

Heart of Midlothian 0 Inverness Caledonian Thistle 2



SPFL, Saturday 14 December 2013 – Tynecastle

Hearts' hopes of producing the great escape by clawing back their 15 point deduction imposed at the beginning of the season and thereby avoiding demotion look increasingly forlorn after another defeat in the SPFL this weekend.

Those Hearts supporters looking to escape the thronging masses of the Edinburgh public doing Christmas shopping were, instead, forced to endure misery of another kind as Inverness Caledonian Thistle headed back to the Highlands with all three points to leave Gary Locke's men needing snookers, to use another sporting cliché, to avoid relegation.

New Caley Thistle boss John Hughes clearly relished taking his side to Scotland's capital city, the home support affording the former Hibs manager the kind of reception we all expected. 'Yogi' took it all with his trademark huge grin and he certainly had the last laugh at 4.45pm.

With Ryan Stevenson the latest player on the Hearts casualty list, Gary Locke brought in 18 year olds Gary Oliver and Sam Nicholson and it has to be said the two teenagers didn't let anyone down with assured performances.

Caley Thistle were odds on favourites to win this game and, as befitting of a team challenging Celtic at the top of the SPFL, they dominated the early exchanges with Doran's effort from 25 yards producing a fine save from Hearts Jamie MacDonald. Despite having territorial supremacy, the visitors didn't

really test the Hearts keeper in the first 45 minutes other than Doran's opportunist strike and the first half ended goalless which didn't help the mood of the near 12,000 crowd having to put up with driving wind and rain.

The Highlanders upped the pace somewhat in the second half and they should have opened the scoring after 56 minutes but Warren scooped his shot over the bar from just eight yards out. It was only a temporary let-off for Hearts, however. Three minutes later, the ever-dangerous McKay found himself in space in the Hearts penalty box and curled a fine effort beyond MacDonald to put the Caley Jags in front.

The Hearts youngsters head seemed to go down at this point and John Hughes side continued to dominate. McKay and Shinnie should have extended their side's lead but missed chances. Although Calum Tapping almost equalised for the Maroons, Caley Thistle sealed all three points seven minutes from the end when Watkins fed McKay and the forward scored his and Caley Thistle's second goal of the afternoon to endeth the scoring at 2-0 for the Highlanders.

Afterwards, Hearts chief Gary Locke said the difference between the teams was the presence – or lack of in Hearts case – of a natural goalscorer.

"I didn't think there was a lot in the game, but the quality of Billy McKay was the difference", Locke told the club's website. "He had two chances and that won them the game. He's a natural goalscorer, which we don't have at the moment."

Locke also bemoaned yet another injury as Jamie Walker limped off with an ankle knock.

"It never rains but it pours. The one player who looks a real goal threat is Jamie Walker, and losing him along with Ryan Stevenson is a massive blow. It's an Achilles injury but it's too soon to say how bad it is."

Hearts head to Celtic Park next Saturday with the 7-0 Scottish Cup hammering still fresh in their minds. They'll likely need to wait until at least Boxing Day to reach the much yearned for 'zero' points total.

Hearts: MacDonald; Hamill, McGowan, Wilson, McHattie, Nicholson, Tapping, Robinson, Walker, Paterson, Oliver

Inverness CT: Brill, Shinnie, Warren, Meekings, McKay, Draper, Foran, Doran, Ross, Watkins, Tremarco.

Referee: Brian Colvin

Att: 11,950

Top man: Sam Nicholson – a young man with a big future.