

The Final Word – Heart of Midlothian v St Mirren– 27.11.21

To misquote 'The Killers', 'Fir Park was a friend of mine'. My first visit was way back in 1989 when it was more akin to the old Brockville than the oddity of stadium design it is now. We won 5-out-of-5 games against 'Well that season and it was four years before I saw Hearts lose there. Indeed, right through the nineties we lost only a handful of times at Fir Park. (Handy when the future-best-mate I met at university is a die-hard Motherwell fan.) Since then, it's been patchier though and I haven't even mentioned the 6-1 defeat in 2002 when I was made redundant the same day. (I can laugh now - honest.) In fact, we've only won there four times since returning to the Premiership for the first time in 2015.

That disappointing trend continued in Saturday's pretty lame loss. Sadly, in hindsight it had all the classic ingredients of a Hearts defeat. Good win in the game before? Check. Massive Away Support? Check. Deflating defeat – check ... out. In fairness, it's rare when you can say almost no one played well so it probably has to be written off as a truly bad day at the office. We simply never got a foothold in the game and credit to Motherwell for winning the battle and (shall we say) breaking up the momentum of the game when they had to. Similar to the defeat at Aberdeen lessons need to be learned but hopefully today's visit of St Mirren allows us to get back on track with three points.

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The clamour from the away support for the introduction of Liam Boyce last Saturday and the slight improvement his appearance brought reminds us of the additional, 'talismanic' presence of some players. Sadly, the 'lift' on Saturday probably only took our performance from the basement to lower-basement but the point stands.

Boyce's importance and the belief in his scoring ability by the support gives him something of that status though. His presence makes people – and hopefully opponents – think we are more likely to score. Equally, his absence is met with groans and cries of "who is going to score the goals?" Fortunately, versus Dundee United both Ben Woodburn and Josh Ginnelly were able to step in to the role although they couldn't repeat the trick last week.

We've been fortunate enough to have a few such players over the years. For my vintage the most obvious would-be John Robertson and one of my earliest memories of Tynecastle was a young Robbo equalising in the last minute against Rangers as Hearts successfully came back from two goals down. Equally, who would forget his equaliser at Easter Road in 1995 when he struck home a loose ball as the final whistle was imminent? That of course spurned the famous line "It's not over until the fat striker scores". Perhaps the ultimate definition of a Hearts talisman. Yet, we've had others too. Rudi Skacel – another scourge of

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Easter Road – could always be counted on for something special and I recall his performance from 2012 when he almost single-handedly helped ten-men Hearts defeat today's opponents 5-2 with a hat-trick. He also scored a few more goals in 2012 of course. Older fans will talk of Donald Ford or Drew Busby in the same manner. These are players you can rely on to be the ones who dig you out of a hole. That said you don't want to rely on them wholly. So, although hopefully Liam Boyce notches a goal or two today, we'll also be hoping a few others can help out too.

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The pride no doubt felt in the Gordon household at Craig becoming Hearts' record international cap holder is amplified by everyone at the club. In winning his 33rd cap as a Hearts player he has shown remarkable powers of both longevity and recovery since his Scotland debut back in 2004. That a player who can be counted as 'one of our own' takes the record seems even more appropriate. That's no slight on previous holder Steven Pressley - although he remains a divisive personality in our support - but it just feels right that it should be a Hearts-supporting, Academy graduate that owns the record. For almost a century the record books had the venerable Bobby Walker - subject of an excellent new biography by Colin Robertson and Andrew Hoggan incidentally - with 29 caps as our most capped player. As a fellow son of Gorgie I think Bobby would approve that his own achievement has been surpassed - and will hopefully be further extended - by Craig.