

Heart of Midlothian 2 Ross County 2

☒ SPFL, Saturday 23 November 2013 – Tynecastle Stadium

Ahead of Hearts SPFL game with Ross County on Saturday, [I wrote on these pages](#) that, given the tendency for late comebacks in this fixture, fans would be advised to stay until the end in case they missed something. And so it proved at Tynecastle on Saturday as Hearts rescued a point against ten men County with a goal a minute from time to salvage a 2-2 draw.

Buoyed by their fine 3-1 win at Aberdeen a fortnight ago, Hearts were full of confidence going into this game with Callum Tapping, in for the injured Jason Holt, being the only change from that team. This confidence was clearly evident in the early stages as the home side dominated with some neat passing moves although, as has been the case this season, the end result seemed to fall down somewhat in the final third of the field with County keeper Mark Brown, once of Hibernian as some of the Hearts fans were keen to point out, not having too much to do.

And, again as has been the case for many games this season, Hearts decent start was undone by slack defensive play. Midway through the first half and with the home side looking comfortable, there seemed little danger as Jamie Hamill and Callum Tapping both went to collect the ball in the middle of the Hearts half. However, neither played seemed to know each other's thoughts and Tapping's decision to pass the ball back to keeper Jamie MacDonald ended in despair for the home side as County's Carey intercepted before slotting the ball beyond MacDonald with ease to put the Dingwall side ahead against the run of play.

Thankfully for the home support, parity was restored just four

minutes later. Hearts seemed to have difficulty taking corners in front of the Wheatfield Stand with a mound of sand in the corner area resulting in a couple of poor efforts from Scott Robinson and Jamie Walker which brought some derision from the home support. When Walker's next corner trundled over, the howls became louder but they soon changed to howls of joy when the ball eventually found its way to Callum Paterson who hit a superb half volley past keeper Brown to level the scores at 1-1.

Ross County's overly physical approach, particularly on Jamie Walker, left a bad taste in the mouth and it was disappointing to see a team's main objective as stopping their opponents from playing. Half-time arrived with the teams level at 1-1.

If Hearts manager Gary Locke had told his defenders at the interval to tighten things up he must have been close to tearing his hair out just four minutes into the second half. The home defence were all over the place as County stormed forward and indecision by Jamie MacDonald meant Hearts couldn't clear their lines with the result the ball was squared across goal for De Leeuw to fire home to put the visitors back in front.

Hearts tried to rally but the heads were down and the atmosphere at Tynecastle strangely muted. That was until the 63rd minute when County's sometimes brutal approach finally paid its price when club captain Brittain received a second yellow card for yet another clumsy challenge on Walker and the Highlanders were reduced to ten men. This invigorated Hearts and they charged forward in search of the equaliser. Just when it seemed they would end the day frustrated, Hearts scrambled a much deserved equaliser a minute from time when skipper Danny Wilson powered a header home although it seemed initially that Ryan Stevenson had got the final touch. It mattered not who scored as Hearts gained what could be a valuable point. Indeed, they may well have claimed all three when Callum Paterson's strike on goal seconds later crashed

off the crossbar – victory would have been no more than the home side deserved.

When the dust had settled after a fiercely bruising encounter, Hearts point moved them to minus three in the league table and saw them inch closer to Kilmarnock, who lost at home to Motherwell. The gap at the bottom is now 12 points.

If this young Hearts team can master the art of grinding out victories then all is not lost. Victory at Dundee United in a fortnight – a tough ask, admittedly – would finally see the 15 point deficit wiped out. After that, who knows...?

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

Ross County: Brown, Kettlewell, Boyd, Micic, Brittain, Quinn, De Leeuw, Glen, Luckassen, McLean, Carey.

Referee: Crawford Allan

Top man: The hard-working and always dangerous Callum Paterson