

Heart of Midlothian 0 St Johnstone 2

SPFL, Saturday 2 November 2013 – Tynecastle

After the high of their League Cup quarter final victory over Hibernian at Easter Road on Wednesday evening, Gary Locke's young Hearts came down to earth with something of a thud on Saturday as their miserable league form continued with a defeat from St. Johnstone at Tynecastle. In truth, Hearts have been at rock bottom since the beginning of the season as far as the league is concerned and it's becoming increasingly likely the Maroons will be spending next season in the Scottish Championship.

On a miserable, dank afternoon in Gorgie, goals in either half from Nigel Hasselbaink and Stevie May condemned Hearts to an eighth defeat in nine league games and it's difficult to see how this team, bereft of ideas in the final third of the field, can arrest this slump anytime soon.

Yet Hearts, fielding the same team that produced a backs-to-the wall yet heroic performance at Easter Road during the week, started the game against the Perth Saints in a sprightly manner, the impetus of that derby victory seemingly carrying over to the challenge of SPFL survival.

Only three minutes had gone when Jamie Walker cut inside from the left before firing in a fierce shot that shaved the post – as so often this season for Hearts, a case of so near, yet so far.

Walker then set up Jason Holt but the youngster, who has been attracting the attention of Nottingham Forest, saw his left foot shot sail over the bar. St. Johnstone then produced their first real chance of the game when Hearts keeper Jamie MacDonald saved superbly from Hasselbaink. Hearts still looked

threatening on the break, though, with Walker and Stevenson causing problems for the Perth side's rear-guard.

Somewhat inevitably, Hearts bright start was negated when the visitors took the lead just before the half hour mark. Millar's cross spun off home defender Kevin McHattie and Hasselbaink was first to reach the ball with a header past MacDonald. 1-0 to St. Johnstone to leave the always vociferous home support with that déjà vu feeling.

Stevenson and Jordan McGhee then had chances to draw parity before the ever-dangerous Hasselbaink found himself completely unmarked in the Hearts penalty box only to send his header over the bar. 1-0 to the Perth Saints at half time.

The second half didn't take long to see the game run away from a tiring Hearts side. Garry MacDonald had an early shot well saved by his Hearts namesake before having a second effort moments later which again was blocked by the Hearts custodian – only for May to pick up the chance and curl a fine effort into the top corner to double Saints lead after just 52 minutes.

Hasselbaink had another chance ten minutes later as a confident St. Johnstone side threatened every time they came forward. Hearts, to excuse the pun, looked disheartened, with only substitute Dale Carrick producing an effort of any note 13 minutes from the end with an effort that ended up in the rapidly emptying stand.

Losing a second goal so early in the second half seemed to knock the stuffing out of a Hearts side that had begun the game so well. The only smidgeon of good news after the game came when it was announced that St. Mirren – the team immediately above Hearts in the league table – had seen their two goal lead over Ross County nullified when their game was abandoned in the second half due to a waterlogged pitch. However, this was very much in the clutching at straws variety.

Gary Lock cut a frustrated figure after the game. "The second

half performance wasn't good enough" said the Hearts chief. "We defended badly for their second goal and that killed the game. I keep saying this but we're going to have to learn quickly. This was a bad defeat."

The mind games that Hearts assistant manager Billy Brown played to good effect before the League Cup win at Easter Road may well need to be used with increasing frequency. Hearts head to high-flying Aberdeen next Saturday and few will give the young Maroons any chance. However, if the take on Hearts fate is that they accept which division they will be playing in next season, then perhaps the pressure will be taken off the young lads and they can relax and play more care-free football.

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

St Johnstone: Mannus, Miller, Mackay, Scobbie, Easton, Davidson, Millar, MacDonald, Wotherspoon, May, Hasselbaink

Referee: Bobby Madden

Att: 13,175

Top man: I find using the cut and paste facility quite a useful tool when writing these match reports – Hearts keeper Jamie MacDonald was, yet again, outstanding. A call-up to the Scotland squad surely beckons.