

The Final Word – Heart of Midlothian v Dundee United – 06.11.21

So, the unbeaten run comes to an end. Ultimately at Pittodrie the lack of cutting edge that had seen us drop points versus Dundee and St Johnstone really hit home and we weren't able to trouble a re-jigged Aberdeen after the break. Those old enough to remember back to 1986 (shudder) will recall that, sadly, unbeaten runs are no guarantee of success but I think we can be reasonably happy with the results thus far.

Perhaps even more frustrating than defeat - which we can pragmatically accept especially when not playing well - is a draw. The move to make it three points for a win - also a number of years ago - was welcomed but equally it suddenly meant not losing was two points dropped. Had we won and lost one of the recent three draws we'd actually be better off.

So, sometimes draws are the worst. Not *all* draws obviously. At Ibrox a last-minute equalizer felt like a win but we saw the other side of the coin in the next two matches. Despite dominating we couldn't find a second goal and the frustration was both understandable and no doubt shared or even amplified by the players. Even so it says a lot about the expectations at Hearts that going top-of-the-league after the Dundee game was met with a sprinkle of boos.

The following midweek that same Dundee team spectacularly (and let's be honest, amusingly) lost 5-0 at home to Ross County. Using the old playground logic that means Hearts must be rubbish? Well not quite. Robbie Neilson would no doubt be quick to tell you that teams playing Hearts often raise their game (even if occasionally they haven't actually had to!) So, Dundee coming to Tynecastle have a different attitude to when they trot out against Ross County at Dens. It promptly worked in reverse with St Johnstone losing 3-0 to Livingston on the Saturday but then happily matching up to Hearts four days later.

The truth is, it's a bit of a mixed-up League at the moment. No side is truly hitting consistent top-form and good results are often followed by disappointing ones. So, today's match - a hopefully lucky 13th League fixture of the season - gives us an opportunity to make an immediate recovery. Regardless, there is room for development but we shouldn't suddenly go from criticising the team for losing at Brora (shudder #2) to doing the same because we fail to match Rangers or Celtic point-for-point. Progress is being made and there will be dips, frustrations, peaks and celebrations to follow but thus far it's been promising and hopefully there is more to come.

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I suppose if you are seeing this then you are already someone who buys or at least reads the Hearts programme. So, writing to converted as it were. However, in the last few weeks we've seen programmes in the news with Hibs' decision to stop producing them after almost a century. Although unrelated the subsequent launch of their cryptocurrency scheme is a reminder, as if needed, that the world is ever-more moving online. Yet, as a long-term reader of, and now writer for, the programme I'd like to think there still a place for the printed word.

There seems to be a fixation that programmes are irrelevant because you no longer have to look up the teams or use the programme to de-code the letters on the half-time scoreboard. Yet that hasn't been the function of a programme for 30 or 40 years.

Instead, programmes have evolved into journals with a variety of articles and ultimately serving a less functional but complimentary purpose. That shouldn't be their undoing though. Like all of the writers for the Hearts' programme we are fans first and foremost and enjoy writing and sharing our thoughts, experience and knowledge of our wonderful football club. Those writings then come together into a programme and whilst not so for everyone for many it remains the single, tangible souvenir of a match.

Recently, my son and I were able to take in the eclectic delights of Fleetwood Town versus Burton Albion in League One. There was no programme, the tickets were on my phone and in fact the stadium was 'cashless'. Leaving without a programme as a souvenir and memory of the occasion slightly lessened it for me. "We'll always have Fleetwood" you might say but it's surely enhanced by a physical reminder of the game to look back with?

So, readers, keep the faith, keep buying Edinburgh's foremost football programme and we'll commit to being here for your entertainment. (Or something like it anyway.)