

What next for Hearts?

Recently, Hearts fans got the news that they'd long expected, but still didn't want to hear.

After fighting the practical and financial aspects of the club's relegation from the Scottish Premiership through the courts and then through a lengthy arbitration process, the end result has remained unchanged.

Hearts will not be allowed to retain their place in the Premiership next season, and nor will they be financially compensated for the way in which their relegation was decided. As angry as the club and its fans are (and may have every right to be), they're now a Scottish Championship club, and must urgently begin preparations for the coming season and their attempt to return to the top flight at the first time of asking.

It was never likely that the courts would overturn the SPFL's decision. The league's governing body theoretically has the right to run the league in any way it sees fit, and the decision to relegate Hearts had the backing of the majority of its members. It was also unlikely that the SFA would make a ruling on the matter that contradicted the SPFL. Making an exception for Hearts would have caused chaos throughout Scottish football, with [Partick Thistle and Stranraer also relegated](#) on the same basis that Hearts were. As harsh as the decision to relegate the clubs based on a partially-completed season might seem, there's also something to be said for the fact that Hearts wouldn't be in this mess if they weren't at the bottom of the table when the season came to a sudden end. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the matter, the time has now

come to move on and deal with the new reality.



Ladbroke's Scottish Premiership – Hibernian v Heart of Midlothian. Easter Road Stadium, Edinburgh, Midlothian, UK. 03/03/2020. Pic shows: Hibs go down 1-3 to Hearts in the Ladbroke's Scottish Premiership at Easter Road Stadium, Edinburgh. PHOTO: Ian Jacobs

That process of moving on might be easier said than done. The club's owner Ann Budge has vocally opposed the SPFL's decision at every stage, and has continued to do so even after the final verdict was announced, [referring to the panel's decision as 'shameful.'](#) Her rage is understandable. From a financial perspective, she has the most to lose from the decision. The economic differences between playing in the Premiership and the Championship aren't as significant as they are in England, but they'll still result in a sharp drop in the club's revenue figures, and that might see some of Hearts' exciting plans for the future put on hold until a return to the top flight can be secured. New projects cost money, and money is going to be in short supply at Tynecastle for at least the next season.

Historically speaking, when 'big' clubs go down from the Scottish Premiership, they usually come back up again quickly. Rangers powered through the divisions after their enforced relegation to the bottom of the Scottish football league, and they were in a far worse state than Hearts. Even so, there are uncertainties. Nothing other than the top spot will ensure promotion. Anything from 2nd to 4th would put Hearts in the play-offs, and the play-offs are football's answer to the games on online slots websites. Sometimes you can spend virtually nothing on [slot games](#) and walk away with a jackpot. On other occasions, your chosen online slots game will swallow as much as you can afford to spend, and you'll come out with nothing.

There's no such thing as form when it comes to online slots, and it's impossible to make predictions. It's rare that the

best team over the course of a full season prevails in football playoffs. More often, it's the team with the most luck or the team in the best form during the season's closing stages. Losing in the playoff finals would be heartbreaking and devastating. Hearts have to try to find a way to ensure that they come out on top.

On paper, the club ought to be favorites for the title. They're not alone in having serious championship aspirations, though. Inverness Caledonian Thistle will be desperate to make it out of the division this time around, and will likely push Hearts close. Dundee FC could also be contenders. Even Ayr United, who surprised everybody with their competitiveness after only gaining promotion from League One a year previously, might have something to say about the final standings. Hearts aren't guaranteed an easy path. They have to be strong, and they need to make wise decisions in terms of recruitment both now and all the way through until the end of the transfer window. Fortunately for the club, they're going to have some help from a trusted friend in that department.

The return of Jim Jefferies to the club was agreed before Hearts' relegation was finalized, but won't be affected by the final decision. The experienced former manager will advise the club on recruitment and transfer strategy and will fill a hole that was intended to be occupied by a new sporting director on the board. Given the club's new situation, the plans to appoint a new sporting director might have to go on hold for a while, but if anyone knows the club, it's Jefferies. He can't be viewed as a long-term appointment because of his age, but he'll be committed to helping the club out as much as possible and will be a valuable shoulder to lean on for anybody who needs the benefit of his experience and wisdom over the difficult months to come.

The sad reality for Hearts and Hearts fans is that what's done cannot be changed, no matter how right or wrong anybody feels the decision is. Hearts were in dire straits even before last

season was called off, and action would have had to be taken to correct the club's course this year even if the club had managed to stay up by the skin of its teeth. Every step back is an opportunity to rebuild, and it's vital that Hearts, Ann Budge, Jim Jefferies, and returning manager Robbie Neilson take advantage of that opportunity. The dead wood in the team needs to be shown the door. Hungry young players need to be given a chance, and Hearts need to turn winning into a habit again. If they can do that, then one season from now, all of this will feel like it was a bad dream.



Ladbrokes Scottish Premiership – Heart of Midlothian v Motherwell.

Tynecastle Park, Edinburgh, Midlothian, UK.

07/03/2020.

Pic shows: Honours even at 1-1 when the final whistle blows as Hearts play host to Motherwell in the Ladbrokes Scottish Premiership, Tynecastle Park, Edinburgh.

PHOTO : Ian Jacobs

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