

# Hearts Appoint Ian Cathro as Head Coach



Photo: Hearts FC

Hearts today finally revealed the worst-kept secret in Scottish football. The man who has been given the task of replacing Head Coach Robbie Neilson – who departed Edinburgh last week for MK Dons – is Newcastle United's Assistant Coach Ian Cathro.

Cathro, who turned 30 years of age less than six months ago, becomes the second youngest ever Head Coach/Manager of Hearts. He has signed a three-and-a-half-year deal to lead Hearts to the next stage of their development, the club having come from administration and demotion to the Ladbrokes Championship to promotion and a third-place finish in the Ladbrokes Premiership in just three years.

It's fair to say the majority of Hearts supporters are happy with the appointment even though Cathro has never managed a team before. Indeed, the former youth coach at Dundee United – where he previously worked with Hearts Director of Football Craig Levein – has never played professionally before, having played youth football for Forfar Athletic and Brechin City.

Cathro's astonishing rise to the one of the top coaching jobs in the country began when he became the head of Dundee United's youth academy, after successfully running children's clubs in his home city of Dundee. He was barely out of youth eligibility himself – he was just 22 – when this appointment was made in 2008. Yet, Cathro oversaw the progress of the likes of Ryan Gauld – who would go on to sign for Sporting Lisbon – and John Souttar, who he will be reunited with again at Tynecastle.

The SFA recognised Cathro's obvious coaching ability and put him in charge of regional coaching in Dundee. However, in 2012, Cathro quit the SFA to take up the post of assistant coach of Portuguese side Rio Ave – a decision which didn't meet the approval of then SFA Performance Director Mark Wotte who questioned Cathro's commitment to Scotland.

However, Cathro believed the opportunities to further his coaching career in Scotland were limited – and who, in this country, would give someone who had not played professional football the opportunity to coach a top club?

Rio Ave saw Cathro's potential. The Dundonian gain a new insight into how others see how the game should be played, gained valuable cultural experience and expanded his coaching knowledge as wide as the River Tay.

His manager at Rio Ave, Nuno left to go to top Spanish side Valenica in 2014. Nuno regarded Cathro so highly he took him with him to Spain and appointed him Assistant Manager. Together, they took Valencia to fourth place in La Liga.

In the summer of 2015, Cathro was appointed as Assistant Manager at Newcastle United – being second in command to former England manager Steve McClaren. With the Magpies struggling, McClaren was sacked in March 2016 – but his replacement, former Liverpool manager Rafa Benitez bucked the trend of new managers by retaining the services of Cathro, having heard glowing reports about the Scot.

Now, Craig Levein's protégé is back in Scotland, in charge in his own right at last, at one of Scotland's top clubs.



Speaking on the official Hearts website, Cathro was asked what the Hearts fans can expect to see from his team. His answer was swift and forthright.

“They'll see a team that wants to win. A team that, from when

the first whistle goes, irrespective of the opponent, home or away, rain or sun, no matter what – we will expect to win”

Cathro will be formally announced as Hearts Head Coach at a press conference at Tynecastle on Tuesday. However, owner Ann Budge said:

“We are delighted to have secured the services of Ian Cathro and are confident he is the ideal candidate to take our club forward.

He is widely regarded as one of the brightest young coaches in the game and has amassed a great deal of experience both at home and abroad.

We are convinced he has all the tools required to be a successful Head Coach”

It’s an ambitious move by an ambitious club who are trailblazing a modern way of thinking in Scotland. Hearts have given a chance to a young man who has much confidence in his own ability and has gained more top-class coaching experience that some of his critics can ever hope to achieve.

Hearts should be applauded for this ground-breaking appointment. Certainly, the admiring Maroon Army can’t wait for the next stage in the development in the re-birth of Heart of Midlothian.