

# Hearts Legend Salvatori Dies at 49



Photo: Eric McCowat

It remains one of the enduring moments in the aftermath of Hearts 1998 Scottish Cup triumph. As Hearts players and fans celebrated the club's first major piece of silverware in 36 years and their first Scottish Cup triumph since 1956, various television crews swarmed the Celtic Park pitch thrusting cameras and microphones under the noses of the victorious Hearts players. One such player, being Italian and normally the epitome of sartorial elegance, struggled to keep his emotions together with a maroon and white scarf tied round his forehead.

*'Oh, this is fantastic. My team. My supporters. After 42 years, Hearts win the Scottish Cup. Fantastic. I'm very happy. When you win it's brilliant.'*

Stefano Salvatori summed up what that day meant to the Maroon Army.

The news that Salvatori has died after a short illness at the far too early age of 49 has come as a real shock to those Hearts supporters who idolised him. Born in Rome at the end of 1967, Salvatori was a cultured midfield player who began his career at Milan. However, he struggled to make the breakthrough to the first team and was loaned out to Virescit Boccaleone and Parma. He then moved to Fiorentina before returning to Milan where he was part of the squad which won the European Cup in 1989.

After a spell at Atalanta, Salvatori joined Hearts in 1996 and soon became an integral member of an impressive Hearts side

built by Jim Jefferies and Billy Brown. As the Maroons emerged as genuine challengers to the Old Firm in season 1997/98, Salvatori's name was one of the first on the team sheet. While Colin Cameron and Stevie Fulton made the headlines with their performances, Salvatori's commitment, skill and style were a crucial element of Hearts midfield. Although he scored just one goal in competitive games during his time in Gorgie – in a 3-1 win at Dunfermline – his role was linking defence to midfield and letting more attack-minded players take the glory. Nonetheless it's fair to say Hearts would not have won the Scottish Cup without him.

Hearts 1998 Scottish Cup winning team are legends and the passing of Stefano Salvatori has Hearts supporters thinking back to that glorious May afternoon nearly 20 years ago and remembering the Italian with fondness and admiration. His contribution to one of the greatest days in Hearts long history will never be forgotten.

The Edinburgh Reporter sends its condolences to the family and friends of Stefano – forever a Hearts hero.