

Ann Budge Gives Hearts Update



Hearts owner Ann Budge has tonight released a statement on the official Hearts website. The Edinburgh Reporter has published much of what Mrs Budge has said. The full version is available [here](#).

First Team

None of us could have anticipated back in August that within 6 months we would have seen so many changes. Not only do we have a new Head Coach and Assistant Coach, but we have a very different first team squad taking to the pitch every week.

Ian and Austin joined us at the start of December, 2016, at a time when the team was fairly well settled, albeit with some changes planned for the January transfer window. Four games into the new management era, with 2 wins, 1 draw and 1 loss under their belts, we lost Callum Paterson to long-term injury... one of our key defenders... and one of our top goal-scorers at the time. While that was a blow, only 2 games later, we also lost John Souttar to long-term injury... again, one of our key defenders. These things happen in football, however, and we simply have to deal with them.

The January transfer window brought more changes to the squad... a mixture of planned changes and unplanned. No-one, for example, anticipated the departure of Igor Rossi. Once again, we reacted and brought in some highly-rated players... some to see us through to the end of the season and some on longer term contracts. With so many changes... a number of which were forced upon us... there was clearly always going to be a period of some disruption while things settled down.

Despite this, however, I am pleased that, once again, we have secured a Top 6 place. We set out at the start of the season

with a business plan based on a 4th place finish and after all of the afore-mentioned changes we have currently slipped to 5th place. That said, it is still “all to play for” as they say in football and we will continue to strive for that 4th place, with the possibility that brings of European football in the summer.

Other Footballing Matters

As many of you will appreciate, while the First Team gains most of the media attention... and indeed supporter focus... this is the “tip of the iceberg” in terms of the football operation.

Our academy and our development squads are going from strength-to-strength. It was a real pleasure last month to welcome no less than 8 young Academy players into the professional squad. This shows that we are getting things right at the youngest age groups and promises great things for the future. To strengthen this even further, the Board has recently approved the budget for setting up our own Performance School for the S1-S4 age groups. More detail will be provided on this as the plan is implemented but it is very exciting for all concerned

You will have noticed that we are continuing to invest in our coaching staff too, staffed mainly by former Hearts players as it happens. That can't be bad! We are also reviewing our Recruitment processes in time for next season and will be implementing a new approach and organisational structure to help us continue to improve, across all levels.

I want to finish this section by mentioning the media focus that has been centred on Hearts ever since Ian joined us and which at times, has reached ludicrous proportions.

Firstly, it was questioning why the Club would appoint such a young, inexperienced Head Coach, seriously questioning Ian's credentials for the job. I would answer that quite simply by

referring to our long-term strategy which sees us investing in and developing young coaches. This appointment was totally consistent with that objective.

Then it was questioning the Director of Football's role in terms of the First Team. This reached frenzied proportions during and after the recent Aberdeen game. As has been explained many times before, the Director of Football role as it applies at Hearts is very wide and very varied. Craig is responsible for all football matters and for all age groups... and as stated above, there is a lot going on. He is also an executive director on the Board with the additional responsibilities that brings. Craig holds his position because of his vast footballing experience, which means his opinion and advice can be extremely valuable. That said, he no more does Ian's job than he does Roger Arnott's job as Head of the Academy...or indeed mine, as Chief Executive. For the avoidance of doubt, Ian picks the team...as did Robbie when he was here. Any input from Craig...whether in note form from a vantage point in the stand or in any other form... is given purely to assist Ian's decision-making.

On a final note, certain members of the media have also consistently taken Ian's statements out of context to create sensationalist headlines. Ian is particularly articulate and in his post-match interview and always attempts to give an honest and fulsome evaluation of how he sees things. His style of expression is quite different from many others in Scottish football, possibly influenced by his time spent abroad. He is open, honest and engaging and certain journalists are quite adept at trying to take advantage of this.

The Club works hard to maintain good relations with the media and in the main things work well, based upon mutual respect and understanding for the demands of our respective roles. Indeed, it might interest you to know that last week, we were contacted by one journalist who apologised for the headlines

on the back page of his paper. He was personally embarrassed by the way his article had been produced, and by the fact that certain comments had been taken out of context to create the sensationalist headlines mentioned above. In short, I would urge supporters to keep all of this in mind when reading or listening to the media.

I have said from the outset that we are taking a long-term view of building this Club... this business... and as such a run of disappointing results following a period of significant change, or some mischievous (at best) headlines, will not divert us from our purpose. We will continue to invest in youth, both for players and coaches, supported by experienced professionals. Thank you for your continued support.

New Main Stand Development Project.

The plan sees the erection of the structural steel and concrete behind the Main Stand commencing on 10th April, with a target for completion of the end of May 2017. Steel has now arrived on site and you will shortly see the building start to emerge.

The next main target date relates to the installation of the curtain walling which will comprise the front facade. This is scheduled to start on 1st May and will continue all the way through to mid-August.

As well as building the structure behind the Main Stand, we must, of course, also build the pitch-side seating itself.

Before we can put in the new seating, we have to demolish the existing Main Stand. In line with our key objective of continuing to play all our home games this season at Tynecastle, the demolition of the old stand is scheduled to begin in mid-May; after we have played our last game of the season here. Our planned start date is 15th May 2017.

The order for the staging and seating is currently in final

stages of preparation. It is an exceedingly complex exercise and precision is absolutely key, as much of this is fabricated overseas. It is anticipated that the new staging will arrive at Tynecastle early in August, with the seating scheduled to be installed in full by the end of August.

NB Please note that the Main Stand will be totally off-limits to all from mid-May through to the end of August.

Having built the structure of the new building, we must, of course, then do the fit-out. This will be done in stages as cash-flow permits.

All supporter areas, including toilet facilities, concourse catering facilities, turn-stiles, staircases, lifts, escalators, etc... in short, everything needed to allow our supporters to safely attend home games, is scheduled to be completed by the end of August 2017.

The other priority areas required for the end of August are the main entrance hall, the Directors' Suite, Media Centre and the front Piazza.

OUR PLAN IS TO BE "OPEN FOR BUSINESS" ON 9TH SEPTEMBER 2017.

The next key target date is mid-January 2018, at which point our new hospitality suites will hopefully all be completed, along with the new player facilities.

HOSPITALITY TARGET DATE IS 20TH JANUARY 2018.

Final deliverables will be the Tynecastle Nursery, the new Club Shop and the new Community Services space.

OVERALL COMPLETION IS SCHEDULED FOR 30TH MARCH 2018.

"One – in – a – million" Scheme

We propose to introduce a scheme, which we are calling the "one – in – a – million" scheme, referencing the fact that we

hope to raise £1 million through this scheme. The scheme is essentially in 2 parts; the first part relates to season ticket holders only while the second part is open to all Hearts supporters.

Part 1: The “3 year” scheme

In simple terms, we are offering a 3-year price freeze on season ticket pricing for those who are able to sign up for this scheme. In addition, scheme members will finally be able to secure the rights to their season-ticket seats, for all non-league games, for a period of 3 years. (A ticket will still require to be purchased for these games, of course). This “3 Year” scheme will cost £100.

Part 2: The “Annual Benefits” scheme

The second part of the scheme is quite simply an “Annual Benefits” Scheme. This will comprise a range of benefits, including:

The commercial team at the club have negotiated a range of discounts with locally-based companies and with club sponsors, for supporters who sign up for the scheme. We have concentrated, in the main, on leisure partners and restaurants, which we are confident our supporters will use.

In addition, signing up for the scheme will entitle members to a range of club discounts, including discounts in the club store, or for ticketed events, or for hiring of club facilities.

Everyone who joins the scheme will also be automatically entered into a range of monthly draws, exclusive only to members.

This benefit scheme is offered at an annual charge of £100. However, for anyone who has signed up for the “3 Year” scheme, the annual cost in year 1 will be reduced to £50. Similarly,

to recognise the amazing and continuing contributions from FOH pledgers, any FOH member who has contributed a minimum of £250 in pledges, will also be eligible for a 50% discount in Year 1.

This may seem somewhat complex at the moment but please be assured it will all be fully explained and comprehensive information will be provided within the next couple of weeks.

Our Fundraising Week

Following our last game of the season at Tynecastle, we plan to have a week of fundraising events, covering everything from family fun days, to race nights, to comedy events, to football challenges... and lots more.

We will have raffles, draws and auctions... where many of the prizes will be “money can’t buy” offerings.

You will see pop-up stalls, bucket collections, special tours... all to raise funds for the TRF... but also geared around having fun.

Please keep the week from the 7th May to 14th May as free as possible. Full details will be announced later this week.

Season Tickets

These will go on sale on 14th May 2017. In advance of that date, we will be asking supporters to advise us if they wish to move their seats.

Full pricing information will be published shortly... and yes, this will incorporate a price increase. In broad terms, adult pricing will increase by approximately 6-7%. We have protected concession prices with increases of only £10, or £15 in platinum, with U13 pricing going up by only £5, or £10 in platinum. This will equate overall to an approximate 5% increase.

Having held prices at the Season 2013-14 level, during the last 2 seasons and given the improved facilities, we feel this is reasonable. We hope you agree.

We will be selling full season tickets, on the assumption that all Home SPFL Premiership Games next season will be played at Tynecastle. If we hit major problems, which means the new stand is not ready for our first Home game, contingency plans are in place as described below and season tickets will, of course, be valid. We very much hope this situation does not arise, but we must have a contingency plan in place.

Full season tickets for hospitality lounges will also be sold, with special arrangements in place for Home Games played prior to the new lounges opening in January 2018. Until the lounges open, hospitality will be provided in the Gorgie Suite but with appropriate new VIP seating in the new Main Stand. Full details regarding the offerings associated with each lounge will be provided to current hospitality season – ticket members shortly. They will be given priority for membership, seasonal packages and for seating. It is important to note that a “3-year membership” scheme will underpin all seasonal hospitality packages. This will incorporate the benefits of a 3-year price freeze and seat access to non-league games.

A small number of existing Wheatfield Season Ticket holders will require to be displaced for the first part of the season, given the priorities in our building programme. As stated earlier, the new player facilities in the Main Stand will not be available until January. This means implementing our contingency arrangements and opening up the tunnel in the Wheatfield Stand. We will be contacting those individuals personally to make alternative arrangements for them.

We are still considering whether to offer full season tickets in the Roseburn stand or whether to exclude Cat. A games from these season tickets. Should we opt for the latter, we would guarantee these season ticket holders, preference for similar

category seating elsewhere in the Stadium for Cat. A games. Clearly, this decision is heavily dependent on the number of season tickets we sell. While we would clearly love to limit the number of away tickets sold, as we have done this year, it is important for the finances of the club that we maximise attendance.

Stand Improvements

When we announced this major re-development programme we stressed that this was not only about the new Main Stand and that improvements would also be carried out in our 3 existing stands.

That work has been on-going for some time. Supporters in the Wheatfield Stand will have noticed the new surface on the concourse. This not only enhances the appearance, it also improves safety, as it is non-slip. Similarly, and importantly, it is also water-proof and prevents water damage to the new facilities in the under-croft. If this treatment proves successful, we plan to apply it to the Gorgie and Roseburn stands.

Work has also started on upgrading the toilet facilities in all 3 stands. Ceilings are being repaired, tiling is being replaced or cleaned, pipes are being boxed in to prevent damage, new hand-dryers are being fitted, doors replaced or removed, lighting improved...the list is long! Please bear with us as we work through our maintenance schedule.

Also on our maintenance list for the summer are kiosk improvements, Gorgie Suite improvements, potential upgrading of the PA system and other enhancements within the various concourses.

This work will be on-going well into next season.

Match Arrangements

The need to plan for Home fixtures during the summer, coupled with what happens if our Building Programme runs late, has been a hot topic over the last few months

A number of options have been considered to cover the possibility of having UEFA Europa League games to host over the summer and also to cater for the Betfred Scottish League Cup games in which we may also be potentially involved. We have decided that any games played over the summer will be played at Tynecastle, in front of our 3 stands. We explored the possibility of playing these games at BT Murrayfield. However, despite a very genuine desire on the part of the SRU Management Team to assist us, their pitch maintenance plans rule this out until August at the earliest.

We have, however, an agreement in principle, to play any Ladbroke's Premier League Home fixtures at BT Murrayfield, in the event that our Building Programme runs late.

We have discussed both of these scenarios with the appropriate footballing authorities and we have the necessary agreements in place. I would also mention that my request to other Premiership Clubs for their support of our proposed contingency plans was very generously given by every club in the Division.

So, to summarise...Tynecastle will continue to be our Home Ground throughout the whole Redevelopment Programme, unless events prevent us from opening on 9th September 2017. In that eventuality, we will play Home games at BT Murrayfield until our new stand can be opened, with Season Ticketing being valid and alternative hospitality arrangements being put in place.

Thank you, as ever, for you fantastic support. We are meeting new challenges every day... some of which have brought unexpected additional cost... but, with your continued support, we will continue to meet our key milestones and our key targets.

Ann Budge

12th April 2017

www.heartsfc.co.uk