

Sound of Silence From Tynecastle is Deafening



I was listening to an old classic from Simon & Garfunkel this afternoon when my thoughts were drawn to the west end of Edinburgh. As the strains of 'The Sound of Silence ' faded away, I couldn't help but wonder what – if anything – was going on at Tynecastle.

It's a sad when, after a busy morning, the first thing I did when I switched my phone on at lunchtime was to see if Hearts Head Coach Ian Cathro had left the club. He hadn't. Despite another weekend of anguish for the followers of Heart of Midlothian there was no news of any sort emanating from Tynecastle. The sound of silence from the club is deafening...

Former Hearts captain Gary Mackay wasn't slow to voice his opinion. The man with the record number of appearances in a maroon shirt told BBC Scotland that Hearts have made a mistake appointing Cathro and the club should admit it. However, Mackay's former team-mate Craig Levein, now Director of Football at Tynecastle, has – so far – not complied.

The feel-good factor that Hearts have enjoyed for much of the last three years begun to evaporate at the beginning of 2017 and is in danger of disappearing altogether – something owner Ann Budge must be all too aware of. The fans group the Foundation of Hearts will take over the running of the club from Mrs Budge in due course and the majority of Hearts supporters have placed their faith in her. She rescued the club from extinction three years ago and her leadership has not only resulted in Hearts emerging from the Ladbrokes Championship to a top six place in the Premiership but the creation of a brand new main stand, due to be partially opened

in less than six weeks.

However, there seems little doubt Hearts have hit the reverse gear in recent months. Robbie Neilson's departure as Head Coach at the end of November last year appeared to have been triggered by the actions of some disgruntled supporters, some of whom hired a plane to fly over Tynecastle with a banner which displayed 'No Style, No Bottle. Neilson Out'. Neilson's replacement has hardly been top of the popularity stakes with the Hearts support – like Neilson, getting knocked out of the Scottish Cup by Hibernian meant his status was damaged irrevocably.

Cathro has been a coach at some top clubs, including Newcastle United. But it seems his credibility as Head Coach at Hearts is difficult to accept for some players and certainly much of the support. Last season ended in huge disappointment despite promise shown in victories over Motherwell and, in particular, Rangers who were hammered 4-1 by Cathro's side in February. The cup defeat at Easter Road signalled the start of a malaise and Craig Levein admitted that bringing in so many foreign players on short-terms deal last term was a mistake.

The Director of Football owned up to that one – and now it's time to fess up to another one. Hearts were distinctly average against League Two side Elgin City two weeks ago; not much better against East Fife; absolutely shocking in losing to League Two Peterhead last week and unable to deal with a Dunfermline Athletic team who outfought their hosts at Tynecastle on Saturday. Cathro's decision to drop Jamie Walker for the Dunfermline game – if indeed it was his decision – backfired. Walker may not have been at the top of his game but he is always capable of scoring goals. If a point had to be made why not drop Walker to the substitute's bench and bring him on if the team was in dire straits – as it patently was on Saturday?

Without the width Walker provides with his forward runs,

Hearts resorted to long punts up the park to a bewildered Kyle Lafferty and an out-of-sorts Isma Goncalves, a player clearly lacking in confidence. Not that Cathro seemed to notice.

The decision to play John Souttar at the weekend was another decision which backfired. The young defender was at fault for both Dunfermline goals and it seems the former Dundee United man is some way from the fitness required.

Hearts, under Cathro, have become an embarrassment. A Betfred Cup section containing three part-time teams – two in the fourth tier of Scottish football – and a team from the Championship shouldn't have been too problematic for a side in the Premiership. Not to finish top of the section is bad enough. To fail to finish second is humiliating. Can you imagine if this was Hibernian – how much mickey-taking would Hearts fans be doing right now?

What is adding fuel to a rapidly developing fire is the lack of reaction from the club to the crisis. Even a statement saying the Board were backing Ian Cathro, while not being popular, would at least be keeping the fans – who have parted with hard-earned cash not only for Betfred Cup ties and season tickets but also towards the Foundation of Hearts – informed and updated.

But, for now, the sound of silence from Tynecastle is worrying. With a trip to champions Celtic looming another part of the lyrics from that Simon & Garfunkel song may be more relevant on Saturday evening – hello darkness, my old friend, I've come to talk with you again.

Or not...