

# When Hearts finally ended 36 years of hurt

*Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> May is a date memorable for Hearts fans. It was the day in 1998 that Hearts ended 36 years without a major trophy by winning the Scottish Cup. The Edinburgh Reporter's Mike Smith recalls the events of 22 years ago in an excerpt from his book The Team For Me – 50 Years of Following Hearts.*

As a hypnotherapist, I usually ask my clients to describe the happiest moment in their life. Occasionally, the reply comes 'May 1998'. From that I can deduce my client is a Hearts supporter. For that was the date when Hearts finally put decades of disappointment and near misses behind them and won the Scottish Cup.

Since attending my first Hearts game at Brockville in 1968 I had always wondered what it would be like to see my team winning a trophy. A major trophy, that is. Hearts had

flirted with minor successes such as the Tennent's Sixes tournament in 1985 (played at Ingleston in Edinburgh with the highlights shown on the BBC) and the odd East of Scotland Shield (usually beating Hibernian in the final) And the Gorgie boys had lifted the First Division title in 1980 <check> but when Scottish football re-organised in the mid-1970s, the First Division was, in reality, the second division. The country's top clubs were now in the Premier Division. Winning these trophies, whilst important, wasn't quite the same as winning the major prizes – champions of Scotland, the Scottish and League Cups.

From the depths of despair in the late 1970s and early 1980s – when Hearts nearly went out of business – the club embarked on a resurgence which nearly saw them win both the Premier Division title and the Scottish Cup in the space of seven days in the spring of 1986. Nearly but, heartbreakingly, not quite.

Akin to the popular television quiz show of the time called Bullseye, Hearts then became the perennial victims of 'here's what you could have won'. Scottish cup semi-final heartbreak in 1987, losing to St. Mirren; a year later when Hearts turned a 1-0 semi-final lead over Celtic with two minutes to go into a 2-1 defeat; and other Scottish Cup semi-final defeats in the early 1990s, most notably to

Airdrieonians, managed by former Hearts boss Alex Macdonald who clearly had a point to prove against the club who sacked him days into season 1990/91.

I had resigned myself to never seeing Hearts win anything of note. Until season 1997/98 when the best Hearts team of my generation was assembled by manager Jim Jefferies.



Stephane Adam celebrates scoring Hearts 2nd goal. Photo: Eric McCowat

The former Hearts defender, who had played at Tynecastle during those dark days of the 1970s, had to be prised from the managerial job at Falkirk where he had done a sterling job on a limited budget. Jefferies initially turned down the offer to manage Hearts but Tynecastle chairman Chris Robinson refused to take no for an answer and persuaded 'Jeff' to take charge in Gorgie in the summer of 1995.

It was an inauspicious start as Hearts slumped to the bottom of the Premier Division and another relegation battle looked on the cards. But Jefferies rebuilt the team and not only avoided relegation but took Hearts to the Scottish Cup final – where they lost 5-1 to Rangers in 1996. But Hearts were at last on an upward turn and by season 1997/98 had assembled a very good team that entertained, played free-flowing football, scored goals for fun and gave

Celtic and Rangers

a run for their money in the league.

Players

such as Colin Cameron, Stevie Fulton, Stefano Salvatori, Neil McCann, Gilles

Rousset and Stephane Adam revitalised Hearts and it was no surprise when they reached another Scottish Cup final in 1998.

Rangers-Hearts

Scottish Cup finals have a history of having remarkable beginnings. The 1976

final between the pair began at two minutes to three, Rangers scored

within 80 seconds, and so Hearts were a goal behind before the official

kick-off time! Astonishingly, the 1996 final kicked off at a minute to three

and Hearts lost their captain Gary Locke within seven minutes. The fans

wondered what the 1998 final would have in store – they got their answer after

just 33 seconds. Stevie Fulton's lung-bursting run into the Rangers

penalty box saw him fouled. Colin Cameron took the resultant penalty kick – and

Hearts were in front. I had never seen

Hearts take the lead in a cup final before. I turned to my mate and asked how

long there was to go...

There was no further scoring until early the second half. Then, Hearts

keeper Gilles Rousset launched a long ball down field, and it seemed

that Rangers Amoruso would clear the danger. But the Italian dithered as he

went to strike the ball and Frenchman Stephane Adam nipped in behind him.

Taking the ball into the penalty box, Adam fired in a powerful shot which Rangers goalkeeper Goram could only parry into the net. 2-0 to Hearts and Adam ran with outstretched arms to an ecstatic Jambos support to milk the celebrations.

The noise from the Hearts end was deafening. The supporters, so often kicked in the teeth by countless near misses from their side, could scarcely believe it. Rangers pulled a goal back towards the end through Ally McCoist. And 20,000 maroon fingernails at Celtic Park were chewed to the quick.

The last few minutes were tense, nervous and fraught for supporters of both sides. The period of injury time seemed to last forever. Fully four minutes stoppage time had been played when, at last, referee Young blew for the end of the match. The Hearts support roared themselves hoarse and danced for joy. Jim Jefferies almost crushed his assistant Billy Brown with a hug of delight. Hearts had won the cup for the first time since 1956 and four decades of heartbreak had come to an end.

The scenes which followed were remarkable. Grown men wept and the tide of emotion that washed over those in maroon seemed almost to overpower them.

When Steve Fulton went to collect the trophy, he invited club captain Gary Locke to go up with him. The injured Locke – a dyed in the wool Hearts fan if ever there was one – didn't need to be asked twice and the two players held the cup

aloft to a huge  
ovation from the Hearts support.

Edinburgh partied  
all weekend as the players paraded the cup through the streets  
of the famous  
old city and on to Tynecastle Stadium for a truly emotional  
homecoming. An  
estimated one hundred thousand people welcomed them home and  
Edinburgh let down  
its collective hair. Manager Jim Jefferies had said before the  
game that the  
players could become legends if they won the cup and there's  
little doubt that  
the Hearts support treated their heroes in a way befitting  
such a status.

It was an emotional  
end to an emotional season.

It's true to say Hearts  
had become something of a laughing stock in Scottish football  
because of their  
lack of success and their almost constant failure to produce  
the goods when it  
really mattered. Season 1997-98 changed all that. Throughout  
the season Hearts  
had consistently produced a sparkling brand of fluent,  
attacking football which  
delighted the purists.

And, after 36 years  
of hurt, they had finally brought silverware back to  
Tynecastle.

*The Team For Me – 50 Years of Following Hearts* is still  
available to buy [here](#)