

Armchair Hearts fans remain seated for time being

We are in a world that none of us could have imagined this time last year and, whilst the light at the end of the tunnel appears to be getting brighter, it still looks likely that no mass spectator events are around the corner.

This of course means no crowds at football games. Since March 2020, many thousands have suffered from missing week-in week-out competitive football, the escape that offers, and the ritual of going to watch your side.

But what have been the implications of no crowds? It is evident that the beautiful game is simply just not the same. The atmosphere feels peculiarly sterile and diluted from afar, with the enjoyment subsequently watered down too.



Scottish Championship – Heart of Midlothian v Morton.

Tynecastle Park, Edinburgh, Midlothian, UK.

20/2/2021

Hearts play host to Morton in the Scottish Championship at Tynecastle Park, Edinburgh.

Pic shows: Despite having the bulk of the pressure, Hearts are held to a 1-1 by the visitors.

Credit: Ian Jacobs

Ironically, many of us are watching more football now than ever – whether that is thanks to the loosening of broadcast

rights to show 3pm Saturday kick-offs down south or, most likely, via the rapid increase in all clubs offering their own match stream.

Leaving aside the politics of paying for feeds from clubs deemed to have wronged Hearts over the summer, every minute of the Jambos' season is now able to be pored over and analysed. One side note is, once we enter the "new normal", will this streaming infrastructure persist? With the initial investment costs now sunk with the clubs, making games accessible to those not wishing to travel may be a welcome ongoing revenue stream.

Going back to the enforced virtual terracing, watching in the perceived comfort of your own home, however, does not lead to the shared experience of spectating as a group of 15,000 inside Tynecastle, or as a hardy body of away fans at Pittodrie, Easter Road or Ibrox. There's no ripple of applause recognising a decent pass, the intake of breath at a sharp tackle or, of course, the sheer elation when the ball hits the net. Most notably, there's no means to demonstrate unbridled joy at a derby goal, or the sheer disdain at another dismal home performance – no singing, no chanting.

We're now reduced to online "debate" and, in the era of social media most of this is pretty dicey when it comes to meaningful thinking. One major uptick, however, has been the increased prolificacy of Hearts podcasts all offering amusement, analysis and, frankly, some decent weekly company in which to think about our beloved club.

With clubs across the land getting set to roll-out their annual season ticket renewal campaigns, what sales can they expect? Expensive subscriptions to Hearts TV are not exactly top of everyone's list, but with the emotional pull of possibly seeing in the flesh Heart of Midlothian back in the Premiership, it may be a temptation too big for most fans.



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