

# **The day when Hartley was Hearts Hampden Hero**

*Today,  
Hearts and Hibernian should have  
been contesting the William Hill  
Scottish Cup  
semi-final at Hampden Park. It may  
be some time until this fixture is  
played so  
The Edinburgh Reporter's Mike Smith  
looks back to the last time  
Edinburgh's big  
two contested a cup semi-final.*

In 2006 the unlikely Scottish Cup semi-final line up consisted of Hearts, Hibernian, First Division side Dundee and Gretna of the Second Division. Would there be the first all Edinburgh Scottish Cup final since 1896? The answer was no because the old Edinburgh rivals were paired with each other for the semi-final.

There was much debate before the game, which was switched to a Sunday lunchtime to suit the needs of satellite television, as to where it should be

played. The obvious choice was Murrayfield Stadium in the capital city. This was a far bigger arena than the traditional venue for cup semi-finals – Glasgow's Hampden Park – meaning more fans would get to the game and would avoid the necessity of thousands of Hearts and Hibs fans travelling west on a Sunday morning. However, the fans wishes, as is so often the case, were ignored and the game went ahead with a 12.15pm kick-off at Hampden Park on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2006.

The four-week build up to the biggest Edinburgh derby in decades was fraught. One of the worst experiences in football is losing a cup semi-final. To lose one to your city rivals simply didn't bear thinking about. Moreover, Hearts supporters had taunted their neighbours with the oft-stated statistic that Hibernian had not won the Scottish Cup in over 100 years.

They knew that if Hibs won at Hampden they would be red-hot favourites to break that hoodoo, particularly as Gretna had upset the odds by defeating Dundee in the other semi-final played the day before. More than 43,000 fans headed to Scotland's national football stadium for the clash of the titans.

Hearts manager Valdas Ivanauskas was forced into making changes although the Hearts

team changed so frequently that season it was difficult to say who was injured or who had been dropped at the whim of owner Vladimir Romanov. However, Julien Brellier and Roman Bednar were absent due to suspension and this meant recalls for Portuguese midfielder Bruno Aguiar and young forward Calum Elliot.

Hibernian also had their share of suspensions and injuries, but this took nothing away from what would be – until 2012 – the Edinburgh derby to end all Edinburgh derbies.

Under their previous manager George Burley, Hearts tactic was usually to try to blow away their opponents in the opening minutes. Following the departure of Burley and his successor Graham Rix, Valdas Ivanauskas was Hearts third manager in six months but the Lithuanian used the same approach. Hearts leapt out of the starting blocks and talisman Rudi Skacel sprinted past Hibs Gary Caldwell in the opening minute, but striker Edgaras Jankauskas could not direct the Czech star's cross and the Hibernian alarm bells stopped – momentarily at least.

Hearts continued to look the more threatening side, but goalkeeper Craig Gordon had to keep alert, as was proved in the 14<sup>th</sup> minute when he tipped an effort

from Hibs Steven Whittaker over the crossbar. Minutes later, Hearts Paul Hartley – formerly of Hibernian – fired in a 30-yard effort that Hibs keeper Zibby Malkowski palmed round the post for a corner as Hearts further increased the tempo. They were rewarded in the 27<sup>th</sup> minute.

Hibs Abdesalam

Benjelloun was dispossessed by Hartley inside the Hearts half. The attacking midfielder raced forward with Jankauskas haring down the flank. Hartley played a sublime one-two with the Lithuanian before getting the merest of flicks to the return pass to steer the ball past Malkowski and into the corner of the net. 1-0 to Hearts and one half of Hampden Park erupted.

Hearts

suffered a blow when captain Steven Pressley picked up a head injury after showing total commitment in an aerial joust with Benjelloun and the former Rangers and Dundee United defender did not appear for the second half, his place taken by Takis Fyssas. It was a worry for many Hearts supporters who, given previous semi-final defeats, had a penchant for thinking the worst. Hearts had dominated the game but held the slenderest of leads. Now their inspirational captain was off the field.



Photo: London Hearts

When another free-kick from Hartley was deflected by Hibs Stephen Glass it was heading for the net and the doubling of Hearts lead – until Malkowski leapt superbly to turn the ball round the post. In the 57<sup>th</sup> minute, Calum Elliot was bundled off the ball by Hogg, between the corner flag and the penalty box. Yet another free kick for Hearts and yet again Hartley stepped up to take it. The Hibs defence and Hearts attacking players crowded the penalty box waiting for Hartley's usual expert delivery. He stepped back, looked up – and curled a magnificent shot between Malkowski and his near post into the net. Hearts were 2-0 up and Hartley, Skacel et al celebrated at the corner flag in front of the

dancing Hearts support. True, the Hibs goalkeeper was badly positioned but you had to admire the skill of the scorer.

Hearts

suffered another injury blow when Jose Goncalves had to retire from the game, the defender never fully recovering from a blow sustained earlier that required lengthy treatment. Bizarrely, referee Stuart Dougal had booked Hearts keeper Craig Gordon for what he thought was time wasting at the time of the incident.

Saulius

Mikoliunas replaced Goncalves and the Lithuanian didn't take long to make an impact. The winger took the ball of Hibs Ivan Sproule before the Hibs fouled the Hearts man – and stamped on the player as he lay on the ground. It could be nothing other than a straight red card for the Hibs man and with him went his team's chances of reaching the Scottish Cup final.

With nine

minutes left, any lingering doubt held by those Hearts supporters of the more pessimistic nature, disappeared when Malkowski compounded his team's misery by trying to dribble the ball past Jankauskas on the edge of his penalty box – only for the big striker to take it off his toes, skip past him into the penalty box and stroke home for Hearts third goal.

With just three

minutes left, Hearts substitute Michal Pospisil raced through

on goal, eager to get in on the scoring act. Hibs defender Gary Smith pulled down the Czech striker. Referee Dougal showed Smith a red card and awarded Hearts a penalty kick. Paul Hartley – who else? – duly despatched the spot kick to complete a memorable hat-trick and he ran towards the joyous Hearts support with three fingers in the air. 4-0 to Hearts, Hibs down to nine men – the celebrating Hearts support wanted the game to go on forever, but it ended a couple of minutes later. This was just as well as there was serious drinking to be done when they arrived back in Edinburgh a couple of hours later. The Tynecastle Arms was rocking that Sunday evening!

Hearts would face Gretna in one of the most unlikely Scottish Cup finals ever on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2006. It was typical of Hearts that they would need a penalty shoot-out to defeat their lower league opponents to lift the famous old trophy for the seventh time.

That semi-final had been the most important Edinburgh derby in over a century. And Hearts had won it by the length of the M8 motorway. It had been the greatest Edinburgh derby of all – at least for now...

**Hearts:** Gordon, Neilson, Pressley, Webster, Goncalves, Cesnauskis, Aguiar, Hartley, Skacel, Elliot,

Jankauskas.

**Hibernian:** Malkowski, Whittaker, Smith, Caldwell,  
Murphy, Sproule, Hogg, Thomson, Glass, Fletcher, Benjelloun.

**Referee:** Stuart Dougal

**Att:** 43,180

Photos courtesy of The Guardian and London Hearts