

Ross County 2 Hearts of Midlothian 1

It was heartbreak in the Highlands for Hearts as Gary Locke's team snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. Leading 1-0 thanks to a Calum Paterson goal, it looked like all three points were destined for Gorgie Road and a vital win. However, fate wore the dark blue strip of Ross County who equalised with just three minutes to go before the roof fell in on Hearts in injury time when the home side snatched the winner.

There was one change to the Hearts team that lost 3-1 to Celtic at Tynecastle seven days ago – Billy King making way for David Smith.

The home side dominated the early exchanges with Carey causing Hearts Dylan McGowan problems on the right. Brittain then evaded the attentions of Jamie Hamill and Danny Wilson but his ambitious long range effort went wide of goal. However, despite their territorial dominance, County were shocked to find themselves a goal behind midway through the first half. Kevin McHattie's first delivery into the County penalty box was sent back to the young defender whose second cross was met by Calum Paterson who directed the ball past home keeper Brown to put Hearts a goal ahead.

The visiting support, estimated as much as 800, were already as vociferous as ever but Paterson's goal raised the decibel level even higher. Paterson had another chance after half an hour but his effort from ten yards went wide. County, however, continued to press with former Hibernian Ivan Sproule causing Hearts problems with his pace. Half-time arrived with Gary Locke's youngsters one goal to the good.

There were chances for both sides after the break with Hearts Jason Holt orchestrating things in the middle of the park. It

was Holt who had a couple of chances to double Hearts lead but he couldn't find a way past keeper Brown while Calum Paterson passed up a golden chance to all but secure victory for the visitors but, again, his effort went wide. As so often happens, missed chances cost dear and thus Ross County made Hearts pay with just three minutes left when substitute De Leeuw headed a cross beyond the despairing reach of Hearts keeper Jamie MacDonald to level the scores.

If the huge travelling support felt frustrated at losing two valuable points, they were in despair in injury time when home skipper Brittain headed home for an unlikely winner.

With St. Mirren losing at Easter Road, Hearts passed up a golden opportunity to reduce the deficit at the bottom of the SPFL to six points – a fact not lost on Gary Locke.

"It's a sore one" the Hearts manager said after the game, "We've let two crosses into our box and we've not defended them. At 1-0 I felt we were comfortable. But we can't afford to feel sorry for ourselves. We just have to pick ourselves up again for the visit of Queen of the South on Wednesday."

A bitter pill for these Hearts youngsters to swallow after going so close to victory. The only thing to take from the afternoon was the fact Hearts lost no further ground to St. Mirren whose visit to Tynecastle in a fortnight has all the makings of a tense occasion.

Ross County: Brown, Kovacevic, Gordon, Kettlewell, Boyd, Sproule, Brittain, Quinn, Ross, McLean, Carey.

Hearts: MacDonald; McGowan, McKay, Wilson, McHattie; Holt, Robinson, Hamill; Smith, Paterson, Walker

Referee: Euan Norris

Att: 4,059

Top man: Jamie Hamill – it's just a pity Hearts don't have

other players with the former Killie man's experience.