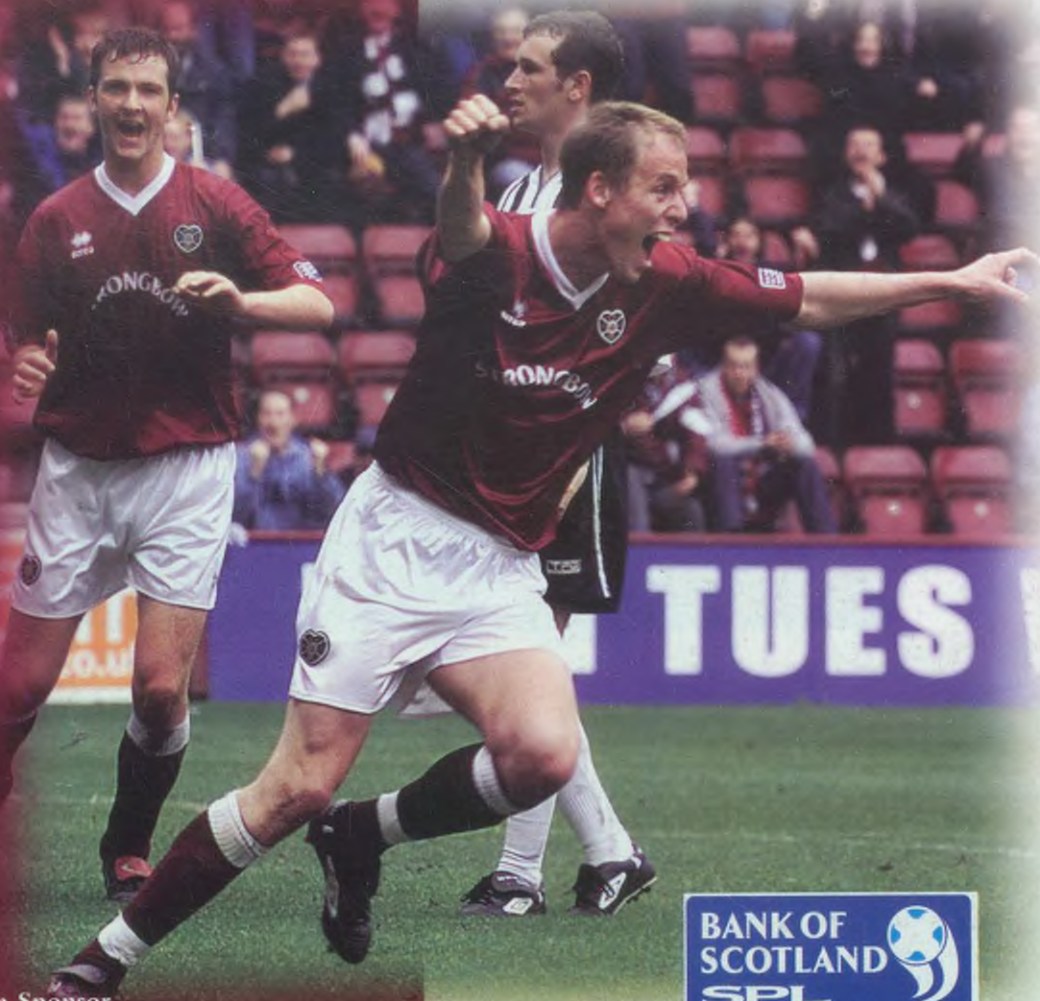




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I was really pleased that the team got all three points last week against Dunfermline in what was a particularly difficult match for us. Your patience played a big part in the eventual victory for we were all well aware that breaking down a very determined Dunfermline side would take time but that we would be eventually rewarded.

The two goals in the second half ended Dunfermline's aspirations of European football and kept our own alive, at least for another week.



By the start of today's game we will know our situation. The result at Livingston has to be in our favour to allow the realistic opportunity of gaining a European place to still remain. As a man who hails from Fife, I will have my fingers crossed that Dunfermline can achieve victory over Livingston in a match that kicks-off at 12 noon for television purposes.

We will then know exactly where we stand come 3.00pm. Even if the result is in our favour at Livingston, we still have to face up to the challenge of today's visitors, Celtic. That will be far from easy as Celtic are without doubt a quality team and richly deserve winning back to back League titles.

Much has already been said about the possibility of Celtic bringing an under strength team to Tynecastle and I really have to laugh at such a suggestion when you consider the strength in depth of their squad. No matter which player runs out on to the field wearing the green and white hoops, Celtic will start with a formidable team. Injuries and suspensions may have been accumulated of late that would normally severely cripple a club but in Celtic's case that has proved of little or no concern.

It was good to see Andy Kirk scoring last week after a difficult season with a number of different injuries. He was just so glad to be able to get the maroon jersey on his back once again. Hopefully, he can now go from strength to strength with a degree of confidence.

Scott Severin is due to play for a Scotland 'B' eleven against Dundee United next Tuesday at Forthbank, Stirling and I certainly wish him well. Berti Vogts will no doubt already have his own ideas on his future Scotland team but he cannot fail to have been impressed with Scott's performance last Saturday, whilst he sat in the stands.

This is also a time of the year when players are in great demand to attend supporter clubs annual functions for player of the year awards, etc. Players will always give up their time to attend as many of those functions as possible as they are always delighted to meet with our supporters.

Enjoy the game.

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Captain's Corner



I am pleased to be able to report that the recovery to my back injury is going according to plan with physio Alan Rae satisfied with the rehabilitation programme to date. Last Saturday, my first game in attendance since injury, I stood at the head of the tunnel to watch proceedings and let me tell you that I am anything but a good observer!

After Saturday, I am now well aware of what football can do to damage a manager's health and any aspirations of football management in future years on my part will have to be seriously considered (my wife has recently confirmed this in no uncertainly terms!).

Seriously though, I thought the team last Saturday gave a very compact, professional performance throughout the entire ninety minutes and this despite losing Stephane Mahe to what looked like a fairly serious injury early in the first half. Fortunately for our French cousin, the injury is not as bad as first feared and Stephane may be able to take his usual place today.

Once Stephane had left the field, the adjustment with Kenny Milne dropping back meant that the back four took on a young and relatively inexperienced look. The boys continued though to restrict Dunfermline to very few chances and it was only on the odd occasion when they did break through that they found Antti Niemi once again in inspired form. His penalty save culminated in an outstanding overall display which again proved what a top goalkeeper he really is.

It was also pleasing to see Andy Kirk back on first team duty again. Andy has been out of action for several weeks with a similar injury to that of my own. He may have started on the subs bench but once introduced into the action, Andy showed that he has not lost the knack of scoring goals.

Robert Tomaschek was another player returning from injury to play at Tynecastle having been out of contention for nearly nine months. Robert is a very influential player for us in midfield and is extremely popular amongst the players in the dressing room. I was delighted for him and I am sure that he too will have been satisfied with his all round contribution last Saturday.

We should congratulate today's visitors, Celtic, for yet another outstanding season showing remarkable consistency in the League campaign.

The possibility of our involvement in Europe next season will depend on results elsewhere being in our favour before we commence at 3.00pm. Set aside Europe however as this game is more significant for us in terms of getting a much needed victory over a member of the Old Firm.

Enjoy the game.

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Tynecastle midfielder Robert Tomaschek could not have come back from serious injury at a better time.

At the time of going to print, there was still an opportunity of a European place being up for grabs for Craig Levein's men, although that was dependant on Dunfermline taking something off Livingston earlier this afternoon.

And the out-of-contract Slovakian Internationalist has also given himself a better chance of being offered a new deal at Tynecastle, albeit depending on the outcome of TV income, when it looked at first as though his season was over.

Tomaschek, who made his return to the first-team against Rangers at Ibrox three games ago, has done his part in keeping Hearts in the race for Europe, starring in the 3-2 win at Pittodrie a fortnight ago, and the 2-0 victory against the Pars last week.

The loss of the experienced Slovakian, after he damaged cruciate knee ligaments at Celtic Park last August, was a massive blow to Hearts at such an early part of the season.

Indeed, it prompted Levein to go into the transfer market to sign Finnish cap Tommi Grönlund to fill the gap vacated by Tomaschek.

That is how highly the midfield man is rated by his boss, and it emphasised what an integral role Tomaschek plays at Tynecastle.

However, the man signed from Slovan Bratislava in 1999 by former manager Jim Jefferies is fit again and enjoying being part of the set-up once more. He said: "Yes, it's a great feeling to be back in the team. It was a frustrating time for me while I was out injured, but I am feeling good now."





"It is also a bonus that I came back into the side with a European place still there for us to aim for, and we will be trying for that as long as it is still possible."

Tomaschek watched from the sidelines throughout the season as several youngsters including Stephen Simmons, Andy Webster and Kevin McKenna made their mark in the SPL.

The 29-year-old has been impressed with the progress the younger players have been making and he hopes that he can use his experience on the field to help them even further. Even so,

the Slovakian believes the future will be bright down Gorgie way with so many good young players making the breakthrough.

He said: "There are a lot of very talented youngsters at Hearts. You always need a mix of experience and youth, and I hope I can add my experience to help the younger players.

"But I think they can do very well and it is good for Hearts that so many are coming through."

Today's crucial Premier League clash against Celtic should see Tomaschek line up against his former idol, Parkhead legend Lubomir Moravcik. The pair starred alongside each other in the Slovakian national side in recent seasons, and Tomaschek used to go along to watch the Celt when Moravcik was playing his football at Slovak side Plastika Nitra, and Robert was just a boy.

With Moravcik set to say his farewells to Scottish football at the end of the season, Tomaschek is looking forward to facing 'Lubo' one more time. He said: "I used to go along to see Lubomir playing at Plastika when I was younger. He is a great footballer and it would be nice to play against him again before he leaves Scotland in the summer.

"But I'm hoping I'll be on the winning side on Sunday, not Lubomir!