

Saints Aid 6 - My Experience

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By Holly "Holz" McCormack...

I think it is an ambition of many, to play at the stadium of all their dreams, their fantasies and desires. It is something that we may aspire to do all our lives, but never make the grade. It may be on the "top things to do before I die" list that you wrote, one rainy Sunday. It's a dream that did become a reality, and one that I'm sure anyone who participated in, would never forget.

I felt that the most interaction I would ever endure on the pitch at Love Street was my match day mascot stint in 1997. What a day that was, my 12th birthday, warming up with my idols, actually being able to run and making no mistake as I hit the ball to the left hand side of Alan Combe. I don't think I ever thought that anything would live up to that moment, but I was wrong.

It was Sunday 20th May, perhaps a normal Sunday. I wake up and it's late, I've been out the night before so it's hardly a professional preparation, for what I am about to embark on. Slowly, but surely - get all my things ready. I pack my bag, and take a brisk walk to the random location where I had left my car the night before; perfect pre-match warm-up.

I arrived at Love Street, just a few minutes shy of 1300 hours, when the mission would commence. I dithered around in anticipation, trying to keep my thoughts on the match to a minimum. I knew that I was only there to soak up the atmosphere and the experience. As a girl, things were always going to be a little different. I moved upstairs to my own private changing facility, away from everyone else. I looked out the chin guards, put my strip on with pride, fastened up the laces on my football boots and went downstairs to join the rest of my team for a warm up.

In my current level of fitness, I think a warm up is as intensive as anything else, so I just took things easy, carried out a few stretches and hit the ball a few times. I was going to be playing in this game,

albeit a substitute, but I would have my chance. In truth, I was happy to sit there in the dugout, and resisted the chance to go on the park a few times. It was perhaps nerves but I think it was a generally inadequacy to run at the moment.

At this year's Saints Aid, the fans were left slightly disappointed that both Gus MacPherson and Andy Millen could not be in attendance. This was a result of the club taking the team to Spain, for a week of relaxation and the perfect preparation to start their close season. However, SMISA arranged the two teams to be coached by Ricky Gillies and Steven McGarry. As we all know both of these players were heavily involved the last time St Mirren competed in the SPL. It is also apt as both players who are from the local area, were brought up from the St Mirren youth development scheme and are living proof of what SMISA, and Saints Aid are looking to achieve.

Ricky Gillies has just recently returned from New Zealand where he had been staying with his family, and playing as much football as he possibly could. Steven McGarry has been at Motherwell for the past 18 months, after a move from previous manager Terry Butcher secured his switch from Ross County. It was brilliant that both of these past players could step in, as they are both individuals that St Mirren supporters have a huge respect for. It was the job of Ricky to coach the home side, and Steven the away side " and hence it was time to let the competition begin.

The game kicked off, I was in the away team and well we didn't start too brightly. In truth, the whole of the first half saw us lose goal, after goal. It was clear that most of these were being lost down the left hand side, and of course where did I need to cover when I eventually did go on " yes the left hand side, trust me " I have never been a defensive player in my life and this was certainly not the time to start. I didn't feel comfortable in the position, and my legs actually did feel that they were going to give way. I think this aided things as the home player I was marking, continually was caught offside when I was on the pitch so I did make some influence, I feel.

Those five minutes were about as much as I could handle in

the first half, and I must confess it was relief to go back through the tunnel at half time. Our team coach, McGarry, made it clear at half time that we needed a little more passion, dedication and if we had this, then we would enjoy the experience more. Out the team came, and in true tradition we did go out and win that second half. I felt I interacted slightly better when I made another experience, as I was able to push up the pitch a lot more. I think that suits me better, as in any sport that I have ever played " I have always enjoyed to play in a more attacking role.

I think that I gave myself about ten minutes and had to go off again, well I blame my asthma. I had only sat down for 2 minutes, when the whole team was instructed to go on " and moments later, our coach McGarry and the home team legend, Gillies " also made their way on to the park. It was a fun finish to this match, which I think it's fair to say that the home team did deserve their "marginal" win.

It was then penalties, and I was just relieved that mine actually made contact with my football boot and found its way to the back of the net. That was my job done, and I certainly enjoyed just lying on the grass and soaking up the moment.

I know that some people pay a lot of money to experience Saints Aid, and with a good cause. At the end of the day, you may just be having a game of football but it's the whole experience that does count, and it is a priceless one. It's something to tell your children that you played at Love Street, home of the best team in Scotland. It will be an emotional affair next year when Love Street will only be moments from becoming a Tesco store, and I therefore think it will be all the more memorable. It is something that I would encourage anyone who can to experience whilst they still can.

I enjoyed myself and I know that everyone else did. It's something I would love to do again, but I think I should start preparing for it now. The best part is that Saints Aid 6 raised in excess of Â£6000 to the youth development fund for Love Street. We all know this is vital to the progress of our club as it helps to develop young players, such as Chris Smith " who go on to play in our first team.

Thanks for the opportunity SMISA, and Iâ€™m sure weâ€™ll see you next year, as some experiences as I said before â€” are just priceless.