

One Club Man

April 2014

Hearts' Burns Night was spent travelling back from Dingwall after a 2-1 win finally saw the Club overcome the 15-point deduction for entering Administration and move into positive points. The home side issued their tidy, full-colour issue for £2 and although reading is light and scattered the value can't be questioned. A crowd of 4,016 watched Hearts claim what was also their first win since November.

Four days later there was a hastily re-arranged League match versus St Mirren. Originally scheduled for the weekend it had been displaced by the League Cup Semi-Finals. However, with Ryan Stevenson – one of only four players over-21 in the squad - facing suspension for the Cup-tie the League match was brought forward to have him freed-up. Credit then that the programme was produced to the usual high standard. Gary Cowen's pages looked back at St Mirren issues from the past and included was the December 1960 issue. That season was something of an oddity in the first few years of my collection with only a handful of issues gathered – including that Saints one - in comparison to other campaigns before I eventually managed to complete it. A fine midweek crowd of 12,422 saw Hearts record a 2-1 win .

Having just read of Chris Oakley's latest travels around Europe and in particular trying to track down a PSV reserve fixture I admire his efforts but wonder how he would get on in Scotland. U20 fixtures here are rarely publicised and are played at a variety of venues – Hearts have used Newtongrange, The Hearts Academy, Tynecastle and Airdrie - and for February 1st there was a friendly arranged with Spartans' East of Scotland League side at Ainslie Park. Certainly I hadn't heard about the game in advance and admirably (or annoyingly!) a programme was issued. So another issue to track down

That same weekend saw the League Cup Semi-Finals both played in Edinburgh - the first time in many years the City had hosted two Semis - with Aberdeen versus St Johnstone at Tynecastle before Hearts and Inverness met at Easter Road. Given that I also collect 'Hearts-related' issues I ordered a copy of the Aberdeen-Saints issue and when compared to the issue from the match the following day I'd say it was the better of the two. Both had similar red/maroon and blue covers with pictures of the hosting stadia feinted through which made them look Barcelona-esque. Or perhaps Whitehill Welfare. Inside, a bland welcome from Neil Doncaster was generalist enough to be used word-for-word in both issues but the Tynecastle programme had the more interesting articles with several of a historical nature including a look back at Saints defeating Hearts 3-0 in the 1998 Semi-Final and another by Hearts' Programme Editor, Paul Kiddie on his grandfather who played in the Dons' Southern Cup winning side of 1946. In contrast the issue at Easter Road perhaps suffered from Inverness only being formed in 1994 and instead largely reflected on the current day with only a look-back at Inverness' first League Cup match and the previous year's Semi-Final. Reduced to nine-men with a minute left, the Highlanders nonetheless clung on to force penalties and ultimately book a first Final before 12,462.

Three days later the U20s made their first appearance of the season at Tynecastle against Ross County and a photocopied, amalgam of the official teamlines was available on entry. With the lack of facilities at the normal, 'home' venue of Newtongrange this is the first U20 issue of any type this season.

With the next weekend blank due to the Scottish Cup Hearts travelled to Inverness the following week and once again there was the choice of issue presented by the 50p matchday programme or £3 for programme and monthly magazine. The programme has an admirable amount of reading crammed into four-pages and relatively-speaking probably represents the better value. Unfortunately, for the travelling Hearts fans the magazine had had time to gather copious coverage of the Semi-Final. 3,812 watched Inverness strike woodwork four times in the first-half but the game still ended 0-0.

After a relatively quiet period there have been some cracking Hearts items on eBay recently and whilst some went for well into three figures I was delighted to sneak in for a home reserve issue from 1953 against now-defunct, Leith Athletic. Indeed, the sight of their name on the front of the issue was a thrill to me and meant that I targeted it from the off albeit with caution that saw me get it for a decent price.

Leith – alongside St Bernards – were long part of the senior football scene in Edinburgh although ultimately they were unable to dislodge Hearts and Hibernian for the city's attentions. However, whilst St Bernards did not re-emerge from their Second World War shutdown, in 1953 Leith were ploughing on in Division C of the Scottish League playing alongside predominantly reserve sides. Hence their arrival at Tynecastle.

Hearts reserve issues had by now evolved into four-pagers with a similar masthead to the first team programmes. The teams were on the front with Hearts fielding John Cumming and Jimmy Murray amongst the less well-known Gordon, Cochrane, Fraser and Kilgannon who also made the first-team. Inside the format is familiar with Tynecastle Topics commenting on the plight of the visitors and their apparent lack of support. (Athletic by this point had migrated to Meadowbank – the site of the present-day veldorome next to now, 'new' Meadowbank.) Accordingly, mention was made of a forthcoming Edinburgh v Glasgow match to be held at the ground which was hoped would attract a decent crowd - Hearts “delighted to co-operate” by sending several players. Opposite is 'Notes and News' with brief second team statistics and line-ups from recent matches which continued chronologically between first-team and reserve issues alike. The back-page has a detailed profile of Athletic with a comment that the visitors were apparently trialling floodlights although such matches were “not allowed” – presumably meaning in competitive matches. Unsurprisingly, several ‘freed’ Hibs players had made the short journey across to Meadowbank and with two ex-Celts and a handful of stalwarts they combined to post Leith in 12th place in the League, eight places behind Hearts ‘A’. Only leaders, Berwick and Brechin and Montrose fielded their first teams. Whilst the presence of Hearts and Hibs reserves may have helped Leith to some extent the huge crowd their first-teams were attracting at this time would undoubtedly have hindered far more. Indeed, 41,085 had been at Tynecastle the previous day to see Hibernian claim the New Year Derby.

Ultimately, this 2-0 home win proved to be Leith's last-ever visit to Tynecastle with the club refusing to continue in the ‘reserve league’ at the end of the season. Promptly suspended they folded two years later...just before the remaining first-teams were admitted to an expanded Second Division. Happily, Leith Athletic did return to senior football in 2008, however when a youth club of that name took over Edinburgh Athletic's membership of the East of Scotland League.

A modest issue but one that represents a fascinating slice of Edinburgh's football history.

Enjoy your collecting – whatever it may be!

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