

# Ann Budge Condemns 'Disgraceful Behaviour'



A week after the fall-out following the Hearts-Rangers game at Tynecastle on 22 November, came the fall-out from the Hearts-Celtic William Hill Scottish Cup tie at the same venue last Sunday.

Hearts owner Ann Budge today condemned the actions of both sets of supporters following some ugly scenes before, during and after the Celtic game.

*She told the official Hearts website "I feel it is important that I respond to some of the issues that have arisen/emails received following the Scottish Cup tie between Hearts and Celtic on Sunday and I hope this goes some way to offering reassurance that we are totally committed to creating a safe and comfortable environment in which to enjoy the Tynecastle matchday experience.*

*It is important to stress the values and principles we are trying to promote within the club and the behaviour we are seeking to encourage. Many of our fans are supporting our efforts to improve the overall experience at Tynecastle and to create a truly family-focused culture. For this to work, we need to do everything in our power to ensure our opposition on the day also enjoys the experience of coming to Tynecastle. Friendly banter is acceptable – some might even say desirable – threatening and intimidating behaviour between supporters is not.*

*However, we also need our visiting fans to behave accordingly. Based on emails and communications received into the club it would seem both sets of supporters had cause for complaint on Sunday.*

*The police report confirms that one Hearts supporter was arrested at the match for sectarian abuse. That is unacceptable and dangerous. In line with my previous statement of zero tolerance, that individual will not be allowed back into the stadium.*

*The same police report confirms that five Celtic supporters were arrested for sectarian abuse, coin throwing and disorderly behaviour. I hope that Celtic will take appropriate action against those individuals who let them down. Certainly, at Hearts, we will do everything in our power to ensure they are never again allowed into Tynecastle.*

*I was appalled at the vandalism carried out by our visiting supporters on Sunday. Having recently spent significant sums to replace broken seats in the Roseburn Stand, for the benefit, primarily, of our away supporters, I was hugely disappointed to witness the destruction of close to 100 seats. Similarly, the graffiti on walls, tiles, doors – basically all types of surfaces – was quite disgraceful and this is not to mention the damage to toilets.*

*I have discussed all of these matters with members of the Celtic Executive and we are working co-operatively to address the issues. No club should be on the receiving end of such unacceptable behaviour and no club should be put in the position of having to defend such behaviour.*

*The most distressing emails/reports I have received are of intimidation both to fans and to staff from away fans. Everyone gets frustrated when officials and police appear to take little or no action. This is something I will discuss with the authorities but as many of us know, their response is very often influenced by a need not to further inflame a situation. The only real answer is to try to remove those people who cause the problems and who spoil the whole experience for so many others."*

It was a strong response from Ms Budge and one welcomed by the majority of decent-minded people.

However, Celtic's response was that while they would work with Hearts to address these matters, they pointed out there was continued sectarian abuse directed at Celtic management, staff and players from some of the home support at Tynecastle. Celtic striker Anthony Stokes said "Maybe Anne Budge should worry about her own fans. I've never had so many sectarian comments directed at me as I had at Tynecastle"

It seems sad that while someone like Anne Budge is doing her very best to rid Scottish football of its cancerous sectarianism – she was quick to condemn those Hearts supporters guilty of this and, let's face it, there are a few Hearts fans who behave in this manner – it's disappointing, but not altogether surprising, that Celtic have adopted a 'you started it' stance. The comments of Anthony Stokes – a player who was reprimanded by Celtic in 2012 for attending a memorial service for a notorious member of the IRA – only inflames the situation.

The atmosphere at Hearts-Celtic games in recent years has become poisonous. I take no pleasure in watching these games now. I couldn't attend Sunday's game and part of me was rather thankful I wasn't there.

The strongly-worded statement from Anne Budge should be applauded. Something has to be done by both clubs, the SFA and the police to address this very serious issue. Getting whole-hearted support from your rivals instead of tit-for-tat accusations might be a start...