

Football – Kilmarnock 4 Hearts of Midlothian 2



It says much about this season that Hearts' supporters travelled to Ayrshire today hoping their team would collect three points, not so they could avoid demotion but more that the final nail in the relegation coffin wouldn't be administered by bitter rivals Hibernian at Tynecastle at the end of this month. They left Rugby Park inevitably disappointed as Gary Locke's side shipped four goals to Allan Johnston's side for the second time this season and suffered a third straight loss to a team that had proved to be something of a bogey to Hearts in recent years.

Yet, as at Motherwell last Saturday, Hearts began the game brightly with Ryan Stevenson shooting wide and the Maroons looking lively on the counter-attack. However, it was the same old story of missed chances and defensive frailties for the Edinburgh side. After keeper Jamie MacDonald denied Ashcroft, the home side took the lead after 27 minutes when the always dangerous McKenzie sped down the right wing before firing in a cross which Hearts skipper Danny Wilson could only divert past his own goalkeeper.

Hearts, though, again demonstrated their battling qualities and equalised just three minutes later. Ashcroft's attempts to usher the ball back to his goalkeeper failed miserably for the home side when Dale Carrick nipped in to send ball beyond Samson to level the score. At least the Hearts supporters had something to cheer at half-time with the score at 1-1.

Sadly, within six minutes of the re-start, Hearts were 3-1 down. First, ex-Killie defender Jamie Hamill was dispossessed by Boyd on the edge of the penalty box and the former Rangers

and Scotland striker showed his experience to slip the ball past MacDonald.

Two minutes later, a mistake from Hearts Dylan McGowan proved costly and Boyd made the Australian suffer by shooting high into the net. It looked all over for Hearts at this stage but they were thrown a lifeline with 20 minutes to go when substitute Billy King passed to Sam Nicholson who despatched the ball beyond Samson to make it 3-2 and give some hope to the visiting support.

This hope lasted all of three minutes. Gardyne's shot struck the Hearts crossbar but the Gorgie defenders could not clear their lines and when Tesselaar returned the ball to Gardyne this time the Killie player didn't miss. 4-2 to the home side and while substitute Paul McCallum had the ball in the net in the dying stages his effort was ruled out for offside. Yet again Hearts returned to the capital city with nothing.

If Hearts were to win every one of their remaining nine games this would yield 27 points. Currently, the Maroons are 20 points adrift. The last rites on Hearts Premiership status will soon, if you'll excuse the phrase, be administered..

Kilmarnock: Samson, Tesselaar, Boyd, Karlsson, Clohessy, McKenzie, Gardyne, O'Hara, Slater, Pascali, Ashcroft.

Hearts: MacDonald; McGhee, McGowan, Wilson, McHattie; Stevenson, Hamill, Robinson, Nicholson; Carrick, Paterson

Referee: Euan Norris

Att: 3,510

Top man: Sam Nicholson