

Kilmarnock 2 Heart of Midlothian 0

SPFL, Saturday 26 October 2013 – Rugby Park

Back in August, Hearts began the season with a 15 point deficit, the 'punishment' imposed by the Scottish Professional Football League for the club entering administration in June. Despite an opening day defeat by St. Johnstone, there was a vibrancy and optimism that Hearts could overcome the odds, a feeling enhanced with victories over Hibernian and Aberdeen. Despite this early surge, 11 games into the season, Hearts are back at being 15 points behind the team immediately above them in the league and the feeling that this young team might not perform the great escape widely predicted when the season was in its infancy is growing akin to a fungus in the main stand at Tynecastle.

In darkest Ayrshire on a miserable Saturday afternoon, Hearts fell to yet another defeat on the road. Killie striker Kris Boyd, now back at Rugby Park after sojourns which took him to Rangers and Middlesbrough amongst others, proved to be the thorn in the Hearts side with two goals to earn an important victory for the home side, one which places them 16 points ahead of the Maroons.

Hearts manager Gary Locke very much has one hand tied behind his back when attempting to freshen up his team but he still managed a couple of changes from the side that lost narrowly at Motherwell last week, with David Smith and Scott Robinson replacing Callum Paterson and Dylan McGowan who were on the substitutes' bench.

Hearts began brightly and in the opening minutes Ryan Stevenson curled in an effort which looked a goal all the way

until Killie keeper Samson pulled off a fine save. Then Danny Wilson headed Kevin McHattie's corner wide and at this stage Hearts seemed the likelier of the two teams to open the scoring. Inevitably, when Hearts supporters get that feeling, the opposite occurs and Killie duly went ahead as a long ball from defence found Boyd who skipped past Jordan McGhee before shooting past Jamie MacDonald to put the home side a goal ahead after 16 minutes.

If that was a cruel blow for the young visitors, there was another soon after when one of Hearts more experienced players, Ryan Stevenson, was injured in a collision with former Hearts defender Darren Barr and had to be replaced by Callum Paterson. Barr himself had to leave the field soon after following a head knock and the Hearts support, fondly recalling Barr opening the scoring for the Maroons in the 2012 Scottish Cup final demolition of Hibernian, gave the former Jambo a warm round of applause as he left the field after a delay of several minutes.

Callum Paterson then missed a glorious chance to level the score when he completely missed the ball when it seemed all he had to do was connect to score. The frustration among the Hearts support was evident when half-time arrived with their team a goal behind following another case of 'what could have been'.

Early in the second half, Jamie Walker set off on one of those runs for which he has become accustomed but the unfortunate Paterson mistimed his jump when attempting to meet Walker's cross and another chance was gone.

On 60 minutes, Hearts were caught flat-footed again when another long ball was missed by Brad McKay allowing Boyd to run in on goal before chipping MacDonald to double the home side's lead.

Despite the best efforts of Jamie Walker, Hearts never really looked like getting back into the game and, rather alarmingly,

there was almost an acceptance of yet another defeat – their sixth in the last seven league games.

Hearts are on the road again on Wednesday evening, albeit it's the short trip across Edinburgh to meet Hibernian in the quarter finals of the League Cup. Hearts supporters, yet again, have sold out their allocation for this game in double quick time and they will be at Easter Road in their thousands. Important as this game is – and getting to the semi-finals will be hugely beneficial in financial terms for the club – one may suspect Gary Locke would gladly swap a win on Wednesday for much-needed progress in the league.

The optimist might say Hearts are no worse off than they were when the season began. The realist might say Hearts really needed to have made inroads into the 15 point deduction long before now. There is no doubt Hearts have some talented youngsters with Jamie Walker in particular looking like he is destined for big things. However, the more this winless run continues, the more confidence – a crucial thing in football – will be in short supply.

On a weekend when the clocks went back one hour, anguished Hearts fans may well be wishing they could turn the clock back two months...

Kilmarnock: Samson, Tesselaar, Irvine, Barr, Nicholson, Boyd, Johnston, Clohessy, Gardyne, O'Hara, Pascali.

Hearts: MacDonald; McGhee, McKay, Wilson, McHattie, Hamill, Tapping, Smith, Robinson, Walker; Stevenson

Att: 5,090

Referee: Kevin Clancy

Top man: Yet again, Hearts goalkeeper Jamie MacDonald.