

Rangers legend John Greig only wanted to play for Hearts

He has been voted “The Greatest Ever Ranger” by fans of the Glasgow football club – but now Light Blues legend John Greig has revealed he didn’t want to sign for the club because he only wanted to play for Hearts.

Greig, 81, was born and raised in Edinburgh, where he dreamt of playing at Tynecastle every week, for his beloved Hearts.

Speaking in the final episode of BBC Scotland documentary series “Icons of Football” to be shown on Sunday Greig reveals he was snubbed by his idols as a youth and only signed for Rangers after being ordered to by his father.

He said: “It was my ambition to play for Hearts. Hearts had a great side in those days and I was very very disappointed when so many players in my juvenile team were signed for Hearts and they didn’t come to me because they thought I was too small.

“My brother Tam said to me one day ‘there’s a guy to see you, he’s from Rangers Football Club’ and I thought ‘well there’s no harm in speaking to the guy’.

“My father was sitting in the chair reading his Sunday paper and Bob McAuley came in and started giving me the spiel about

Rangers.

"After about 20 minutes or so he brought a form out of his pocket and said 'so just sign there son',

"I turned to my brother and I said 'I'm not signing that because I'm a Hearts supporter, I don't want to sign for Rangers'.

"My father just moved the paper an inch away from his face and said 'sign that paper'. I had to do as my father told me."

He added: "Bob McAuley went away out the door and I said to my brother 'I'll never forgive you for that, I'm a Hearts supporter'.

"He said 'I don't think you'll ever regret that, you've signed for a really good club. They're playing at Easter Road next Saturday, we'll go down and see what this team's like'.

"They beat Hibs 6-1 that day and I thought 'what a team this is I've signed for'. And that was me, I never worried about Hearts again, it was Rangers for me after that."

Greig made a record 755 appearances for Rangers and later became manager.

Now honorary life president at Ibrox, Greig is best remembered for winning 16 major honours in the club's colours, including its only European trophy in 1972.

But in the BBC Scotland programme, he reveals how just five years earlier he urged a referee to blow the final whistle as Rangers suffered their most humiliating ever defeat, at the hands of minnows Berwick Rangers.

Greig was captain of the Rangers side that was knocked out of the Scottish Cup in the first round by the part-timers on 28 January 1967.

The Glasgow giants went into the match at Shielfield Park in Berwick Upon Tweed as cup holders. They dominated the match but failed to score, and Sammy Reid's historic goal for the hosts in the 32nd minute caused one of the biggest upsets in football.

Greig recalls how, with time running out, he told referee Eddie Thomson to blow the whistle and end their misery.

He said: "That was probably one of the worst days of my life. We just couldn't put the ball in the net.

"We were getting beaten one nothing and we'd missed chance after chance after chance and I said 'Eddie, how long is there to go?'

"He said 'it's nearly time up, John', so the next time I passed him I said "Eddie, blow the whistle and let us get away out of here, we'll never score'.

"So he just blew the whistle and we went off. That was probably the worst defeat of my career as a Rangers player."

Striker Willie Johnston, who was stretchered off in the 65th minute of the defeat, recalls in the programme: "I was in the hospital, I'd broken my ankle and I said to the nurse, 'could you tell me the score please'.

"She said 'one-nil to Rangers'. I said 'that's alright then', but she said 'no, it's Berwick Rangers'. And this boy jumped up and punched a hole in the window."

* Icons of Football: John Greig is on the BBC Scotland channel, Sunday, 10.30pm and on the BBC iPlayer.

