

The Final Word – Heart of Midlothian v St Mirren 231223

Football. Bloody hell. After two, dispiriting defeats and an AGM that reflected the prevailing mood we go and comprehensively defeat the champions on their own patch. Put simply, we were terrific. Clinical to go 2-0 up and then composed enough to defend that lead for an hour.

It's undoubtedly been a tough, few weeks even when winning. But a victory in Glasgow sets the new standard. Shankland scoring yet again, a composed midfield and defence and youngsters like Denholm and Tait being involved. All these positives need fostered and grown.

With four games in the EH postcode before the break there's potential for almost a fresh start. Let's take it.

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We may have received an early Christmas present last week but there's more fond memories in the continuing advent calendar. Still no chocolate though.

### **9. Marius Zalkiukas**

If anyone bridged the madcap gap between Lithuania and Hearts, it was Marius Zaliukas. Arriving as yet another trialist he gradually grew into the Hearts shirt and graduated eventually to captain. And ultimately as the Romanov era turned sour, he was a leader. He identified with Hearts and 'got it' and it was appropriate he walked up the steps at Hampden to lift the Scottish Cup in 2012. A year later miles off fitness he made a last appearance for Hearts at Pittodrie just to play in the jersey once more.

His-to us-sudden death-just seven years later stunned everyone. A young man with a family had been taken all too soon. That it was confirmed during the Scottish Cup Semi-Final against Hibernian seemed to make it more poignant. Yet we pulled out a huge victory that night and somewhere up there, there was a grinning, flag-wearing Zal looking down.

### **10. Dave McPherson v Rangers, February 1995**

It would be fair to say the single-season Tommy McLean was in charge at Tynecastle brought few highlights. Instead, there was a second, grim relegation battle. Yet in the Scottish Cup we recorded a huge win. Having drawn reigning Champions Rangers at Tynecastle it seemed a likely defeat. But with the match moved to the Monday evening for SKY we emerged into a rocking-three-sided-Tynecastle as the Hearts song belted out and suddenly you had one of those moments of certainty we would win. We were 2-0 up at half-time although Rangers rallied to draw level early in the second but just as first doubts began to rise John Robertson popped up to restore the lead. And to cap it? Dave McPherson – who had already scored – broke from defence on a typically mazy run, cruising through the Rangers midfield he played a quick one two and although the eventual cut-back was blocked it fell to Kevin Thomas to make it 4-2 and seal a huge Hearts' win.

### **11. Bayern Munich**

Hearts haven't (yet) dominated European football. Yet we've had our moments and Stuttgart, Bordeaux, Atletico Madrid and now Rosenborg have all been overcome in some form. But Bayern Munich stands alone as our

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biggest result. The Germans - West Germans then – are a huge name and apparently brought with them characteristic arrogance; the dressing room was too small, was Tynecastle the training ground? Well cut to a cold February evening, 28,000 crammed onto the terracing and perception became a different reality. In truth Hearts should have won by more but in the end, we only had Iain Ferguson's magnificent free kick to give us a famous victory. Stood at the Gorgie Road end I watched the shot rocket into the net and suddenly the Germans in their muddied white kit realised they were up against it. Hearts 1 Bayern Munich 0. History was made.

### **12. John Robertson v St Mirren, January 1992**

Perhaps the most remarkable statistic about John Robertson is that he never scored a top-flight hat-trick. It is testament to his record-breaking goalscoring that he is all-time top League scorer without ever scoring more than two in a Premier League game.

Yet a hat-trick is an emotive milestone all the same and on a cold January night in 1992 Tynecastle watched the master achieve it. After an uneventful 0-0 draw at Paisley the two sides served up a similar tie at Tynecastle until John slotted home a second-half penalty. Minutes later he made it two and then the moment. Beautifully teed up by Scott Crabbe he rifled home a third and ran off to celebrate in front of the shed.

Having a talisman like Robbo was just so important to Hearts. And possibly not replicated consistently until Lawrence Shankland now. It gives belief that a goal will always come and Robertson was the master across two decades at Tynecastle.

### **13. Craig Beattie v Celtic, April 2012**

There was a lot to admire as we took on Celtic at Hampden in the Scottish Cup Semi-Final of April 2012. Deliberately conservative in the first half we opened-up from the restart and scored through Rudi Skacel. Our defence were in fine form but in the dying minutes when Celtic equalised it seemed like a case of holding-out until extra-time. But instead, it was we who attacked from the restart and later as the ball fell to Marius Zaliukas his shot struck two Celtic players on the hand. To our surprise a penalty was given. It's hard to describe the feelings at that moment but broadly elation, nausea and sheer panic. Fortunately, Beattie was calmer and scored before setting-off on his famous celebration. Hearts were in the Final. Hibs and legend awaited.

### **14. The Tennent's Sixes**

Before the 1998 Scottish Cup win there were a number of agonising near misses. So, when we did win 'something' it was pretty cool. I was allowed to stay up late to watch the final of 1985 Tennent's Sixes at Ingliston and Hearts duly romped to the trophy with a Final win over Morton. Wearing those er...lucky silver shirts Walter Kidd claimed the trophy amidst an impromptu ticker-tape display from the fans.

Six years later we claimed the Sixes again. TV coverage was limited due to the ill-timed outbreak of the first Gulf War that day, but we eventually saw Henry Smith lift the trophy after we beat Motherwell. We pondered the obvious. What would a major win be like?

**15. The New Den, July 2010**

July 2010 and Hearts announce they will travel to Millwall for Neil Harris' testimonial. Natural trepidation at the venue and opposition gave way to curiosity and off we went. Except I had to be in Ayrshire the following day for an event with my wife. So, it was train down to London first thing, a bit of an explore and then out to the slightly less infamous than Old, New Den. I'm not sure it's a positive thing, but the Millwall supporters were very welcoming although you could tell it would be different with Leeds or Cardiff. We ignored the role of dutiful guests and promptly won the game 3-2. Then it was a case of back into London, a few drinks and for me the overnight coach back to Scotland. The fact that we stopped firstly at a new driver's house and then at Berwick for diesel made it an experience never to repeat and proved you can get jet-lag without leaving the UK.

**16. Legends**

I was brought up on tales of heroes like Willie Bauld, Jim Cruickshank and (today's cover star) Drew Busby. Bauld in particular seemed almost mythical and my father relayed how he been introduced to the 'King' as a star-truck child whilst on holiday in North Berwick. Yet it underlined the passion we all have for Hearts and how that passes down the generations. Bauld became Ford, he became Robertson and he now Shankland. The legends of Tynecastle are many but some are elevated regardless of time.