

One Club Man

February 2014

The day of my wedding coincided with a home match against St Johnstone. However, with mobile phones news of St Johnstone's two goals without reply was soon communicated around the reception – the crowd of 13,175 being light of a good few season ticket holders for the day. The programme cover featured Youth Coach, Darren Murray who was at his final game before taking up a similar position with Coventry City, The seven-page interview with Murray was the mainstay of an otherwise standard issue albeit packed with photographs of the win at Easter Road three days before. Neatly, however, page seven profiled Murray's replacement, Robbie Neilson.

The following Saturday I had just returned from honeymoon and not wishing to risk marital strife opted to miss the trip to Pittodrie which promptly returned three goals and an away win for Hearts before a crowd of 13,940. The excellent home issue was picked up by a friend however and came complete with four loose-leaf 'Panini-style' stickers. The first half of the issue is dominated by interviews with a variety of personalities such as current player Jamie Langfield, ex-Don Gavin Rae and supporter and golfer, Paul Lawrie. Finally there is BBC Radio presenter Richard Gordon's column where he happily points out that Hearts have little chance and that Aberdeen will be "too strong" for them. Fate happily tempted then. Eight pages of historical content open the second-half with glorious use of photographs from the thirties, fifties, sixties and eighties before a third section of the programme which is primarily supporter- driven. The Hearts coverage is limited and comes late – using the same idea as Motherwell of presenting player photos in a sticker album design.

Four days later the severe financial pressures at Tynecastle saw a fundraising match staged at Tynecastle as German side Wolfsburg travelled to Scotland. After the game, publishers 442 happily Tweeted that the crowd of 5,535 had generated programme sales of 1,200 which is remarkably high. I had anticipated the opposite scenario of a restricted print run. The issue was reduced to 68-pages and as a result had the perfect binding removed. Featuring an attractive cover made up of both club's badges the programme came with the same team poster as given away with the issue versus Celtic earlier in the season.

It's a fine issue overall with several specific features such as ESPN Commentator, Derek Rae writing on the origins of Wolfsburg and further columns on the make-up of German club names and connections between Hearts and Wolfsburg. Gary Cowen and David Speed also themed their columns with Gary looking at programmes from the 1985 friendly against Eintracht Frankfurt and 1989 UEFA Cup tie against Bayern Munich which I have also featured in the past. David looked at the 1951 tour of West Germany. All-in-all an excellent issue for what nowadays is a rare mid-season friendly.

I had previously commented on what I felt were comparatively 'dull' covers on the otherwise excellent Hearts issue this season. Well after the Wolfsburg issue came an even better effort for the match against Ross County with a striking image of one of Hearts' greats, Bobby Walker. Arguably one of Scotland's greatest ever players he suffers only by having played at the turn of the century and the obvious lack of footage of his career. However, with two Scottish Cups, a League Championship and until recently a Club record 29 caps for his country Walker was long overdue an entry into the Scottish Football Hall of Fame. Appropriately, in the days following his induction at Hampden Hearts re-furbished an Executive Suite and re-named it in Walker's honour. The suite has accompanying memorabilia including the ball from the 1903 Scottish Cup Final which Hearts lost to Rangers.

The sepia-style programme cover shows Walker in the pink and yellow hooped, Lord Roseberry Scotland jersey which

itself was one of several historical gems discovered in an attic above the Main Stand several years ago. Within there is a loving seven-page tribute to Walker by David Speed which includes the newspaper report of his death at the untimely age of 51. David also notes Bobby “liked a pint” and indeed shows that Tevez et al are not the inventors of the ‘bad boy’ tag given that in 1909 Walker was suspended for his behaviour but it was Manager James McGhee who quickly left the Club not Walker. However, perhaps most touching is a picture of his Hall of Fame award placed on his gravestone. Apparently a humble individual he would no doubt be bemused to be remembered so well a century on but it is only right. Elsewhere, Gary Cowen features the 1984 Ross County issue that I covered in PM387 as well as the more modern issue from a Testimonial in 1997. If I remember correctly from that issue Ross feared they had lost much of their historical data in a fire. Was it ever recovered?

Eight days later Celtic visited Tynecastle in the Scottish Cup 4th Round and with the match live on BBC only 10,636 turned out with large gaps in the home stands. They had the right idea for Hearts were duly thumped 7-0 to record their joint-second heaviest ever defeat. The programme was also low-key with the reduced, 68-page issue on sale for £3. The cover featured the trophy itself this match being between the last two winners. Gary Cowen covered a Hearts-Celtic programme from 1950-51 and the intricate mast and illustration on the front cover made me think what a fantastic cover they would make even today.

It was Tannadice the following weekend and although the Dundee United issue has generated a glossy cover the internal look and feel remains pretty much the same. Local adverts are slotted in and around more nationwide companies and I had to laugh at BT Sport's which declares as “unmissable” fixtures such as Stenhousemuir v Rangers and Airdrie v Rangers. Speaking of adverts there is also a back cover one for a Dundee United/Calor Gas heater which would have been welcome amidst the 7,080 crowd as United eased to a 4-1 win.

That same day I was also fortunate enough to collect a number of items from Club Historian, David Speed. The bundle included a number of teamsheets from first team and U20 matches as well as the ‘programmes’ from the unveiling of the bronze plaque at Tynecastle in memory of the 1914-15 squad that ‘signed-up’ en mass and the later Remembrance Service and subsequent afternoon lunch.

The following week it was back to Tynecastle and a wild and wet day for a crowd of 11,950. The howling wind and rain meant the programme was quickly secreted away and not read until the train home. By then Hearts had slipped to a depressing 2-0 defeat so I could only muster the enthusiasm for a skimmed read. However, that does provide a test of what you read in a programme and in Hearts’ case it is undoubtedly the historical coverage followed by the U20s.

Perhaps an appropriately anorak-ish thought to ponder on a cold, dark, wet winter’s night.

Enjoy your collecting – whatever it may be!

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