

Out With the Old and In With the New at Hearts



Ann Budge took over as Hearts Chief Executive and Chairperson today and immediately began implementing the changes she believes are required to take the club back to the top of Scottish football. Head Coach Gary Locke, Assistant Billy Brown and Goalkeeping Coach Alan Combe were all advised they weren't having their contracts renewed while senior players Ryan Stevenson, Jamie Hamill, Jamie MacDonald, Dylan McGowan and Callum Tapping, along with reserve goalkeeper Mark Ridgers, were also told their services would no longer be required at Tynecastle.

Budge has appointed former Hearts and Scotland manager Craig Levein as Director of Football while Youth Team Coach Robbie Neilson has been promoted to First Team Coach. John Murray will also return to his previous role of Chief Scout.

Ann Budge released the following statement which appeared on the official Hearts website www.heartsfc.co.uk

It was clear from my earliest visits to Tynecastle and my earliest meetings with senior staff that the company, Heart of Midlothian plc, was, in every sense of the word, "broken".

There was no overarching strategy for how the business should be run. For far too long, there had been no clear leadership. This coupled with the sole focus on day to day survival had left the club in a sorry and perilous financial state. This led to a fundamental disconnect between the various departments and a mountain of issues to be resolved. Add to this, the under-investment in various parts of the business and the current financial position, and we have a "broken"

Hearts. We must all realise that there is no quick fix for these problems.

One thing is very clear. We have come far too close to losing our very existence and we must never allow this to happen again. We must grasp this opportunity to start afresh; to put in place solid foundations that will ensure we never again risk our 140 years of history.

We must make changes. We must stop thinking short-term. We must put in place a 3-5-year plan that will see our commercial activities totally re-vamped, such that they once again provide a solid financial under-pinning to our football club; and we must also completely revitalise and re-focus the football side of our club. We have some excellent young players, who have done us proud in the last season. We owe it to them to create an environment that will help them to continue to flourish and develop. This will take time, patience and the continued loyal support of Hearts' dedicated fan base. We will implement strategies to grow and strengthen the club. We will live within in our means to ensure that the future of the club is never again put in jeopardy.

We must ensure we have a clear footballing strategy that drives every aspect of our game; everything from who we recruit into our club, from youth academy through to first team players; how we approach coaching, at all age groups and all levels; how we undertake training... and indeed, what kind of football we play at Hearts.

There must be a totally cohesive plan that ties all aspects of our club together. Everyone must be pulling in the same direction.

Next season cannot simply be about getting back up into the SPFL. Of course, we will be striving for that, but we must take a longer-term view and build for the future. One of the key objectives of the new Board is to put in place a Coaching

Education Programme that is second to none in Scottish football. Only by doing so, can we realistically attain the continual year-on-year improvement we are striving for and that will add to the value of the players and the club alike, and help to secure our future.

This means change on a fairly major scale. Not everyone will agree with all the changes being put in place, but we must address the issues at hand with our heads and not our hearts. We have made these tough decisions after much deliberation and much discussion. All we ask is that you give the new management team time and we will show we can deliver.

What are the changes?

We must put in place, first and foremost strong leadership. We need new skills, strategic thinking, and strong commercial and footballing management.

Board Level Changes

A new Board of Directors is being put in place over the next few days

- Ann Budge: Chairman/CEO*
- Robert Wilson: Deputy CEO/Director of Strategic Planning*
- Eric Hogg: Operations Director*
- Craig Levein: Director of Football*
- Ian Murray (Chair of FOH): Foundation of Hearts Representative*

The Board will be expanded over time to include another non-executive Director, with a strong financial background, and a second FOH Director, to further represent the fans.

Operational Management Changes

Both Eric Hogg and myself will assume a very hands-on role in the day-to-day running of the club, supported by the existing management team.

I am delighted to say that the Operational Management Team will be expanded to include a new Head of Commercial. Ann Park will be joining the team with immediate effect. We have worked together over many years and I know she will bring lots of fresh ideas and strong sales and marketing leadership to the commercial team.

Footballing Management Changes

We know it may be an unpopular decision with some of you, but the Board has decided that we cannot offer Gary Locke a new contract as Manager, at the end of his current contract. Please believe me when I say this has been an enormously difficult decision to make. We all know the pressures that Gary and his assistant, Billy Brown, have worked under over the last year. They were set an almost impossible task, which they handled with dignity and determination. For that, we are all hugely grateful to both of them. The players and backroom/support staff at Riccarton will be sorry indeed to see them go...as, I know, will a very large section of the Hearts support. They will both leave with our very grateful thanks and best wishes.

Craig Levein will join the club with immediate effect and will assume total responsibility for everything to do with the playing side of the business. He will be responsible for putting in place an end-to-end strategy for how we are going to implement a youth-driven playing policy within the club.

John Murray will return to his former role as a chief scout. In the short-term, he will also assist with running the Academy, while we identify who should head this up. For the last year, John has taken on a wide sphere of responsibilities in support of the club he loves and for that we owe him a vote

of thanks. We are pleased to be able to offer him the opportunity to go back to what he loves best; namely identifying new, young talent.

These decisions have been driven by everything that has been said about needing a long-term strategy, built over a 3-5-year planning horizon. For those reasons, the new Board believes that we need to bring in someone with Craig's experience to guide that vision. With such a strong Director of Football on board, we feel we have to spend our limited resources on strengthening and building the Coaching side of the business, rather than having a 1st team manager. Robbie Neilson will take over as Head Coach for the 1st team and we will bring in a strong support team to work with Robbie in terms of an Assistant Coach and U20s Coach.

Over the next few days, a number of other changes will be announced as we start the process of rebuilding our great Club. We will have to say good-bye to a number of the fans' current favourites; we will do our best to secure all our excellent young players; and we will welcome a group of new players, who will help us achieve our vision.

A number of the decisions we make over the next few days and weeks will be driven by finance. We have to ensure we live within our means. All of the decisions have been taken with a view to ensuring the future stability of our club.

End of statement

Some of Budge's decisions were clearly unpopular with a section of the Hearts support; in particular the decision not to retain the services of Gary Locke. However, it is clear strategic decisions regarding the long-term future of the club had to be made. Locke will always be remembered as a dyed-in-the-wool Hearts supporter who served the club he has supported since childhood with hard work, passion and integrity.

It's time for everyone associated with Hearts – supporters and players alike – to look ahead. Today's changes are the first steps to ensuring a brighter future for Heart of Midlothian FC.