

Hearts Fans Stand Proud



It felt strange going to watch Hearts on Sunday. The hoo-ha about whether their Ladbrokes Premiership game with Partick Thistle would be on or not had subsided (although Thistle were still bumping their gums about the uncertainty on Sunday lunchtime, hours after the go-ahead had been given) and the boys in maroon were returning to Tynecastle for the first time this season.

Of course, it was a new-look Tynecastle. The new main stand, which was issued a safety certificate at the weekend, looks awesome. From the outside its impressive appearance and majestic splendour has transformed McLeod Street. With Hearts new stand and surroundings and the relatively new Tynecastle High School opposite, only the famous Tynecastle Arms pub on the street corner and the remnants of the old high school further down the road are reminders of a glorious past. But it's to the future this great club now looks.

Adding to the unfamiliarity of the afternoon was the fact my grandson Jack wasn't with me as he usually is at Hearts games. The laddo plays football for his local under 13 side on a Sunday so I sat in my seat in the Wheatfield Stand about half an hour before kick-off and contemplated Hearts new-look home.

This was the first time I had seen the new stand from the other side, so to speak. It looks just as impressive from my vantage point. The Wheatfield, Gorgie and Roseburn Stands have, of course, been there for years. The old Archibald Leitch stand looked out of place. The old lady had served Hearts well for over a hundred years but the time to lay her to rest had been evident for some time.

I looked around Tynecastle just before kick-off on Sunday and in my mind, I saw Rab Prentice dashing down the wing, skipping

past defenders before lashing the ball into the school terracing.

I saw Drew Busby blasting the ball from 30 yards into the net, then shaking a clenched fist to the adoring Hearts support.

I saw Jim Cruickshank pulling off save after save and then hanging from the cross bar.

There was John Robertson scoring against Hibernian and running to the old Tynecastle shed to take the acclaim of the fans.

Images of some of the big names in Europe such as Bayern Munich, Atletico Madrid, VfB Stuttgart, Bologna all trooping off the Tynecastle pitch dejected, defeated, 'Gorgie, Gorgie, Gorgie Rule' bellowing out from the shed, the open terracings and, indeed, the old stand.

I thought of Eddie Thomson leading the Hearts team out of the famous Tynecastle tunnel in the Texaco Cup final against Wolverhampton Wanderers in 1971.

I also thought back to the first time I cried at a football match – a certain Edinburgh derby on the first day of 1973 when Hibernian made seven counter-attacks from suspiciously offside positions and scored each time. I asked my father to take me home at half-time – but he refused. It was all part of growing up for a ten-year-old Hearts fan.

Contemplating these thoughts on Sunday it was difficult to comprehend this was the same location that all these events had taken place. Grandson Jack is 12 years old. For his mother's 12th birthday, I took her to Tynecastle to see the triumphant Hearts team come home with the Scottish Cup, having defeated Rangers in the final the day earlier in May 1998.



Tynecastle has changed out of all recognition from when I

first went there in 1968. The old main stand was the last vestige of the old days. It must be said many of those old days weren't particularly happy ones. Losing the league title on the final day of season 1964/65 when Kilmarnock won 2-0 in Gorgie (before I started going, thankfully). Relegation, crowd trouble, Wallace Mercer walking to the School End to implore the fans to behave themselves.

The memories are still vivid for me and thousands of others. Now we have a new stand, a wonderfully atmospheric stadium of which every Hearts fan can be proud. When Chris Robinson was chairman thirteen years ago he threatened to destroy Tynecastle, a deal to sell the stadium and move Hearts to Murrayfield being a done if not quite finalised deal. The fans refused to let it happen. Vladimir Romanov took over and while he pledged the club would remain at Tynecastle, Hearts debt spiralled out of control. Administration in 2013 threatened not only Tynecastle but the club itself.

Again, the fans refused to let it happen. Ann Budge and the supporters group the Foundation of Hearts rescued the club from oblivion.

Sunday saw another huge step in the rehabilitation of an Edinburgh and Scottish football institution. Pride swelled from the stands, all four of them. For years, even decades, few Hearts fans dared to believe this would happen.

Now it has. And it's thanks to those supporters that the dream has been realised. Tynecastle is dead. Long live Tynecastle.