as having the best programme in both the SPL and the whole of Scotland. Like football itself, programmes are all about opinions and I asked George to give his reasons for plumping for Hearts and he said the "three excellent features" which are Mike Aitken, Mike Smith and Gary Cowen's columns.

The following Wednesday it was a trip to Paisley for the Cup replay which bravely competed for SKY coverage with Manchester City versus Chelsea. Saints issued their standard 36 pages for £2.50 and as I have said before it is a pity that there is not more of the excellent writing. There are only twelve pages of reading including statistics and this means that the usually full-page adverts rather dominate especially where they appear on consecutive pages. The three supporter-written columns are really enjoyable and accurately reflect the experiences of following non-Old Firm clubs particularly in the building up of hopes during a cup run. Incidentally, both Saints and Hearts had done their best to provide programmes for collectors given that from six ties they had produced eleven games. Only Hearts had defeated Auchinleck first time-out. A crowd of 5,921 plus a few more on SKY watched Hearts progress 2-0.

Two days later and despite it being mid-March it the season tickets for 2012-13 were launched. As part of that Hearts issued a full information pack issued just prior to the launch. These 'packs' have rather increased in size in recent years and contrast with the earliest example I have, from 1991 which consists of a poorly-replicated letter and narrow leaflet/application form. The 2012 version contained an eight-page, A5, fold-out style leaflet featuring Jamie Hamill on the cover. The first page has a message for supporters, rather patronisingly telling us that supporting Hearts is "a roller-coaster of emotions and drama." We'd probably worked that out by now and it is not really something to be promoted!

Thereafter, come the prices, 'how to buy' and benefits for season ticket holders. The reverse four pages have details on the new Family Stand - which would see the Gorgie Road Stand informally dedicated to that group - and contact details. Also with the booklet came an A5, eight-page booklet outlining the various initiatives offered by 'Hearts in the Community' and a four page leaflet from Zebra Finance outlining their terms for 'paying up' season tickets. All this came in a branded envelope. The pack described the prices as "starting" as this year Hearts adopted a dynamic pricing strategy which would see demand define price. This proved relatively controversial as we seemed to find the one price that rose quicker than a gallon of petrol.

The next day it was off to Perth to face St Johnstone and their 'Essentials' £1 offering was on sale. Pen pictures of both sides provide the biggest amount of reading and even Manager, Steve Lomas' column stretches to three paragraphs. That said there is a not a lot you can say, perhaps about the fifth meeting of these sides in just three months. That said, the most interesting piece is a short reflection on the sides' meeting in the new Premier League in October 1975 which Hearts won 1-0. A crowd of 4,700 looked on from the terraces of Muirton Park that day and 335 less watched the modern day Saints win 2-1 at McDiarmid. An interesting, if isolated, comparison as talk of reconstruction rumbles on.

March closed out with a home victory against Aberdeen before 13,292. Another standard issue – albeit with a delightful cover as you will see! - but it's worth noting that the regular player interview, with Ian Black was replicated in several national newspapers the following week. The following Thursday Tynecastle hosted the latest Scotland Women's European Championship qualifier against Ireland and once again a super, full-colour 16-page issue was free on admission. Or if you asked nicely. A min version of the full national side issues, this has a plethora of reading and its vibrant lay out truly reflects the developing game at this level.

The following week saw Hearts make the short trip to Dunfermline where a crowd of 4,700 saw a 2-1 win for the visitors. That win plunged Dunfermline further toward a likely relegation and the 48-page, 'The Game' will be a loss to the SPL as it is one of the more readable issues with a balance of well-written content and innovative articles. I particularly like season-long series on 1911-12 as I always feel a series like this adds a defined spine to a programme. Although the article on animals used in English and Scottish League badges was possibly a little too much for even the most committed anorak. Lions and eagles abound with a top mention for the wyverns of Carlisle. I had to look that one up. Interesting also to see Jim Jefferies opening the issue with his notes having been in charge at Tynecastle until last August.

The following week saw Hearts arrive at Hampden to take on Celtic and the prospect of another big-match programme. Or as my mate put it "I always buy a programme at Semi-Finals" which shows how good Hearts' track record making the Final is! The programme is noticeably thin at 40 pages (for £3) but the gloss, card cover gives it a big-match feel. Indeed, the look and feel is the most positive aspect of the issue which is generally dominated by player interviews. SFA President, Campbell Ogilvie welcomes the sides on page five before 'Pltting Route 56' gives a patchy history of ties between the sides. Strangely this also includes a photo from a League match in 1987 and a photo of the scoreboard from the Semi-Final of 2005. Thereafter, the interviews take over with around 20 pages of them. Messrs Skacel, Templeton and Locke are up against Mjallby, Stokes and Hooper for Celtic. The Hooper/Stokes interview is in a more innovative 'Q&A' format and given it was supplied by Celtic Media I wonder how much editorial power the clubs have? Paul Hartley and John Clark also provide historical content with interviews on times past. The teams are squeezed in on

third-last page. All-in-all perhaps not the strongest issue but then Semi-Finals are all about the Final so hopefully the programme for the Final would be stronger. And it was Hearts who would be there with a dramatic 2-1 win before 36,609.

Although Hearts have contested many semi-finals the one such programme that springs to mind is from a game before I was even born. On March 30th 1968, Hearts took on Morton at Hampden having defeated Brechin City, Dundee United and Rangers to reach Hampden. This is one of the first programmes I bought; from Alan Cunningham's 'Football Crazy' shop in Spittal Street in Edinburgh. I can well remember seeing it on the wall and picking it out with a couple of other forgotten issues to be taken home in a brown paper bag. It was the fact that the programme looked so OLD that caught my attention. This purchase would have been carried out around 20 years after the game when I was around 11 years old so to my eyes the cover which simply contained a drawing of a football with the match details seemed truly ancient. I know now in the context of the other issues from 1967-68 that photographs on the cover were still the exception rather than the rule – Hearts did use black-and-white photos – but this style looks akin to something from the forties.

Casting a more modern, cynical eye the colour of blue being used throughout are also surprising given that they are shared by Morton. Inside the layout is very familiar, with an advert on page two and an opening article opposite which reviews Morton and Hearts in the Cup above a quiz. The centre pages, unusually are divided between a photo of Hearts' Scottish Cup winning side and opposite a layout of the teams above a half-time scoreboard. Morton's photo shows action from their Quarter-Final tie with (then) non-League, Elgin City before the final reading which details the route to the Semis a continuation of the opening article and of course, an advert for the 'T pattern' football. The back page has an evocative advert of the time for Capstan cigarettes. All that for 1/-. 22,569 watched a 1-1 draw with just half of that returning for Hearts 2-1 victory in a replay. Dunfermline, in turn, proved too good in the Final. My Mum and Dad were at these games and twenty years later bought me the programme which goes to show you don't have to be at a game to have fond memories of it.

And finally, the Case of the Mysterious Glass Window item number 217, "Stained and painted glass window, circa 1900 depicting Bobby Walker playing football". The listing then gives an account of Walker's career before concluding that the panel "demonstrates" similarities to sportsmen panels at the Cafe Royal. It was estimated to fetch £800-£1200. The illustration shows a fair-haired footballer and following media publicity two historians questioned whether it was Walker at all. Gary Cowen and David Speed were both quoted casting their doubts. Subsequently, the item was removed from auction when Police became involved and it was identified as possibly belonging to the Station Tavern in Gorgie Road.

League action returned with the visit of Rangers on April 21st and whilst some touted this programme as a collectors item given Rangers' potential demise the main reason was increased coverage of the Semi-Final win. The cover featured a topless Craig Beattie and Rusi Skacel embracing after the winning goal and within their was an extended, eight-page match report with the views of several players and photographs. "it has been Rangers Football Club that Hearts have faced for almost 125 years and long may that continue." Mike Smith also had a rare serious column with a reflection on Tom Gracie.

Enjoy your collecting – whatever it maybe!

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