

Sounds of the 70s – chants of a bygone age

The cessation of sport during the present lockdown is an added angst for many.

Sport is an escape from the drudgery of everyday life. When everyday life

presently means staying at home not having this means of escape just adds to

the already considerable feelings of misery.

Starved of

live action, I have been watching BT Sport's re-runs of The Big Match

Revisited, the ITV version of Match of the Day from the 1970s and 80s. What is

striking is the difference in stadia, crowds and the general atmosphere in

football of yesteryear.

The Big

Match Revisited shows mainly English games and there was a penchant among many

of the fans of decades gone by to chant the score particularly when their team opened the scoring. The BBC's Match of the Day had legendary commentator David Coleman among others and his cry of 'one-nil' became his trademark. When Liverpool's Kevin Keegan scored during the 1974 FA Cup final between Liverpool and Newcastle United, Coleman memorably exclaimed 'Goals pay the rent – and Keegan gets his share' which was very much of its time.

I suspect Coleman's 'one-nil' may have been behind the reason fans of many teams shouted 'one-nil, one-nil, one-nil, one-nil' when their team took the lead. This isn't something that's heard these days and perhaps that's something we should be thankful for.

The essence of football chants, like so many other things, has changed over the years. When fans packed into the old terracings in the days before all-seated stadia, there was a communal gathering, almost religion-like in its purpose. When people of a particular faith gather in their place of worship they can sing or chant and share their beliefs with other like-minded worshippers. I don't think it's crass to suggest it's the same for football fans although the content of much of what is sung has altered in recent years as people become more diverse and embracing of different cultures and race.

The Big

Match Revisited was originally broadcast at a time when Hearts fans would be

seen standing in the old shed at Tynecastle, sheltering from the teeming rain.

This invoked a spirit of togetherness.

The game would kick off and Hearts would begin brightly, leading to a

dangerous period of optimism among the home support. Then, wham! The opposition

would break away and open the scoring. If, as was custom, Hearts opponents were

playing towards the School End in the first half you could hear the swish of

the net as the ball nestled there beyond the despairing grasp of goalkeeper

extraordinaire Jim Cruickshank. There would be a momentarily silence – save for

the sprinkling of away fans scattered on the Gorgie Road terracing – before the

home support would chant '*You're gonna*

*get your ****ing head kicked in*' accompanied by rapid clapping. This, of

course, was aimed at those away supporters whose team had dared to score

against the mighty Hearts (although for much of the 1970s it wasn't so much

mighty as meek as the maroons dived with oblivion)

This would

merely taunt those away fans into ridiculing us even more and the home fans

chant would then change to '*You're going home in a ****ing ambulance*'.

Some tunes

from the 'hit parade' of the 1970s (ask your mum and dad,

young 'uns) would be
in use for several years. Scots band Pilot had a hit with
'*Magic*' in 1974 and the more mischievous among the Hearts
support
would adopt the tune but change the lyrics of the chorus to
'*It's magic, you know...there's gonnae be
Gorgie aggro*' – a clear indication that Hearts supporters
weren't to be
messed with.

The songs
and chants 40 odd years ago weren't all about putting someone
in hospital. A
Christmas Eve 1977 visit to Gayfield Park, Arbroath in the
First Division saw
Hearts hammer their fellow maroon opponents 7-0. The Gorgie
Army's rendition of
'*White Christmas*' was as memorable as
it was alcohol-induced...

In the 1970s
there was a penchant, particularly among some of the younger
supporters, to tie
your scarf around your wrist. My wife Marion tells me this was
something
teenyboppers of 1970s idols such as Donny Osmond and the Bay
City Rollers also
did but she knows more about this than I do.

My first
proper away trip without a responsible adult in tow was in
April 1976 when a
fellow Hearts supporting pal and I headed to Montrose for
Hearts Scottish Cup
quarter final tie with the Gable Endies. We were excited 14-
year-olds adorned
from head to toe in maroon and white with enough badges on our
scarves which,

if melted down, could have been transformed into a Ford Capri.

A popular badge in the 1970s was the two-fingered salute – a drawing of a fist with a forefinger and middle finger protruding and the statement underneath shouting, 'Up the Hearts!' I recall I had one particular badge for that trip to Montrose which was pretty close to the official Hearts badge but with a turquoise colour behind the St Andrew's Cross. It was, apparently, something of a rarity although I can't recall how I came to acquire this little beauty. A fellow Hearts fan at Montrose – and there were about 7,000 of us packed into tiny Links Park that spring afternoon – saw the array of badges on my scarf and offered me the princely sum of 35p for this badge. It was a tempting offer – seven shillings in old money – but I politely declined. This added to the already considerable pride I felt, and I imagined admiring glances for the rest of that afternoon from my fellow Hearts supporters (your mind does strange things when you are 14 years old...)

If you think this sounds like the ramblings of an old man who is desperate to see live football again – even the fare produced by Hearts this year – you would be right. COVID-19 might have taken football away from me – but it can't take away the memories.