

A NEW ERA AT TOTTENHAM

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The return of Glenn Hoddle to Tottenham Hotspur has many Spurs fans convinced that the glory, glory, days will quickly return to White Hart Lane. A Spurs fan since he was 8, Hoddle was idolised as a player at White Hart Lane, joining the club as a 16-year-old in 1974 and making 378 League appearances (88 goals) as well as collecting successive FA Cup winners medals in 1981 and 1982.

However, it was his stylish play that so endeared him to Tottenham supporters; many regard Hoddle as the most gifted player to wear the lilywhite shirt. That is why, when George Graham was unceremoniously shown the door by investment company ENIC, Tottenham's new owners, Hoddle was the runaway favourite to succeed him.

Graham put the League Cup in the Tottenham trophy cabinet in 1999, and took them to this season's FA Cup final, where they meet his old club Arsenal next weekend. But Graham's pragmatic approach was not loved by the fans, who harboured romantic notions of previous Tottenham teams studded by high profile entertainers like Tommy Harmer, John White, Danny Blanchflower, Jimmy Greaves, Paul Gascoigne, Chris Waddle and above all, Glenn Hoddle.

Confirming that Graham and ex-chairman Alan Sugar never stood much chance in the eyes of Spurs fans, new executive vice-chairman David Buchler said of Hoddle's appointment, 'This has given us back our Tottenham.'

Casting further aspersions on Graham's reign, Buchler has also remarked that the arrival of Hoddle and the retention of England centre-half Sol Campbell are essential to healing the rift within Tottenham Hotspur. Campbell is said not have been on speaking terms with the previous manager (who is seeking £1 million compensation from Spurs), but has indicated that Hoddle's appointment would persuade him to stay at the club when his contract expires this summer. The new board is believed to be preparing a £60,000-per-week deal to keep Campbell at White Hart Lane, and making a substantial transfer fund available to Hoddle to bring in new players. Darren Anderton and Les Ferdinand are also expected to commit themselves to Spurs following Hoddle's arrival.

Despite all the euphoria surrounding his appointment, however, Hoddle faces a major challenge. He has signed a five-year contract, and may well need that time to build a squad capable of consistently challenging Manchester United and enemies Arsenal at the top of the Premiership. His first task will be to overcome the Gunners in the FA Cup and get Spurs into the Final. Superstition persuades its fans to believe that the club will always win a trophy when the year ends in one.* Ironically, the semi-final pits Hoddle against Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger, the manager when both were at Monaco, and the man who inspired Hoddle to go into management.

Hoddle is thought to be on a contract worth £1.2 million a year, and is likely to be offered the £750,000 bonus promised to Graham for winning the FA Cup. But whether or not Hoddle can inspire Spurs to FA Cup glory this season, the real test will always be the Premiership. The club have only won the League title twice (compared with Arsenal's 11), the last time being 40 years ago.

However, the Spurs tradition demands that even if they don't win trophies, they must play with style. Hoddle the player had style in abundance; and his club managerial record is fairly good. He took unfashionable Swindon Town into the Premiership in 1993, then joined Chelsea whom he guided to the FA Cup Final in 1994 (when they lost to Manchester United). He started the revival at Chelsea after years of decline, and has also turned Southampton from relegation battlers in European aspirants.

Spurs now have their favourite son in place, but he will need to deliver quickly to avoid being crushed by the weight of unrealistic expectations.

**What Spurs have won when the year ends in one:*

1901: FA Cup

1921: FA Cup

1951: League Championship

1961: League Championship & FA Cup

1971: League Cup

1981: FA Cup

1991: FA Cup

2001: ?