

# Football – Heart of Midlothian 0 Celtic 2



Hearts mini-revival in the SPFL Premiership – Gary Locke's side were on an unbeaten run of four games – came to an end at Tynecastle on Saturday when league champions Celtic extended their lead at the top of the league to an astonishing 24 points with a 2-0 victory.

Given Hearts' miserable season and the result the last time Neil Lennon's team visited Gorgie – a 7-0 thrashing in the Scottish Cup in December – few of the home support expected their side to take anything from a team still to taste defeat in the league this season. However, this was a much-improved showing from the young Maroons and allowed a smidgeon of optimism to return to the Gorgie faithful.

Locke made two changes from the team that won a hard-earned point in Inverness last Saturday with Callum Paterson and Kevin McHattie restored to the side.

Hearts looked determined to ensure they wouldn't be on the receiving end of another seven goal hiding and gave Celtic as good as they got in the first half. As expected, the Hoops created the better openings in front of goal and Mulgrew's cross created a chance for Stokes but the former Hibs player couldn't connect with the ball. Another former Hibby – Leigh Griffiths, a target for the baying home support – then set off on a run down the right but failed to provide a finish. Van Dijk then saw his free-kick go wide, before Hearts skipper Danny Wilson blocked another effort from Griffiths.

It wasn't all one-sided though and Callum Paterson set up striker Paul McCallum only to see the on-loan West Ham player make something of a hash of the opportunity and end up

conceding a foul. Paterson then made a loud but rather optimistic plea for a penalty kick when he fell inside the Celtic penalty area but if any contact was made it appeared it was from another player wearing maroon. Nonetheless, Hearts fans could enjoy their half-time pie with the game goalless. At this stage during Celtic's last visit, the Hoops were five goals ahead...

Celtic began the second half the way they began the first by swarming around Hearts goal. It seemed only a matter of time before they scored and, indeed, they did after an hour's play. Griffiths turned Danny Wilson before drilling in a left foot shot past Jamie MacDonald to give the visitors a deserved lead.

Hearts substitute Dale Carrick looked lively when he replaced the ineffectual McCallum and the youngster fired in a powerful effort from 20 yards which was blocked by Biton as Hearts went looking for the equaliser. However, it was the visitors who looked the more likely to score again and Commons drove a shot wide before Boerrigter produced a fine save from Jamie MacDonald.

Hearts then threatened to spoil Celtic's long run without conceding a goal – after 31 minutes Celtic keeper Forster broke former Aberdeen keeper's league record of 1,115 minutes without losing a goal – but the Hoops defended well before finishing the game in the third minute of injury time when Pukki scored a second goal.

The game therefore ended with a 2-0 win for Celtic but it was a gallant effort from this young Hearts team who at least restored credibility with a battling performance, something Hearts manager Gary Locke alluded to after the game.

"I think we've got to look at the positives," said the Hearts gaffer. "The last time Celtic played here it was no contest. You can see how far some of our young players have come. For long spells we matched the best team in the country. We've

told the players to go and express themselves. In the middle of the season, they took a dip in form, some of them at the same time. But you can see that, having worked with them for five or six months, they're taking on board what we're saying. They're not making as many mistakes and they've grown from boys to men."

Hearts: MacDonald, McGowan, McKay, Wilson, McHattie, Paterson, Stevenson, Hamill, Robinson, Nicholson, McCallum.

Celtic: Forster, Matthews, van Dijk, Ambrose, Mulgrew, Brown, Biton, Johansen, Commons, Griffiths, Stokes.

Referee: Kevin Clancy

Att: 15,801

Top man: Jamie MacDonald