

Curses! The Fitba's Back...



It's that time of the year again. Although this 'time of the year' seems to have been getting earlier and earlier in recent times. Yes, dear reader, I'm talking about the start of the football season.

For the past couple of months, it's been relatively calm in the Smith household (apart from Mrs Smith's increasingly frequent rants about the bedroom needing to be re-decorated) On Tuesday evening, however, the sound of cursing emanated again, increasing in volume as the evening wore on.

Hearts returned to competitive action as they travelled to Elgin on Betfred Cup duty. The prospect of making a 340-mile round trip on a Tuesday evening was less than enticing so this Hearts fan opted to follow the Maroons' progress – if you could call it that – online via social media and a live scores app on my mobile phone.

When I first began following Hearts nearly 50 years ago, a mobile phone was when my father threw the dialling contraption across the room when he opened the phone bill. In my formative Hearts supporting years the best way of finding out how Hearts were doing was to actually be at the game itself. The BBC was the main source of radio coverage but the blanket coverage we have today was just a fantasy.

This was the case even well into the 1980s. I recall Hearts entertaining Montrose in the League Cup in season 1986/87 – the season after they infamously lost the league in the last eight minutes of the season at Dens Park. I was living in Aberdeen at the time and this was an era before the internet and immediate communication we demand today. I didn't even have that new-fangled information service, Ceefax, on my telly. Instead, I had to anxiously pace the living room for

most of the evening before tuning into BBC Radio 2's sports desk at five past ten. *'And one football result from Scotland tonight – it was Hearts 0 Montrose 2'*

My transistor radio went the same way as my father's telephone nearly two decades earlier. 2-0 Montrose? Bloody BBC! Can't they get anything right? But the newspapers the following morning confirmed the news. Hearts Dens Park hangover had carried on...

31 years on, I'm sitting on a sofa in darkest Leith (yes, I'm a Jambo in a foreign land) The present Mrs Smith compels me to 'stop looking at that bloody phone every two seconds'. Tuesday evening went pretty much like this:

7.40: I tell Mrs Smith that Hearts are playing tonight. Ian Cathro has picked a strong team so it should be an easy win against a team that lost 6-0 on Saturday. She ignores me.

7.50: No scoring as yet but it's early days.

7.55: Still no score.

8.00: Still no score. C'mon Hearts, get the finger out.

8.03: Mrs Smith asks if there is a game on tonight. Clearly, my statement 23 minutes earlier had a major impact.

8.05: Still no score. Bloody hell, Hearts, Dunfermline were 2-0 up by this stage last Saturday.

8.07: Edinburgh City go ahead against Berwick Rangers. See, even City can score.

8.10: Still no score. I throw my phone aside. That's it. I insist I'm not bothering to check the score again until half-time.

8.15: Still no score. Mrs Smith questions my previous declaration that I wouldn't check the score until half-time. I

tell her I'm not in the mood for her pedantic utterances.

8.22: Bloody hell, Hearts. This is a disgrace.

8.25: Still no score. Kyle Lafferty? Ha! Yer havin' a laff.

8.30: Half-time. Elgin City 0 Hearts 0. The official Hearts Twitter account says Hearts are dominating the game but have still to make the breakthrough. Talk about stating the bleedin' obvious.

At least there's a 15-minute break now which gives me the chance to recharge my phone and to pour myself a stiff drink.

8.47: Hearts will surely do the business in the second half. Won't they?

8.49: Still no score. More sighing from me as Mrs Smith asks the somewhat rhetorical question 'have they scored yet?'

8.52: Still no score. At this stage on Saturday Dunfermline were 5-0 up against Elgin. I pour myself another drink.

8.57: Still no score. I throw my phone on to the chair across the room. That bloody team of mine! Bloody Ian Cathro! He has to go! Bloody Elgin City.

9.02: GOALLLLLLL! Kyle Lafferty puts Hearts in front. Yaaa beauty!

9.03: Mrs Smith comments on my remarkable change in mood. Kyle Lafferty? Great player, I say. Will make a real difference to Hearts this season.

9.05: Ian Cathro will do a great job this season. He's got his own team in place now.

9.10; 9.15; and at frequent times until 9.35: Bloody hell, Hearts! Only 1-0 against a bunch of part-timers. It's a disgrace!

9.37: Full-time Elgin City 0 Hearts 1 (Lafferty, 60)

9.38: That will do for starters. Tough place to go, Elgin. And a win's a win.

The world's a better place again. The fitba's back. But I need to see my doctor tomorrow – I think my blood pressure is a bit on the high side...