

Inverness Caledonian Thistle

0 Heart of Midlothian 0



They say a week is a long time in politics. It's also a long time in football, particularly if your team is on the wrong end of a gut-wrenching cup semi-final defeat by a team with just nine players. A week is bad enough; two weeks seems like an eternity.

Hearts headed north on Saturday to the home of the opponents who inflicted such misery at Easter Road in that ill-fated League Cup semi-final a fortnight ago. This time it was on league business and with Caley Thistle riding high in the league, the Highlanders were firm favourites to take all three points.

Hearts manager Gary Locke was forced into making a couple of changes from the side that broke many hearts two weeks ago. The injured David Smith was replaced by Ryan Stevenson while the suspended Kevin McHattie's place was taken by Jordan McGhee.

As expected, the home side dominated the first half although it was Hearts Ryan Stevenson who had the game's first real chance with a shot from 20 yards which went just over the bar. Thereafter, it was Caley Thistle who dictated the game with Watkins, Raven and the always-dangerous McKay all coming close to opening the scoring.

It seemed at times that Hearts captain Danny Wilson and goalkeeper Jamie MacDonald were playing Caley Thistle on their own, the Hearts custodian pulling off a superb save from McKay. Seconds later, Watkins effort beat MacDonald but Hearts teenage defender Jordan McGhee scooped the ball off the line. Hearts were defending desperately at times but the aim of

preventing the home side from scoring had worked as the first half ended goalless.

Curiously, it was Hearts who had the first chance of the second half when Jamie Hamill, who scored twice in the semi-final, almost opened the scoring with a powerful effort from 20 yards which whistled wide. Thereafter, the home side resumed their ascendancy with Tansey and substitute Foran coming closest to breaking the deadlock. As the final whistle approached, Hearts almost nicked all three points when new boy Paul McCallum headed for goal only to see his effort blocked by Shinnie.

Locke was keen to point out the improvement in his side when he faced the press afterwards. "Overall, it's a difficult place to come" said the Gorgie boss. "When we came here earlier in the season we were totally outplayed so I think you can see a definite improvement. That's four games in a row in the league we're unbeaten and I think there's now a bit of belief among the boys."

Hearts are now unbeaten in four league games although the gap at the bottom of the league table is 16 points. Next up for the Maroons is the visit of Celtic to Tynecastle next Saturday. Given the result the last time Neil Lennon's side came to Gorgie, next week's encounter may be deemed unsuitable for those under the age of 16...

Inverness Caledonian Thistle: Brill, Raven, Shinnie, Draper, Warren, Meekings, Watkins, Tansey, McKay, Vincent, Doran.

Hearts: MacDonald, McGowan, McGhee, Robinson, McKay, Wilson, Carrick, Hamill, McCallum, Stevenson, Nicholson.

Referee: Craig Thomson

Att: 3,392

Top man: Jamie MacDonald – Caley Thistle's goalkeeper may be

called Brill but this was another brilliant performance from the Hearts keeper.