

The Final Word – Heart of Midlothian v Rangers - 061223

It's a case of 1-0 to the 'Arsenal of the north' right now as we racked up two more single-goal victories since last time. It might not be pretty but it's got us to third and beats playing similarly and losing. Tonight is a different challenge but also an opportunity to step-on against a team who won't sit-in like recent opponents. The last two losses against Rangers have perhaps not reflected, at times, decent performances so it's a case of hoping for third time lucky tonight. Gloved fingers crossed for a result.

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There is a distinct chill in the air and an almighty scrum at the German Market. So, this month I have come up with a Hearts advent calendar of memories. Hearts felt a programme with small doors was impractical; as was including chocolate. So, just use your imagination.

### **1. The Old Main Stand**

I've written fondly about the old Main Stand before. It was from there I watched my first-Hearts game and it suited Tynecastle's footprint that the council buildings hid even this, largest structure largely from sight. Nonetheless, the closer you got the more impressive it was. Unsurprisingly, inside it was something of a warren and cramped compared to modern facilities. 'Up top' in the seats it was similarly 'oldie-wordie'. A small Press box was at the rear with telephones lined-up for reporters to phone-in copy and the original seats were wooden and tipped up. But it also projected solidity with everything clad in deep maroon and white. Albeit Wallace Mercer added a modern touch with some poor worker stenciling 'Smith's Menswear on every seat at some point. All-in-all it was a throwback that was brought up to date in piecemeal fashion. Eventually however time was called, and progress won out after 103 years.

### **2. Jordan McGhee scores v Aberdeen, August 2013**

Despite being in administration and almost certainly doomed to relegation 2013-14 still provided positive memories. Survival with an inexperienced, paper-thin squad was a huge achievement but early season optimism and defiance mixed as Aberdeen visited. We were 1-0 up when disaster struck as Kevin McHattie was sent-off in giving away a penalty. An unlikely point seemed our best hope now but late on we won a free kick near the Aberdeen box. The ball was swung-in and up rose Jordan McGhee to beat the flailing keeper and head home the winner. Tynecastle exploded and in our little area of the Wheatfield it became a pile of limbs. We won, we hoped to stay up, but we didn't. However, Hearts were, as they say, still beating.

### **3. Andy Thorn**

That Hearts entered a League Cup Quarter-Final with Celtic at Tynecastle having had four men sent off the previous week at Ibrox now seems like something of a myth. But it's true. Gary Naysmith drafted in at left-back, Allan McManus at right and Dave McPherson in the middle but who to fill the gap? Cue Andy Thorn. A free agent who spent the morning of the match jogging to keep fit he flew north to debut that night. He was imperious. At one point in the second half, he was stood in front of us, collar on his Pony jersey ripped but calmy marking Pierre van Hooijdonk out of the game. His performance set the tone and in extra-time John Robertson struck the only goal for a famous win.

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### **4. Osman Sow scores at Ibrox, August 2014**

Facing recovery from administration in a 2014-15 Championship also containing Hibernian and a Rangers side apparently cruising through the Leagues seemed a daunting prospect. As did an opening day fixture at Ibrox. I recall us gradually growing into the game and that culminated with Danny Wilson heading us ahead just after half-time. Even then it was “well we scored” but as the minutes ticked by, we began to think of an unexpected win. Yet Rangers equalised late-on with a header that seemed to its’ time on deciding decide on going in and we steeled ourselves to hang on for a point. Instead, we broke up the park, Sam Nicholson played-in Osman Sow, and he skipped away from the defence to almost casually slip home the winner. The foundation stone of a dominant title win had been set.

### **5. Gorgie Road**

‘Away up in Gorgie’. And it’s true for Hearts have been in the area since 1881 and in truth in many ways it won’t have changed all that much since. The tenements remain, making it a narrow chamber to walk along. And for those same years thousands of people have made the same journey to Tynecastle. Walking, hopping off omnibuses, trams, buses or simply diving out of a hurriedly parked car. Yet after all those years walking up through Dalry and turning into Gorgie Road, seeing the floodlights and then Tynecastle it still feels so very special. You don’t get that in a modern, out of town stadium as you cut past a cinema or a McDonalds.

Instead Gorgie seems to further envelope the closed in nature of Tynecastle itself. It’s home to Heart of Midlothian and always should be.

### **6. Toby Sibbick at Easter Road, January 2023**

Last season maybe didn’t pan out as we hoped but the middle section proved immensely satisfying not least due to consecutive 3-0 wins over Hibernian. In the League match we had been clinical rather than brilliant but come the Cup game at Easter Road it was a polished, controlled performance. 1-0 up early on, Shankland’s volley seemed to secure the win despite his later sending off. As Hibs huffed and puffed in the closing stages Hearts looked more dangerous on the break and that led to the brilliant moment of ‘Go on Toby’ as I remember shouting. Breaking from defence like a peak-Beckenbauer he raced through on a one-two and then topped the run with a delicate chip over the keeper. For a brief second there was a question if it would make past a retreating defender, but it did. What a goal to seal the win.

### **7. Anfield, August 2013**

Anfield the home of the biggest and most successful clubs in England as I grew up; a ground seen so often on TV and now here we were stood watching Hearts. At one point Steven Gerrard took a corner in front of us in the first half and aimed for Luis Sanchez - it was frankly surreal. But we matched them all the way and doggedly held out to try and get the goal we needed. That it came from our first corner showed how often we’d made it up-field but after David Templeton struck his shot time seemed to stand still as Reina fumbled and the ball trickled

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over the line. Hearts were leading at Anfield. It was incredible and the wild celebrations reflected that. Yep, we lost in the end, but you couldn't have been prouder of Hearts that night.

### **8. Pittodrie, November 1997**

As 1997-98 progressed it was obvious a very good Hearts side was emerging. We'd already defeated Aberdeen 4-1 at Tynecastle in August but to repeat the trick in the North really underlined our credentials. Aberdeen were 1-0 up at half-time and Hearts had struggled to make an impact. Yet in a breath-taking second half we simply blew them away scoring four times without reply. Neil McCann drew us level and then the previously unheralded Thomas Flögel added the first of two goals before John Robertson put us 3-1 up. The Austrian then finished off with a stylish scissor-kick that seemed to illustrate the confidence flowing through the side. White shirts shining under the floodlights, celebrations in front the of the away support; this Hearts side was about to move into legend.