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APPLEYARD JAGUAR

What a difference a day makes. Indeed, what a difference a week makes! The supposed gloom that had been surrounding Tynecastle up until last Saturday has been removed. Firstly with a performance and result against Dundee on the Saturday followed by some truly positive football announcements during this week.

We all knew what was required last Saturday and those of you who were in attendance witnessed everyone wearing the maroon jersey give their all. And a plaudit must go to you, the fans, for your patience during the game, especially those first 45 minutes. With Dundee playing a 4-5-1 system it was always going to be a hard task for us to get a result. We had plenty possession of the ball but found the Dundee defensive line up difficult to break down. But even after the first forty-five minutes, we were confident that with perseverance and belief, we would eventually get that vital goal and go on to win the game.

It was a great result and exactly what was needed to boost everyone's morale, and I should add that the players all commented about the support that you gave them on the day. It really can make a difference!

During the week we announced the start date of work at the new Youth Academy at Riccarton. The first brick is due to be laid next February and when finally completed in 2003, the Academy will be used primarily as a first team training base but even more importantly, the supreme facilities will be fully used by the younger members of our ever increasing youth set-up.

Stephen Simmons breaking into the first team squad is the first product of the Youth Initiative system that was introduced three years ago. Stephen's emergence in the first team shows that with correct and quality coaching which the Youth Initiative system provides, good youngsters will progress through their journey to the ultimate aim of playing in the first team.

The launch of the Club's new alliance with Intelligent Finance, the new Telenet Bank, will also be a boost to the Youth Academy as their contribution will allow us to continue to invest in the development of grass roots talent.

We also launched during the week the poster of the team that was taken for Show Racism the Red Card. All of the staff at Tynecastle are fully committed on the question of racism and indeed bigotry of any kind and are only pleased to assist with any promotion on this subject.

The visit of Celtic today will really test our resolve. They are a good team, full of quality players and should be complimented on such a good start to the League campaign, and of course, their exciting matches in the Champions League where they were unfortunate not to progress in that competition.

We know that nothing short of total commitment will do if we are to get any kind of result today and I can promise you that is exactly what you will get!

Enjoy the game.



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CAPTAIN'S CORNER

Before going on to write about the football, let me firstly take time to thank all supporters for their cards and letters congratulating my wife, June and I on the birth of our first son, Aaron. All your good wishes were much appreciated.

Last week's victory over Dundee was just what the doctor ordered. Everyone connected with Hearts needed a boost and I thought that all the boys went about their business in a truly positive manner. In our minds there was only going to be one winner last Saturday and we were confident right from the start that we would collect all three points.

Dundee were no pushover. Remember that they came to Tynecastle on the back of some very good results, including a recent victory at Easter Road. Going in to the match, they were very much the form team. But records mean nothing when you have eleven men in maroon jerseys determined to succeed. I know the Gaffer was going to mention in his article today about the support that the fans gave to the team last Saturday. I can only add on the players'

behalf that we were extremely grateful for your solid backing.

On Monday evening I attended my first Annual General Meeting of the Club in my capacity as Club Captain. Whilst it can be said that the meeting was perhaps a bit of an "eye opener", and some of the topics were over my head, I did observe a fervent passion for this Club to succeed and I took that message away from the evening and made all the players aware of this the following morning at training. Our aim must be to fulfil the supporters' desires.

The Gaffer is gradually building a solid unit which we are

all confident will succeed given time. Football supporters of any team are always looking for immediate success and that is fully understandable but we keep repeating "patience" for that is what it will take to get a team that will bring you the success that you are craving for.

Enjoy the game – and keep up your support for the team!



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When teenage defender Andy Webster walked into the Tynecastle dressing room for the first time back in March, he almost had to pinch himself to make sure he was not living a dream.

Here was a relative upstart just sitting a few metres away along the bench from players like Antti Niemi - first capped by Finland at 19 and a stalwart of World Cup and European matches, Colin Cameron - a Scotland Internationalist now staring at a possible life in the Premiership with Wolves, and Steven Pressley - reared at Ibrox and arguably the most consistent stopper in the country.

It was Roy of the Rovers stuff for a 19-year-old from a fishing village on the edge of the North Sea, who, just a few months before, had only just commanded a regular place in the Arbroath first-team then playing in the Scottish Second Division.

Just a handful of games tucked away in the folder marked, 'life experience,' it was a level-headed but naturally excited Andy Webster who was paraded before the flashing cameras following an £80,000 move.

There he sat in the changing rooms with his new team-mates, barely able to believe the dramatic sequence of events which had thrust him into a new life. Now, however, young Andy Webster has grown up a lot.

It is hard to think that all that was going on barely eight months ago. This season, the assured central defender has played 11 games on the bounce for Craig Levein's first-team and rarely looked out of place in any of them.

The promise, which saw Liverpool, Charlton and Dundee United also covet his talents whilst a player with the Red Lichties, is beginning to be transformed into real ability thanks to the coaching staff at Tynecastle. And he admits his starry-eyed days are in the past now.

"It has been a bit of a rollercoaster at Hearts," he admits, with a smile. "Even at times last year, I had only played a few games for Arbroath, but it was not really until this year that I was a regular in their first team. A few months later I moved to Hearts."

Modest and self-analytical, Webster knew he had inner faith in his ability to make the jump up to the SPL and a major club. However, he does admit to feeling a little overwhelmed in his first few days.





"Coming to Hearts, they were a big club. You were talking about playing alongside International players. Around me were guys like Antti Niemi, who is an unbelievable goalkeeper, Elvis, who is captain of the Club and a Scotland International, Stephane Mahe, who has been at Celtic for four years, Kevin McKenna - a Canadian Internationalist - even in front of you there are players like Stevie Fulton, who has been around for years and is a great player.

"I have settled in a bit now. But when you first come to a Club like this and you look around the dressing room you kinda think, 'should I be here, you know?'

"These days I am still impressed with the professionalism of the guys but I feel I am coping with that side well."

Webster's development has proved he has as much a right to be amongst his peers as any other. It is not just growing up in football which he has taken to the gusto however, it is also in life as well.

"I got a flat down here at the end of September so there has been a massive change of lifestyle for me, really," he confesses. "When you are living at home, you rely on your mum and dad a lot more, but here I am standing on my own two feet. I am able to look after myself though and I love it down here. There are more things to do than in Arbroath."

During rough times for any football team, there will always be question marks over the mood, mentally or the 'togetherness' of the playing staff. Suggestions of cliques or influential individuals hit the rumour mill and the yarn spins out of control. According to Webster, however, these things do not exist at Tynecastle under Craig Levein. And that is why he has managed to revel and grow in his new environment.

"It is good here. Everybody is in it together, we are all mates, there are no groups within the club. I think we have a great team spirit and the young boys who are coming through are very good. Even when there has been nit-picking by the media, everyone has stuck together, including the management and coaching staff and that is what we need here.

"I still feel I have heaps to learn. I am only 19 but I think you can't fail to improve if there is quality around you."