

# Summer Time Blues

Although the World Cup is about to commence in Russia, it's the end of the domestic football season in Scotland. A time when thousands of Scots wander aimlessly around shopping centres of a weekend wishing they were at the football instead.

Why do we do it? Why do we put ourselves through such anguish on a weekly basis, occasionally vowing never to go back but always doing so? Why do we spend a small fortune on following our team, not just the price of match tickets (or season tickets if you're able to afford one) but the added extras that come with 'going to the game' – the pie, the hotdog, the programme, the pre-match and post-match pints?

As a hypnotherapist I help people rid themselves of unwanted habits. 'Going to the game' is a habit and, despite many heartbreaks, agonies and tantrums, it's a habit football fans enjoy so there's no question of it being unwanted.

For millions of people, the result of their team will shape their mood for the week – or until the next time their team plays. It is woven into the fabric of life. I have done things that, looking back, I'm not particularly proud of. The day my first wife was due to give birth to our first child, I was off to watch the Hearts-Aberdeen cup final in 1986. Living in Aberdeen at that time, my wife said she felt fine and if she needed me she believed it would be easy enough to get me. I omitted to tell her the game wasn't at Pittodrie but 140 miles away at Hampden. She wasn't best pleased when I got home late that Saturday evening, but my logic was based on the fact she would probably have more children (she did) but Hearts might never get to another cup final (they did but it would be another 12 years until they won the bloody thing...) In any case, it was another week until Laura was born so, hey, there was no harm done.

Perhaps more damage was done seven years later when I missed my second child's fourth birthday because of being in Madrid. Not on a business trip but watching my first Hearts game abroad when a trip to Atletico was in order. I'm not sure if Michaela has ever forgiven me and, I admit, she had a point. Particularly as Hearts lost 3-0.

Nick Hornby's assertion in his excellent book *Fever Pitch* – that your relationship with your football team can be stronger than that with your wife/husband/partner – was proven correct when my first wife and I divorced after 30 years of marriage. I married again, in 2015, older, wiser and even missing a Hearts game at Tynecastle for the occasion. My best man was a Hibby so obviously he wasn't bothered about football that day, but I did get a couple of pals to keep me posted with events from Gorgie. After the ceremony, as we stood posing for photographs on the steps of Edinburgh's Capital Hotel on Valentine's Day, a couple of guests were signalling the latest score to me with their fingers. 1-0 to Hearts was what I could just about make out but what wasn't so easy to decipher was that Jamie Walker had scored the goal.

The question 'can't you forget about bloody football for one day?' was asked by more than one person but my honest answer was this was a crucial season for Hearts, having been relegated the season before, and it was vitally important they returned to the top flight of Scottish football as soon as they could...

That's the crux, though. Aficionados of the game can't forget about football even just for one day (sounds like a David Bowie song) Football is always on our minds. Even when it's nearing the end of another drab season where there have been more downs than ups, when your chance of seeing your team win a trophy disappeared in January, when there's little to play for except pride.

'I'm not that bothered about the Hearts game today' I have

offered by way of trying to gain points with my wife Marion. However, she knows me well and immediately replies with that unique Scots phrase where two positives said together mean a negative. 'Aye, right'.

Yes, I have vowed many a time that I was finished with Hearts, that this team of mine has let me down on too many occasions and this time I was finished with them for good. But, rather like having a row with your beloved, you know deep in your heart that you'll be back.

Come the beginning of a new season I'll be filled once again with hope, anticipation and sometimes expectation (although Hearts fans will tell you never to expect too much)

And then the season begins, and I storm out of Tynecastle cursing and swearing. And it all kicks off again.

Roll on July!

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