A decade which started with demotion turned into one of the most successful in Fife Flyers' entire history. The rollercoaster ride began with a shock relegation from the Premier league in **Season 1990/91**, the first time Fife had ever been dumped out of the top flight. As seasons go it was a disaster as the club tried to rekindle its Czech experiment only to abandon it after the Autumn Cup. Figala was behind the bench and with the returning Rick Fera the club recruited defenceman Lubos Oslizlo and forward Jaro Korotuicka. The Autumn Cup record of: **P** 8 **W** 6 **D** 0 **L** 2 **F** 65 **A** 49 **Pts** 12 saw them miss out on the semi final round by a point to Humberside Seahawks. It wasn't a heinous start to the season but by the time Cleveland Bombers came to town to on the 2nd weekend of the league season, the Flyers had lost their opening two heavily on the road and the three Czechs were gone with Tim Coghlin on defence and winger Steve Gatzos in place as the team returned to bump and grind North American style of hockey. A week later Mike Fedorko, who had played and coached in Holland over the last few years, was behind the bench. By mid-January Chic Cottrell had replaced Fedorko who had a 50% record and just before Christmas had presided over a shambolic 19-8 shelling at Murrayfield. Just before the coaching change Coghlin and Gatzos were shipped with Paul Cain and Darcy Cahill flown in. Cahill lasted 10 games and Justin Butorac brought his whole-hearted endeavour to what was a hopeless cause. The directors were forced to publicly quash rumours of a rink closure as the team floundered at the bottom of the table finishing with the record: **P** 36 **W** 8 **D** 4 **L** 24 **F** 215 **A** 306 **Pts** 20. The crowds were resilient though with the Flyers average up a few people on last season. The relegation play-offs were just as painful and the team slipped out of the Premier League. Somewhat ironically the team won the mini Scottish League but were beaten by Ayr in the Scottish Cup semi. Fife Flames eventually broke their Wembley duck when they became British Champions with a 5-0 win over Romford. The directors pledged to back one year in Division One. This meant that the **Season 1991/92** stakes were high as former Cardiff coach Brian Kanewischer built his own team. Led by former Ayr imports Frank Morris and Richard Laplante and featuring the inspirational Cal Brown on defence. In the Autumn Cup they finished behind Durham and Whitley Bay in the group stages with a record of: **P** 8 **W** 3 **D** 1 **L** 4 **F** 48 **A** 59. Flyers added the reclassified Kel Land on defence who had been in Swindon for a couple of years and took Division One by Storm. They were pushed all the way however and with a record of **P** 36 **W** 27 **D** 3 **L** 6 **F** 383 **A** 204 **Pts** 57 they took the title ahead of Slough Jets on goal difference. The job was only partly done though as they had to navigate the playoff round. Telford and Romford from Division One were joined by relegation threatened Ayr Bruins from the Premier. After beating Ayr at Kirkcaldy there was a wobble against Telford down south but further wins set up an epic, nail biting all-or-nothing play-off showdown with Ayr Raiders who, themselves, were homeless and on the verge of extinction. Fife led by an aggregate of five in the return at the Summit Centre in Glasgow when Raiders staged a stunning fightback. The capacity crowd could barely watch as Fife held out to win by a solitary goal. Laplante set a record for most points in a game with 17 and scored 211 points on the season eclipsing the previous totals from Bud Scrutton (188), Chick Mann (185) and Dave Stoyanovich (175). The drop down a division had clearly wrankled the fanbase as despite the much more successful season on the ice the crowds dived with the average of 1750 almost 600 down on the last couple of seasons. The mini Scottish league was replaced by a five game challenge series between Flyers and Racers which saw the Flyers win the first two and drop the next three, the last 11-10 as the Racers won the Capital Foods Challenge Cup. In the Scottish Cup the Flyers lost their semi to Ayr. The Flames created history when they became the first team to retain the British Junior crown when they defeated the Durham Mosquitoes 3-2. Kanewischer wanted to continue the job in the Premier League in **Season 1992/93** but was replaced by Jim Lynch. Frank Morris returned as did Cal Brown but the team captain was lost to a career ending head injury in meaningless challenge game in Billingham. In a free weekend between the Autumn Cup finishing and the league starting he dived to block a puck and a skate fractured his skull resulting in a few days later having a blood clot removed from his brain. Ed Zawatsky was a new face who lasted the Autumn Cup campaign before returning to the ECHL. Rob Abel who iced last season for Whitley Bay moved North and won't ever forget the New Years welcome he got from Paul Hand in Edinburgh who headbutted him during a scrum. With

the injury to Brown the Flyers moved to bring Milan Figala back as cover. Bob Giffen arrived a few weeks after to help provide a steadying influence on the blueline. In the New Year the Flyers would also add another D in Darrin Bannister but then shortly afterwards Abel returned home as the Flyers with a record of: **P** 36 **W** 15 **D** 1 **L** 20 **F** 193 **A** 232 **Pts** 31 snuck in on goal difference to the playoffs in eighth spot by beating Nottingham in the penultimate game. The post season saw them lose their opening two games by double digits and Flyers lost it at the end of their game with Billingham where Lynch was suspended for comments made to ref Nicholson who had earlier thrown out Frank Morris, the heart of the team. By the time Panthers returned for the last game of the season Flyers were shattered through injuries to Bannister and Giffen and Morris had missed virtually 3 games due to suspension and they lost all 6 playoff games. The Scottish Cup weekend was staged in Kirkcaldy and the Flyers were once again eliminated in the semi, this time by the Racers. The Flames couldn't make it three in a row at Wembley as Durham got their revenge 5-2 from last season.
Having re-established the team's credentials in a rapidly changing league and with the Fife fans back in good numbers with a 45% increase in average attendance to above 2500 the club and Lynch then raised the stakes. For **Season 1993/94** he signed Doug Smail straight from the NHL, the first player to move from ''The Show'' straight into British hockey. A veteran of some 800 NHL games with Quebec, Minnesota and Ottawa, his electrifying speed and stunning skills were perfectly complemented by Mark Morrison, a former New York Ranger captured from Italian hockey. With Ryan Kummu dominating on D and Neil Smith a steady provider of points and some grit Fife started to perform and entertain as only they can. It took a few weeks for the team to get going during which time the Autumn Cup record of: **P** 6 **W** 0 **D** 2 **L** 4 **F** 25 **A** 37 **Pts** 2 saw them finish bottom of their group. In the league the Flyers offered the only real challenge to the Champion Devils until they suffered a series of stumbles in January which ended them with a runners-up record of **P** 44 **W** 27 **D** 2 **L** 15 **F** 304 **A** 192 **Pts** 56. There were a number of highlights throughout a season that surprisingly saw crowds take another downward turn with the team average dropping below 2000. Champions elect Cardiff were hosed 12-2 and there was a first ever win in the league against the Racers. Oh let's not forget Kummu sending David Longstaff head first over the boards in Kirkcaldy and Smail breaking the short-handed goals in a season record (13) against Murrayfield. In the playoffs the Flyers finished runners up to the Sheffield Steelers to eliminate the Racers and secure a long overdue return to Wembley where they were beaten by Cardiff in the semi. The Flames however were winners again, albeit jointly with Swindon as they finished 1-1 after OT. There was silverware in the shape of Flyers first ever success in the Scottish Cup tournament where they beat Paisley in the semi and Murrayfield in the final. **Season 1994/95** was wrecked by a series of injuries yet it all started positively with the return of Morrison and Kummu and the arrival of the highly touted Josh Boni and Tony Szabo who raced out of the scoring blocks in the Benson and Hedges (Autumn Cup) as the team went a perfect 8 for 8 on the way to the quarter finals where they were downed by the auld enemy Racers over two legs. In November Boni had been cut and replaced with Doug Marsden. Kummu shattered his jaw in a training accident on Christmas Eve and Morrison had to miss games due to a sciatic nerve issue. Szabo would walk out on the team the day before a trip to Cardiff but in all of this there was the opportunity for a number of the younger local skaters to increase their skillset. The dark clouds were lifted in January when Smail returned, Kummu broke his jaw for a second time and that prompted an SOS call back home from Smail to former team mate Laurie Boschman. The 34 year old center had over 1000 NHL appearances and in partnership with Smail started to destroy defences most nights as Flyers won back to back Scottish Cups with a win over Paisley and finished the league season winning six of the last seven and a four point cushion to make the playoffs in 6$^{th}$ place with a record of: **P** 44 **W** 20 **D** 4 **L** 20 **F** 271 **A** 242 **Pts** 44. The playoffs started with hopes of a Wembley return but the season ended with yet another injury twist as Morrison's broken thumb was put into plaster and despite three home wins they lost all three road games and missed out on goal difference. Attendances once again dropped with another 200 off the average to around 1750**.** The Flames won once again at Wembley. **Season 1995/96** saw the final British League season before the inception of the Ice Hockey Super League and the British National League. There was almost £0.5M spent on

improvements to the rink in the summer and as Lynch stood down as coach there was the tantalising return of the legendary Ron Plumb. Morrison and Marsden returned as did Morris after a year each with Murrayfield and Trafford. Chris Palmer moved from Murrayfield to be the top scorer. A standing ovation on his first game underlined the high regard in which Plumb was held, but it was to be a short-lived and unsuccessful homecoming. A clearly under-performing Fife scraped through the Autumn Cup qualifiers, and it was clear action had to be taken. Another who joined from Murrayfield was Paul Hand and the controversial signing would quit on the club as the Flyers were about to play the second leg of the quarter finals of the Benson and Hedges Cup against the Newcastle Warriors at Whitley, the Flyers scraped through 11-10 on aggregate. A change was made though when Plumb stepped down, Morrison stepped up and a whole new chapter began in the club's history. Mo's first game in charge was against Sheffield, live on TV in the Benson & Hedges Cup semi-finals. It was ''The Braveheart Game'' when tartan-clad Fife fans turned the rink into a mini-Hampden and roared Fife to a first leg victory 5-3 victory but they couldn't hold their nerve in the return and Sheffield made the final 9-8 on aggregate. The Flyers roster had a more British based look than most in the league and they often found it tough going against the Canadians and reclassified players. Later in the season Morrison bolstered the playoff push with the introduction of Frank Evans on D and firecracker forward Kevin St Jacques who quickly became a crowd favourite. Once again it was a late charge with seven wins from the last eight games that got them safely into the playoffs. However, after being the form team in the run in the team flattered to deceive by returning only one win and a tie in the six games to miss the last ever Wembley Finals weekend. Attendances were pretty static from last season and the Flames record breaking ninth appearance at the Wembley final ended with a 3-2 Guildford Firestars win. There was no Scottish Cup tournament run. In **Season 1996/97** Morrison began his first full season as coach but in a very different league and with new bosses. Ownership of the team passed into the hands of local businessman, Tom Muir, Tom Muir Senior, Jack Wishart and John Waring. The arena-based teams broke way to form the Super League, and those left behind made the most of life in regionalised leagues. Taking control Mr Muir observed: "There are too many people in Kirkcaldy who love ice hockey for there not to be a team". He was right as crowds rose encouragingly back over 2100 on average as Morrison steered a rookie side to a Northern Premier League and Scottish League double. The 14 consecutive wins from Ron Plumbs 80's side was equalled and they remained unbeaten at home for five months. Russ Parent came on board to bolster the blueline as Morris and Morrison lead the way up front. Their record of **P** 36 **W** 33 **D** 0 **L** 3 **F** 315 **A** 130 **Pts** 66 saw them comfortable league winners ahead of Paisley who won the Scottish Cup against the Flyers and took the only point they dropped in the playoffs from them. They went through to the British Championship final against the short lived "Dream Team", Swindon Ice Lords who had Todd Dutiaume amongst their 10 imports, at the MEN Arena in Manchester. A 1000 strong Fife support put many Super League followings to shame as almost inevitably the Flyers lost 5-0. North and south reunited for the **Season 1997/98** under the banner of the British National League. There were still some disagreements amongst clubs about what constituted an import but Fife with Morrison, Morris and new addition on D Bill Moody, who would go on to win the Mirror of Merit that season, were less worried than most about this as their prodigious local talent started to come to the fore. Davie Smith, Steven King and John Haig all put up numbers that some imports in the league couldn't match. The later two along with goalkeeper Bernie McCrone made the British All-Star team and Morrison won coach of the year. The format of the new set up saw a North and South conference with Flyers topping the Northern Premier League ahead of Paisley. The teams then played a National league where Fife finished 6$^{th}$, well behind the powerhouse team that season the Guildford Flames. In the middle of the season was the Christmas Cup, again based on a North and South grouping, although last time I looked Telford was hardly North of very much. The Flyers finished a couple of points behind Telford who went on to beat the South winners the Flames in the Final. The Benson and Hedges Cup at the season start did not feature the Flyers who instead played in the Autumn Trophy finishing runners up to Kingston Hawks. In the Championship playoffs the Flyers marched through to the "Wembley style" finals in Hull by

toping their group ahead of Telford. They met Kingston Hawks and after an even first two periods with the scores tied 3-3 the Hawks soared their way to the final with a 4-0 third period. There was a wee dip in crowds but the average remained above 2000 for the Flyers which was the best in the National league and better than Super League sides Bracknell and Basingstoke. Paisley were beaten 5-1 in the Scottish Cup final. In **Season 1998/99** Flyers celebrated their Diamond Jubilee in spectacular style. The league increased import numbers to six per team and Fife somewhat reluctantly followed the crowd. Czech goalie Frank Neckar and Justin Bekkering on defence joined returnees Morris, Morrison, Moody for the start of the season. Fife were involved in the Benson and Hedges Cup and finished in second spot in their BNL group. This then led to a "Challenge Round" which saw the Super League teams match up against the BNL teams based upon where they finished in the previous group stage. What a complete waste of time, the eight Super League teams scored a combined 152 goals from the home and away ties for the loss of just 18! Cardiff put 22 past Fife without reply. What was the point? The answer was the Benson and Hedges Plate for all those knocked out in the "Challenge Round", no points for identifying the teams involved. Peterborough were beaten in the quarter final and the semi against Telford Tigers would be decided in a penalty shootout after the teams were level on aggregate after two legs. Jeff Sobb was added to the line-up in early November as Fife suffered a slow start to what was just now a single National league competition. The flamboyant Neckar was cut before Christmas and the Flyers didn't progress in the Christmas Cup, finishing third in their group. Steve Brown who had previously played in the ISL with Bracknell came on board and their best form of the season was reserved yet again for the run in. The up-turn coincided with the arrival of two players from Telford, Todd Dutiaume and John Coyle. The Flyers took off and were now backstopped by the kids in goal. Joe Watkins aged 19 and Stephen Murphy aged 16 who helped Flyers win the Scottish Cup in a game at Kirkcaldy in front of 3000 fans, the biggest attendance that season in Scotland. It was a 5$^{th}$ place finish in the league and in their playoff group, which included the Champion Slough Jets, the Flyers second place finish saw them make a return to the Finals in Hull. Clearly the underdogs going into the weekend and having to overcome the loss of Morrison who had a broken ankle the Flyers upset all the odds. They were never behind against Guildford in the semi and hung on to win 4-3 to set up a winner take all with the seemingly unbeatable Slough Jets. If you were to script a movie then this one would probably have all the drama you'd expect from a Hollywood portrayal of a sporting final. Flyers came tearing out of the blocks in the first period and were 4-1 up. They maintained that advantage after two period leading 5-2. Jets got a couple of quick goas in the third period and the Flyers nerves were shredded. They tied the game with just over five minutes to go. Next goal wins. It didn't arrive in regulation nor did it in overtime. Sudden death penalty shots would decide the outcome and up stepped John Coyle to coolly deliver the winning goal and with Joe Watkins denying Derek Higdon Fife were British Champions. A couple of days later 1200 or so fans turned up at Fife Ice Arena for the Championship party. Flyers once again had the best attendance in the BNL but it was now down to around 1900 on average. Strangely it would continue to fall to around 1600 in **Season 1999/2000** which saw Morrison assemble arguably one of the greatest ever Fife teams and steer it to an incredible Grand Slam: the National League, Championship play-off crown, NTL Cup and a fifth Scottish Cup. Morrison returned with Morris and Dutiaume and added Ted Russell on defence from Peterborough and Russell Monteith in his first season outside of North America. The chemistry in the team was almost instantaneous and that appeared to be the deciding factor over other challengers such as Stan Marple's Guildford Flames and Randy Smith's often out of control Peterborough Pirates. The Benson and Hedges competition was even more convoluted than the previous season. Suffice to say the Flyers lost to Basingstoke in the Plate semi. In the league the Flyers were chased all the way by Guilford and by the narrowest margin of two points from a couple of OT losses the Flyers won the title. They were helped along the way by the record breaking Russell Monteith who shattered the club record for powerplay goals with 38 on the season. Bill Moody re-joined the team early in the New Year and by that time the Flyers had added the Christmas Cup to the trophy cabinet when they beat Basingstoke 6-5 on aggregate. Peterborough remained dangerous opponents but

Fife topped their playoff group to go through to meet Solihull in the semi. Fife won both legs to meet the Bison in a best of five series which was over in quick fashion. A 6-3 win in Kirkcaldy in game one was followed by a crucial 2-1 win on the road the following night. The following Friday night Fife rounded off their season in Kirkcaldy with a 2-1 win to clinch the trophy with Steven King playing with a double broken jaw. Morrison won a post war equalling third Coach of the Year, Murphy cleaned up in all the categories in his rookie year and John Haig once again topped the list of British points scorers.