

Heart of Midlothian 0 St Mirren 2

☒ SPFL, Saturday 5 October 2013 – Tynecastle Stadium

It was a game billed as the proverbial six-pointer. Bottom of the table Hearts, still operating in negative points mode thanks to the club going into administration in June – although this seems an age ago – against the team immediately above them, albeit St. Mirren were nine points ahead going into Saturday's SPFL clash at Tynecastle. Sadly for those associated with the famous Heart of Midlothian the result was the one they feared – a defeat which leaves the Jambos an agonising 12 points behind the Paisley Buddies.

Hearts manager Gary Locke brought back Ryan Stevenson, now fully recovered from the injury he sustained against Hibernian at the beginning of the season. 'Stevo' replaced the luckless David Smith in attack alongside Callum Paterson.

Buoyed by another large and vociferous support, the Maroons started the game well enough although Dylan McGowan caused hearts to flutter when he was short with a passback after just three minutes. Thankfully, keeper Jamie MacDonald was alert to the danger but the incident was a prelude to an afternoon of uncertainty from the Australian defender.

Hearts skipper Danny Wilson almost opened the scoring moments later but his header was pushed over the bar by Saints keeper Dilo. Then it was Callum Paterson's turn to put pressure on the visiting defence when he ran through on goal but his shot on goal was blocked by Dilo. Midway through the first half, the tireless Scott Robinson again ran at the Saints defence before his pass found Stevenson. However, the angle was too tight for the former Ayr United man and his shot at goal went wide. Stevenson's next effort on goal was closer but still

only hit the side net. Jamie Walker then went down in the penalty box and the inevitable claims for a penalty from the Tynecastle hordes ensued. Referee Craig Thomson immediately sprinted into the penalty area – and promptly booked the Hearts youngster for diving.

If I'm giving the impression it was all one-way traffic towards the St. Mirren goal, this wasn't the case. The Buddies created several openings but seemed to lack a cutting edge in front of goal. McGowan and McLean both had efforts on goal, the latter from a free kick which Hearts keeper MacDonald pushed away. Callum Paterson then had a chance from inside the penalty area but his effort was high and wide. It was a missed opportunity he soon regretted as St. Mirren took the lead a couple of minutes before half time. Newton's deep cross was met by the unmarked McGinn who headed the ball past MacDonald to give the visitors a 1-0 lead at half time. The consensus of opinion, certainly in Section D of the Wheatfield Stand, was the goal had been coming.

Gary Locke replaced Robinson with Billy King at the start of the second half but the Paisley Saints knew the pressure was on their hosts to take the game to them and they seemed quite content to waste as much time as they could.

Ten minutes into the second half came the moment the game finally ran away from Hearts reach. Fine work from Ryan Stevenson on the right set the ball up perfectly for Callum Paterson to strike home the equaliser. Sadly, the young striker leant back when hitting the ball from ten yards out and the ball soared into the Roseburn Stand, much to the delight of the visiting support. They were ecstatic seconds later when, from the resultant goal kick, St. Mirren went up the park. Hearts keeper Jamie MacDonald couldn't collect a cross ball allowing McGowan to stroke the ball home to make it 2-0 to the visitors.

Hearts brought on Callum Tapping and Dale Carrick but it was

to no avail. The second goal killed the game stone dead, a fact the players and indeed the despairing home support seemed to realise.

St. Mirren saw out the game comfortably enough and, it has to be said, fully deserved their victory. Their experience showed throughout the afternoon and the reaction of those in black and white at the end of the game told its own story. Saints are now 12 points ahead of Hearts and that's a substantial gap even at this relatively early stage of the season.

What was particularly worrying for this reporter was not so much the result, gut-wrenching as it was, but the fact the Hearts team looked like it had ran out of gas. It's been a tough start to the season for the youngsters and having such a small squad has meant manager Gary Locke has had little option but to play much the same team week in, week out. After a bright opening, Hearts faded badly and, Paterson's chance apart, never looked like scoring.

Locke admitted he was disappointed with the performance of the team:-"It's a reminder of how tough a challenge it is that we're facing. I'm not going to sit here and say we played well, because we didn't. That's the first time I can say that this season, but we have to put it behind us now. At 1-0, we had a great chance to equalise, didn't take it, and they went up the park instead and scored. The boys are down in there, but they knew it was never going to be easy this season".

"We can't feel sorry for ourselves, we've still nearly halved our points deficit, but we weren't good enough on the day and that's why we lost, it's as simple as that".

The Hearts fans departed Tynecastle on a beautifully sunny autumn afternoon in rather a sombre mood. There was no rendition of 'We are the Hearts and We're Staying Up' at the end and there seemed almost an acceptance that their young team may find the 15 point deficit imposed on them this season too much of a handicap to overcome. A look at the league table

shows Hearts are ten points behind Kilmarnock with three quarters of the season still to be played. However, in recent weeks Hearts have thrown away three points in Dingwall, were held to a goalless draw at home by Dundee United and, today, were found rather wanting by a much more experienced St. Mirren team.

Sadly, for those of the maroon persuasion, there's little to indicate their team will catch Kilmarnock, another experienced team, any time soon.

Hearts: MacDonald; McGhee, McGowan, Wilson, McHattie; Robinson, Holt, Hamill, Stevenson, Paterson, Walker.

St Mirren: Dilo, McGregor, Goodwin, P. McGowan, Thompson, Newton, Van Zanten, McGinn, Mair, McLean, Kelly.

Referee: Craig Thomson

Att: 14,769

Top man: Jamie Walker – although booked for diving in the first half, his trickery and eagerness to run at the defence caused St. Mirren problems all afternoon.