

Hard-Working Edinburgh City Are On The Up



A team from Edinburgh sitting top of the league. A new-look team much-changed from last season after the manager at the beginning of the last campaign left. A new manager, a new approach, playing much better football with a definite improvement in results.

However, I'm not talking about Ladbrokes Premiership leaders Heart of Midlothian. I'm talking about Edinburgh City.

It's nearly a year since Gary Jardine left Edinburgh City after seven years in charge of the Citizens. He achieved much in those seven years with his crowning glory being taking City from the Scottish Lowland League into the Scottish Professional Football League (SPFL) in 2016. Such a step up was always going to be difficult but City survived their first season in League Two. However, it was evident from the early stages that season 2017/18 was going to be another struggle. Jardine left, and the club appointed James McDonough, the former assistant manager at Falkirk and head of youth coaching at Hibernian as its new manager.

After another season-long struggle, City again survived but McDonough wanted his new team to be much more than perennial strugglers, battling to avoid the annual play-off against the winners of the Highland League/Lowland League play-off to

ensure they remained in the SPFL.

McDonaugh radically overhauled the playing staff during the summer and his experience and contacts in the game saw the club attract the likes of former Hibernian player Danny Handling and former Hearts starlet Conrad Balatoni as well as highly-rated forward Blair Henderson among others. The result has seen City transformed from a team struggling to avoid 12th place in League Two to leading the table and looking a good bet, even at this early stage in the season, to be involved in the chase for promotion.

I spent Saturday afternoon watching Edinburgh City defeat title challengers Annan Athletic 2-1 at Ainslie Park – the ground City presently share with Lowland League side The Spartans. It was an impressive performance from the black-and-whites with Blair Henderson continuing his impressive start to the season by scoring both goals. While a late counter from Annan Athletics' Sinnamon necessitated a nervous final few moments there was no doubt City deserved their win to remain top of the league.

What was evident to me was the hard work not just of the Edinburgh City players but of those doing the behind the scenes work. Mingling with other guests in the boardroom prior to, during and after the game, it was clear to me that the commitment to City from the directors to the commercial team, the hospitality club secretary and other club officials was second to none.

Club director Christine Curtis told me *“Edinburgh City are very much a family club where everyone pulls together. We're not content to sit in the bottom half of League Two. We are ambitious and, of course, we all want to see the team do well”*

City's Sporting Director is Jim Jefferies, the former Hearts player and manager and the man who ended 36 years of hurt at Tynecastle when he managed the 1998 Scottish Cup winning team.

'JJ' looked fit and well and is a hugely popular figure at Edinburgh City.

Ainslie Park is a hive of activity on match day and it's a real eye-opener to see how much work is put into running the club. Everyone gets stuck in with another director, Alick Milne, even selling the matchday programmes (a hugely enjoyable read) at the entrance to the ground. Others are ensuring no one misses the opportunity to buy a half-time draw ticket and the hospitality staff go the extra mile to ensure club guests are looked after.

All told it was a hugely enjoyable afternoon watching Edinburgh City. The football was of a good standard, the game entertaining and while the attendance was less than 250 – Hibernian being at home three miles along the road may have had something to do with it – those who did come along were entertained and must have fully enjoyed their afternoon (Annan Athletic fans aside)

It's worth noting too that season ticket holders of Hearts and Hibernian pay just half-price admission to Edinburgh City home games – just £6 for adults – upon production of their club season ticket. That's a very generous offer and one for which the club should be applauded.

There's little doubt that Edinburgh City are on the up. A little bit of history will be made next month when City's trip to play League One side Arbroath in the Irn-Bru Cup will be televised live on BBC Alba – the first time a City game will have been shown live on national television.

Promotion to League One, whether its by automatic promotion or via the play-offs, is certainly viable this season and would be suitable reward for the sheer graft undertaken by everyone involved with the club.

Go and see The Citizens this season. You'll be pleasantly surprised. For further information about Edinburgh City

including the club's fixtures for this season, click [here](#).