

# Ross County 1 Heart of Midlothian 2



There has been much speculation in social media circles this week about the latest homecoming of the prodigal son to Tynecastle. Following the news that the SPFL will consider the possibility of Hearts bringing new players to Tynecastle on a one in, one out basis, the potential transfer of Adam King to Swansea has been seen as the key to Gorgie legend Rudi Skacel joining Hearts for a third time. Whether this story has any substance or not – although the player's girlfriend has been dropping heavy hints on Twitter this week – it seems to have triggered a resurgence in feelings of optimism on Gorgie Road (even if the 21 point gap at the foot of the table before Saturday's trip to the Highlands looked insurmountable)

After last week's dramatic salvaging of a point from the jaws of defeat in Perth, Gary Locke's young Hearts side went one better on Saturday afternoon and recorded their first win in the SPFL since their unexpected but nonetheless impressive 3-1 win at Aberdeen on 9 November.

More than 500 Hearts made the long journey to Dingwall on a day when you wouldn't send a dog out and their continuing loyalty to the club was rewarded when Scott Robinson scored a late winner to record an impressive 2-1 win over Ross County, who had not lost a game in 2014 until Saturday.

Hearts manager Gary Locke made two changes to the team with impressive youngster Sam Nicholson replacing the suspended Ryan Stevenson and Scott Robinson in for Callum Tapping.

Hearts weren't slow in taking an early command of the game and had chances aplenty in an entertaining first half. Sam Nicholson had an early chance before David Smith's effort

smacked off the post with Dale Carrick and Calum Paterson also coming close. The home side seemed lethargic and struggling to cope with the visitor's pace. Hearts were creating chances but there was concern these opportunities weren't being taken. However, eight minutes before half-time, the Gorgie boys scored the goal their play fully deserved. David Smith's corner was knocked on to Callum Paterson who netted from close range. However, if the vociferous travelling support thought their side would go in at half-time a goal to the good they were sadly mistaken. Just on the half-time whistle, a free-kick into the Hearts penalty box found Songo'o and the on-loan defender from Blackburn Rovers sent a powerful header beyond Hearts keeper Jamie MacDonald to level the scores at the break.

In the second half it was the home side who began to take command of the game and for ten minute period they pinned Hearts in their own half. However, for all their possession, the Staggies only really threatened Hearts keeper Jamie MacDonald once when goalscorer Songo'o fired in a long range effort which the Gorgie number one saved well.

With the game heading for a draw there would have been some Hearts supporters thinking back to 23 November and their team's last visit to Dingwall when the Tynecastle team led 1-0 with three minutes to go only to lose 2-1. This fixture has a habit of producing late goals and so it proved again on Saturday – only, this time, it was the team from the capital city who triumphed. With ten minutes left, David Smith's cross was only partly dealt with by home keeper Fraser. The industrious Scott Robinson latched on to the loose ball and steered it into the net from around eight yards. Joy for the young Hearts players and travelling support and Hearts may well have had a third when Kevin McHattie set off on a mazy run towards the County goal only to see his shot saved by Fraser.

When the final whistle blew moments later, Hearts had clinched

three points. They may not be valuable, given the gap at the foot of the table is now 19 points, but they were very welcome nonetheless and meant Gary Locke's side have now wiped out the 15 point deficit imposed on them at the start of the season after going into administration.

After the game, an upbeat Gary Locke gave his assessment of the game.

"It was a fantastic performance" said the manager, "County had a little spell just after half-time but I felt by then we might have been three or four goals up. I'm delighted for the boys because they've worked really hard all season and they've never really got the rewards they deserved, but today it was a fantastic performance and a fantastic result. One thing about these boys is that they never give up. We're all now looking forward to a big week ahead"

The long journey back was a happy one for those magnificent Hearts supporters as they contemplate Wednesday's re-arranged SPFL Premiership fixture with St. Mirren at Tynecastle and, more importantly, next weekend's Scottish League Cup semi-final tie against Inverness Caledonian Thistle at Easter Road. Given Hearts financial situation, reaching the League Cup final could prove crucial.

After last week's comeback at St. Johnstone, perhaps Edinburgh's finest are beginning to find form at just the right time.

Ross County: Fraser, Gordon, Songo'o, Brittain, McLean, Oikonomou, Kiss, Tidser, Arquin, Slew, Carey

Hearts: MacDonald, McHattie, McKay, Hamill, Wilson, McGowan, Smith, Carrick, Paterson, Robinson, Nicholson.

Att: 4,016

Referee: Kevin Clancy

Top man: The impressive Sam Nicholson – this young man has a bright future.