

# Hearts throw away advantage against Highlanders



John McGlynn's reign at Tynecastle remained unbeaten following a share of the spoils with Inverness yesterday. But the natives were far from impressed with the overall Hearts performance. Following a below par display in last weekend's 1-1 draw at Easter Road, many Jambos will have been expecting more of a response from their side. The home team found themselves two goals up, in addition to facing ten men, after an Arvydas Novikovas strike and a controversial John Sutton penalty. Referee Bobby Madden had infuriated Inverness during the first period, but it would be the home side who felt aggrieved by the official's decision making in the second half. Hearts threw away their advantage, succumbing to a last gasp equaliser from teenager Conor Pepper, after another baffling penalty decision allowed the Highlanders back into the match. Although the referee played his part, ultimately the display from McGlynn's men was not good enough.

Hearts started the game with three changes from last week's Edinburgh derby. David Templeton's two match ban for kicking out at James McPake meant Novikovas was brought in. Mehdi Taouil replaced Scott Robinson, appearing to indicate that McGlynn was looking for more guile in the middle of the park. Danny Grainger, who missed the start of the season through suspension, returned to the starting line-up in place of young Kevin McHattie. Although it was a pleasing sight for the Gorgie faithful to see one of their cup heroes back in the team, it was an odd decision by the manager after his comments earlier in the week. McGlynn had suggested just days before that McHattie would continue at left back for the time being.

The match began with Hearts on the front foot, moving the ball

around well. But it was Inverness who carved out the better opportunities early on. With four minutes played Andrew Shinnie flashed a right-foot effort narrowly wide of Jamie MacDonald's post from just inside the box, although the former Rangers player didn't catch his effort cleanly. His brother, Graeme Shinnie, was next to try his luck, sending a left foot effort well wide of goal.

Hearts were getting plenty of the ball and looked comfortable in possession, without looking incisive in the final third. McGlynn persisted with Australian Ryan McGowan in attacking midfield, a position which clearly doesn't suit the naturally defensive player. The decision seemed ever more strange with Mehdi Taouil in the team, a more attacking player who was deployed in a deeper role against Caley. Despite the odd midfield dynamic, it was Hearts who opened the scoring. Skipper Marius Zaliukas broke from defence and picked out Andrew Driver with a precise pass using the outside of his right boot. Driver turned and moved towards goal, before picking out Darren Barr on the edge of the box. As the Inverness defence were drawn towards the former Falkirk man, he laid the ball into the path of the onrushing Novikovas, who arrived from the right wing to perfectly slot a left foot shot past Ryan Esson.

The goal appeared to settle the home side, who started to grow in confidence. Young full back Callum Paterson began supporting Novikovas, often overlapping the Lithuanian. McGlynn's men were keeping the ball on the ground and passing it well, without threatening the Inverness goal. Referee Madden flashed a couple of yellow cards after half an hour, firstly to Andrew Shinnie for scything down Taouil and then to Darren Barr for an innocuous challenge on Shane Sutherland. But the first real talking point for the referee came in the 39th minute. Mehdi Taouil sent a free kick into the Inverness box, which was punched away by Ryan Esson. Although the goalkeeper appeared to catch Zaliukas, there was no claim for

a foul. But Madden stunned both sets of players when he pointed to the spot, appearing to indicate that Simon King had been shirt pulling. King was booked by the referee before John Sutton stepped up to convert the penalty, sending Esson the wrong way as he tucked the ball neatly into the bottom left hand corner of the net.

Zaliukas, clearly hurt by the collision with the Caley goalkeeper, went off for treatment, but failed to recover fully and was replaced by Robinson as the first half came to a close. Darren Barr moved into defence and Robinson slotted straight into midfield, but the concern for Hearts will be that the Lithuanian skipper might now miss the clash with Liverpool on Thursday evening. And it wasn't just Hearts who would lose their captain before the half was finished. Madden once again drew the wrath of the Inverness players and backroom staff as he reduced the Highlanders to ten men. Richie Foran lunged recklessly at Ryan McGowan, catching the Australian as he skipped past him. It was careless, although many referees would have settled with a yellow card. Foran received no such sympathy though as Madden flashed a straight red card at the striker. This brought the half to an end, with Terry Butcher fuming on the sidelines.

Hearts should have seen the game out from this point, two goals to the good and with a numerical advantage. They started the half reasonably well, Andrew Driver threatening with a couple of shots at Esson's goal. The first effort – just two minutes after the restart – was blocked, before he tried his luck from range, flashing a right footed drive wide of the target three minutes later. Jamie MacDonald was forced into a rare save at his near post, denying Billy McKay as Inverness threatened on the counter attack. But the home side began to look nervous, epitomised by MacDonald's lack of concentration when he allowed a Paterson pass back to slip under his foot. The goalkeeper managed to recover the situation, but was picking the ball out of the net a little over two minutes

later. Madden was again at the centre of the incident, this time drawing the disapproval of the home support as he awarded a penalty to Inverness. Callum Paterson was the player penalised for an apparent trip on Graeme Shinnie, however there appeared to be no contact between the players. The young Hearts right back was booked, before Andrew Shinnie stepped up to fire home the penalty, although Jamie MacDonald managed to get a strong left hand to it, narrowly failing to divert the ball wide.

The goal galvanised the Inverness team, who began to play with more belief. At the same time the home fans grew increasingly frustrated as the Hearts side looked content to sit on their lead. Chances were at a premium, although Ryan McGowan twice had a sight at goal. Paterson set up the first opportunity after a fantastic run, but McGowan was thwarted by a Garry Warren's last ditch block. The Australian's next opportunity came from a well executed lob pass by Scott Robinson, who scooped the ball over the Inverness defence before McGowan finished poorly, volleying the ball harmlessly wide.

Inverness appeared content to let Hearts retain possession, waiting patiently for their chance to snatch a share of the spoils. Eventually, their patience paid off. The home side's lack of desire to kill their opponent's off came back to haunt them in the closing minutes. They received a warning shot in the 91st minute, as Graeme Shinnie fired a low cross into the danger area, forcing Danny Grainger to hook the ball over his own crossbar. The hosts failed to heed the warning.

With the last kick of the game young substitute Conor Pepper, who replaced Andrew Shinnie with ten minutes remaining, grabbed the equaliser. A scramble in the box ended with Graeme Shinnie drilling the ball across the goalmouth, leaving Pepper with the simple task of forcing the ball into the net from just a few yards out. Hearts didn't even have the chance to respond, as the final whistle blew almost immediately after – greeted with boos from the stands. Both sets of fans had reason to

feel the referee made mistakes that cost their team. But ultimately for Hearts the most disappointing factor was the failure to see out a match in which they appeared almost home and dry. Up next for McGlynn is the small task of facing Liverpool on Thursday night, a game in which they will need to show vast improvement to have even the slightest chance of causing an upset.