

St. Mirren 1 Heart of Midlothian 1



It's become something of a habit while compiling match reports on Hearts games for the Edinburgh Reporter this season to convey the feelings of doom and gloom usually associated with what seems like recurring defeat. So it makes a pleasant change to report on Hearts not succumbing to a reversal in Paisley on Sunday, albeit they had to contend with one point rather than the very much needed three following a hard-fought 1-1 draw in Paisley.

After Boxing Day's hapless performance against Kilmarnock, Hearts boss Gary Locke brought back Scott Robinson while there was an unexpected but very much welcome return for the experienced Ryan Stevenson who had been injured for the last three weeks. Locke made a few positional changes too, most notably with Jamie Hamill playing in midfield beside Callum Paterson.

If the changes in the Hearts line up were designed to produce a change in fortune such hopes were in tatters after just three minutes when St. Mirren took the lead. Former Hearts hero Danny Grainger crossed for Thompson to stab the ball home from just three yards out and it looked like another bad day at the office for the Maroons was on the cards.

It was Thompson who almost set up the Paisley Saints second goal when he fed Naismith whose effort was superbly saved by Hearts keeper Jamie MacDonald. Hearts came close themselves after 22 minutes when, from a free-kick, Jamie Hamill set up young Jamie Walker but the winger's effort went just wide. At the interval Hearts remained a goal down but there was no doubt their first half performance was an improvement on

Thursday's debacle at Tynecastle.

Suitably encouraged, Hearts began the second half and equalised in the 48th minute. The home side looked to clear their lines from a Hearts attack but the ball fell to Jamie Hamill 25 yards from goal. The former Kilmarnock defender took it first time with his right foot and volleyed the ball into the net past former Hearts keeper Marian Kello for the equaliser. It was Hearts first goal in four games and brought rapturous applause from the visiting support.

The ever-dangerous Thompson then came close to putting the Buddies back in front before Scott Robinson tried to emulate Hamill but his effort from 30 yards looked destined for Paisley's High Street. Jamie Walker then embarked on a mazy run but his effort on goal was wide of the target. After Ryan Stevenson came close with an ambitious overhead kick, Callum Paterson thought he had sealed a rare Hearts victory with a close range effort only to see Kello produce the kind of stupendous save that marked his all too brief career at Tynecastle.

In the end, Hearts had to settle for one point rather than three and, on the balance of play over 90 minutes, this was probably a fair result. Hearts are now on minus two points at the foot of the table, 13 behind Ross County who lost at Aberdeen.

Afterwards, Hearts boss Gary Locke praised his beleaguered players. "I thought, second-half especially, it was an outstanding performance," Locke told BBC Radio Scotland.

"We asked for a better performance than the other day and I think the players responded in the right manner."

It may be fanciful to suggest Hearts might have cut the deficit to seven points by this time next week – particularly with a trip to Easter Road for the Edinburgh Derby on Thursday – but it's a lifebelt of hope to cling on to.

St Mirren: Kello, Naismith, McAusland, Newton, Kelly, Goodwin, McGregor, McGinn, Thompson, McGowan, Grainger.

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

Referee: Kevin Clancy

Att: 4,568

Top man: Jamie Hamill – what a strike for Hearts equaliser!