

One Club Man

January 2014

October opened with an extremely early six-pointer against fellow strugglers St Mirren which was won convincingly 2-0 by the Paisley side before a crowd of 14,739. It was a standard issue – albeit containing something of a rallying cry – with perhaps the only note of disappointment the fairly unimaginative cover photograph which came from the summer kit launches.

With the relegation battle now looking more like a fight to get to zero points there followed a trip to Motherwell where a handsome looking 68-page issue was on sale for £3. The issue arguably lacks a true 'pull-in' article such as historical content so ironically the coverage of the visitors is probably the most notable feature extending as it does to 12-pages. Four of those it should be said are statistical pen-pictures but even these are innovative with a Panini Sticker album-style layout although sadly no foil badge. Gary Locke is interviewed and there is also a profile by a Hearts supporter which is well above the standard offering. The other feature of note is the Motherwell player interview where the 'Aberdeen model' (pun intended) has been adopted with moody shots, leather jackets and white t-shirts abound. There is also a match report on Hearts' previous defeat to St Mirren and although the score was shown as 2-1 to Saints that may have been a prediction as Motherwell triumphed by that scoreline here. With a crowd of 5,350 and 1,253 travelling supporters – earning a £1-a-head back for the Foundation of Hearts – there was a receipt handed over at the gate which is numbered with the Motherwell badge feinted through it. Maybe it is a Lanarkshire thing as Hamilton also used to issue these receipts when you paid at the gate.

My first visit to Fir Park was in March 1988. I was going to write that this was 'as recent as 1988' but it's something of a shock to realise it was 25 years ago. For the second match of the season at Fir Park my Dad drove through and although I was only 11 I well-remember sitting in a Motherwell café around 1pm with the TV in the corner showing 'Saint and Greavsie' when up came the announcement that the game was off. Undeterred we promptly returned for the re-staging the following Tuesday and despite inadvertently ending up in the home end we chatted happily with the locals amidst the 5,831 crowd as Hearts cantered to a 2-0 win. As an aside that crowd compares reasonably with current day attendances. The previous week there had been 12,000 for a League match at Falkirk and seven days later 21,696 crammed into Tynecastle for the visit of Dunfermline Athletic in the Scottish Cup. On the flipside, Hearts' next three home games all attracted less than 10,000. That bears out my theory that modern-day attendances are on average lower but also more consistent than before. Presumably due to the rise in season-tickets over 'pay-at-the-gate.'

Naturally, even at 11 I had a programme at the game although it is starkly 'light' to my, now 37 year-old hands - as is the price of 50p. Given that the match was so quickly re-arranged the programme was unchanged with Motherwell's standard cover replacing the 'o' in 'Motherwell' with a no-smoking sign above a panoramic photo of Fir Park taken from the away terracing. Manager, Tommy McLean opened the reading on page three and he reflects on recent performances which included defeat to Dundee in the Cup. 'Noticeboard' then provides various pieces of news including the sale of tickets for a trip to Ibrox at £4. Adverts dominate the next two pages although there is an 'open letter' from the President of the Supporters Association commenting on "distasteful criticism" of the players amidst that defeat on Tayside. The centre-pages have the teams amidst more adverts and with my dad dying almost four years ago now I was quite moved to discover his handwritten team-changes and answers to the centred crossword.

Hearts open the second-half with two pages including a photo and brief pen-pictures. Stats close out the issue which stretched to just 16-pages. After the match I recall we took the wrong-turning out of Motherwell but upon asking a local

they came up with the unlikely suggestion that the quickest way home was via Ayr.

The opening round of current fixtures concluded with a trip to Kilmarnock. The Killie issue has not changed significantly in many years but without straying into 'Cover Art' - addressed more ably elsewhere within PM - I do like how the action photo IS the cover rather than being part of it. Three-quarters is simply the photo and with a modest banner in the bottom eighth with match details it makes for an impressive look. Inside content has gradually dropped away in line with the Killie crowds however although the price remains at £2.50. Accordingly, the majority of reading is of the 'snippet' variety with match reports and a fine Q&A with a youth player the only break-up. As ever there is a piece on attendances this time focusing on the gap between best and least supported clubs around Europe. Overall, not the strongest of issues but what there is has a distinct Killie feel. 5,090 watched a rain-soaked 2-0 home win which sent Hearts back to 15 points behind second-bottom place.

Salvation is never far round the corner though and four days later it came at Easter Road with a surprise 1-0 victory in the League Cup 4th Round. Despite a 7pm kick off to allow BBC coverage a healthy crowd of 16,797 turned out and Hibernian issue their standard small-sized ticket with a barcode. Maybe it is just for the away end of course but it is ironic that the only green on it is in the club badge with red, black and mostly white featured. As ever I ventured into home territory for the programme with no sellers on Easter Road and a security cordon around the ground itself although inevitably it transpired they were being sold yards from the away end. At 32 pages for a reasonable £2 it is slight but I'll have wait until the next League visit to see if this is standard. Hibernian have of course produced 'minimal' programmes previously but it has to be said this is the best and most readable of those. 'Pat's Column' - his last as Hibernian Manager it transpired - opens the reading before decent coverage of Hearts, 'League Cup Memories' and then the best article; a look back at the career of Eric Schaedler. I believe a book is being published on his life. An update on the U20s closed out the decent-value issue.

The win meant a rapid re-work of the home programme for the following Saturday's match against St Johnstone at Tynecastle which shows the flexibility of modern day publishing especially given the perfect-bound production. However, I confess I missed this match for a much more important fixture as I was getting married that same day.

For collectors, the full-colour, eight-page order of service was free on entry.

Enjoy your collecting – whatever it may be!

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