

Football – Motherwell 2 Hearts of Midlothian 1

SPFL, Saturday 19 October 2013 – Fir Park

Hearts miserable run in the SPFL continued in deepest Lanarkshire on Saturday when Gary Locke's side slipped to their fifth defeat in their last six league games. Despite being under the cosh for much of the game, hopes were high the Jambos would record their first victory in the league away from Tynecastle this season when Ryan Stevenson gave the visitors the lead against the run of play on the hour mark. However, the Steelmen roared back with two goals to snatch victory and leave the out of luck Maroons marooned at the bottom of the SPFL.

The injured Kevin McHattie – so impressive in recent weeks – succumbed to injury and was replaced by Brad McKay who took a central defensive role with Jordan McGhee going to full back. Locke also brought in Callum Tapping for Scott Robinson and David Smith for Jason Holt.

Motherwell had former Hearts striker John Sutton in their starting line-up and it was he who almost opened the scoring after just three minutes but he couldn't direct his header on target.

Although the home side had most of the possession, there were few clear cut chances in a scrappy first half. Ten minutes before half time Motherwell's Hammell delivered a dangerous cross which seemed to clip Danny Wilson's hand in the penalty box. Amidst loud claims from the home support for a penalty, Vigurs fired in an effort which was too high to trouble Hearts keeper Jamie MacDonald.

It was Vigurs who threatened again with a couple of shots just before the interval but Jamie Mac was equal to his efforts –

although the Hearts goalie wasn't impressed by young Jordan McGhee giving away possession for the latter attempt. That said, it was Hearts who really should have gone in a goal ahead at half-time. Jamie Walker found space in the Motherwell penalty box and saw his effort saved by Well keeper Nielsen while David Smith's follow-up took a deflection before spinning over the bar. The first half, therefore, ended goalless.

The home team began the second half camped in the Hearts half. Sutton had a header superbly saved by MacDonald before Callum Tapping prevented another header by Hutchinson flying into the net. Soon after, MacDonald was again the Hearts hero when he saved well from Lasley as the home side began to turn the screw. The Jambos weren't helped by Callum Paterson's forced withdrawal due to injury and he was replaced by Scott Robinson after 54 minutes – the midfielder having been quite vocal two weeks ago about his disappointment on being taken off in the defeat by St. Mirren. However, Hearts then displayed some of the fight which has been characteristic of this young team. Skipper Danny Wilson dispossessed Hutchinson and passed to Ryan Stevenson. The former Ayr United and Ipswich player forced his way into the penalty box but his shot at goal was saved well by Nielsen.

Moments later, Hearts somewhat unexpectedly took the lead. The hard-working Stevenson drove into the Motherwell penalty box before hitting a low shot past Nielsen and into the net, much to the delight of yet another sizeable travelling support. Their joy, however, was short-lived. Motherwell substitute Moore, who had been on the field for barely a minute, fired in a superb volley from 20 yards to draw parity.

It was all Motherwell now and, sensing blood, they somewhat inevitably scored the winner with less than eight minutes to go. Hutchinson was the first to react to a Motherwell corner and his header was beyond the reach of Jamie MacDonald – and Hearts were sunk.

So another fruitless afternoon for Hearts and the frustration for the Maroons was compounded by the news that both Kilmarnock and St. Mirren won leaving Gary Locke's side somewhat cut adrift at the bottom of the league. Hearts bright start to the season, when they had clawed back half the 15 point deficit imposed on them following administration suffered by the club in the summer is now fast becoming a fading memory. The Gorgie Boys have not won a league game since defeating Aberdeen at Tynecastle in August and after coming within nine points of 11th placed St. Mirren in recent weeks, the gap at the bottom of the SPFL is now 13 points – just two better off than Hearts were at the start of the season.

There is, of course, still a long way to go. Back in August I felt that if Hearts were nine points behind the 11th placed team at New Year they would still have a fighting chance of avoiding relegation. Nothing has changed my view but the longer this winless run continues the more unlikely this scenario appears.

Hearts badly need a win soon and to eradicate the minus points total – before it becomes too late.

Motherwell: Nielsen, Hammell, Ramsden, Hutchinson, McManus, Sutton, Vigurs, Lasley, Francis-Angol, Carswell, Anier

Hearts: MacDonald; McGowan, McKay, Wilson, McGhee, Paterson, Tapping, Hamill, Smith, Stevenson, Walker.

Referee: Brian Colvin

Att: 5,350

Top man: Keeper Jamie MacDonald was back to top form and he will surely prove to be a crucial factor in Hearts fight to avoid relegation.