

What's The Score? Football in the 70s



Photograph courtesy of Away From the Numbers

We live in an age where communication is instant. Indeed, we demand it to be so. Satellite technology and the advance of the internet and mobile phones means that no matter where you are in the world you can have almost instant access to any sporting event worth its salt. It's a far cry from when I first began going to football back in the late 1960s.

Back then, satellite technology was in its infancy. Yes, the USA were putting men on the moon but life in Scotland was literally more down to earth. Football was different five decades ago. There were only two divisions, First and Second with eighteen teams in the top flight. Teams would play each other just twice a season in the league and if my team Hearts were playing away – always on a Saturday afternoon in the days before games were covered live on television – the reserve team would be playing our opponents reserve team at Tynecastle.

Hearts struggled throughout the 1970s and attendances at Tynecastle were about half what they are now. On cold winter afternoons with a biting wind and lashing rain fans would huddle in the old Tynecastle shed urging on the likes of Rab Prentice, Drew Busby and Donald Ford. Unless you had a transistor radio with you – it's a seventies thing, younger readers – getting the half-time scores from other games usually meant forking out a shilling (five pence) for a programme (in the days before they were called match day magazines). The other fixtures would be printed with capital letters next to them and a man would climb the half-time

scoreboard on the Gorgie Road terracing slotting numbers on the board. For example, next to the letter A he would place 1-1. A quick look at the programme would show Aberdeen were drawing at home to Hibernian...

I was living in Aberdeen in 1971 when Partick Thistle recorded their famous League Cup Final triumph over Celtic, who were then one of the best clubs in Europe. I was at Pittodrie with a friend and there were huge hoots of derision when the fella on the half-time scoreboard on the then wide open Pittodrie terracing put 4-0 next to the letter A. The silly man must have got the score the wrong way round we assumed. As if Thistle would be four nil up against Celtic at half time we chortled. Astonishingly, it was true...

Back in the 1970s, the term mobile phone meant someone picking up their old dialling contraption and throwing it across the living room on discovering on BBC1's Grandstand results service that their team had lost at Arbroath. In fact, a good many households didn't even have a telephone – we didn't get one in our house until 1976. The internet was something connected with the space agency NASA. The radio was the main source of getting updated football scores and tuning into Radio Scotland was a challenge in itself. No digital radio then, of course. It was VHF and medium wave and I seem to recall Radio Scotland being an extension of BBC Radio Four. So much so, that Sportsound – or Sportsreel I think it was called back then – didn't start until 3.30pm on a Saturday afternoon. When I lived in Aberdeen as a child I used to spend an anxious half an hour from three o'clock on a Saturday wondering how the mighty – okay this was the 1970s so not so mighty – Jambos were getting on. It was at this time my pessimistic streak developed and has remained with me to this day. Hearts away to Dumbarton? Ach, they'll skoosh it. By half past three, we're bound to be at least three goals ahead. Then the dulcet tones of presenter Brian Marjoriebanks would come on and after updating us on Celtic and Rangers first – some things never

change – eventually he would advise *'and the latest from Boghead is that Dumbarton lead Hearts by a goal to nil...'* I soon learned to accept crushing disappointment as a way of life. As my father used to say to me *'well, son, you chose to follow Hearts...'*

Those of us who grew up in the 1970s and were avid football fans will remember the magnificent David Francey as Radio Scotland's commentator supreme. Francey sounded like a loveable granddad, someone who would offer you sweets when you were expressly forbidden to have anything to eat before supper. *'Oh and there's a drive from the edge of the penalty box which has just whistled past the left hand post of Jim Cruickshank'* – his commentary often gave us better pictures than Archie Macpherson did in the edited television highlights on Saturday evening. Having said that, taking a radio to the game to get the other scores was often fraught with danger. When Hearts needed just a point from that game at Dens Park on the final day of season 1985-86 and hoped Celtic wouldn't get the avalanche of goals they needed at St. Mirren to address their inferior goal difference the fella standing in front of me at Dundee dared to relay the news that The Hoops were four nil ahead at half-time. He was either very brave or very stupid depending on your view...

When the dust had settled on a Saturday afternoon and all the results were in the Hearts result would determine whether I nipped down the road to the local newsagent for a copy of the Saturday sports paper which was rushed out shortly after five o'clock and had all the results and brief match reports from the top games. Nearly every city had one. In Edinburgh it was the Pink News, printed on horrendous pink paper; in Aberdeen it was the Green Final printed on – well, you get the picture. After scouring through the paper to get scores and reports your hands were usually black with newsprint. I still recall the air of anticipation waiting in the newsagents for the screeching sound of the delivery van whose driver would lob a

freshly printed batch of papers toward the door of the shop with the accuracy of a Roy Kay throw in.

50 something fans are often accused of looking at the past through rose-tinted – or in my case maroon-tinted spectacles. However, I can't deny there were some truly awful games at Tynecastle four decades and more ago. Moreover, it's difficult to imagine going to games now without having instant access to other scores through mobile phone and satellite technology.

However, there was an innocence about the days before mass technology I miss. The days before everything was sponsored, strips were emblazoned with names and most of us actually stood on the terracing for ninety minutes. On the other hand I don't miss standing on the wide-open terracings in the middle of winter with the rain running down the back of your neck; the drunks who stumbled through the turnstiles at 2.55pm having been in the pub for the past three hours and who would urinate down the back of your leg; or the ever present threat of violence that meant when you wore your team's scarf walking down the road you were asking for a kicking.

Something I'll hang on to next time Osman Sow's attempt on goal knocks a Blackberry from the hands of a fan in row 25 of the Gorgie Stand...