

Motherwell 4 Heart of Midlothian 1



Hearts record at Motherwell isn't particularly impressive so when manager Gary Locke spoke before the game of his hope that his young team would embark on a run of victories which would make the teams immediately above Hearts in the SPFL Premiership uncomfortable, it was difficult to believe his words had much substance. And so it proved on Saturday as the Maroons slipped closer to the now inevitable relegation trapdoor following a comprehensive defeat in darkest Lanarkshire.

Yet Hearts, unchanged from last week's decent effort against league champions Celtic, began the game brightly with Calum Paterson looking lively up front. That said, it was the home team who created the game's first real chance when a shot from Ainsworth took a deflection off Scott Robinson, forcing keeper Jamie MacDonald to push the ball over the crossbar.

It was the kick-start the home side needed and they began to dominate proceedings. In the 18th minute, their pressure eventually told on the visitors. The always-dangerous McFadden set up Vigurs who created space and time before shooting all too easily past Jamie Mac to put the Steelmen a goal up.

Hearts then threatened briefly when Ryan Stevenson saw his free-kick go just wide of goal before Paul McCallum saw his header go just over the crossbar. However, the pattern of the game remained much the same with Motherwell looking dangerous whenever they came forward. It was scarcely a surprise when they doubled their lead eight minutes before half-time. Again, it was the former Scotland international McFadden who was the architect when he launched a high pass towards Ainsworth who

produced a fine finish to leave MacDonald helpless and put the home side 2-0 ahead. There endeth the first half scoring, although McFadden should have added a third but saw his header go narrowly over the bar.

The second half followed much the same pattern as the first and Vigurs, Lasley and Leitch all had chances to increase the home side's lead. That said, it was Hearts who almost scored next when Dale Carrick's superb effort clipped the Motherwell crossbar. Twenty minutes into the second half, Motherwell sealed all three points when former Hearts striker John Sutton scored the third goal after McFadden had again tormented the Hearts defence.

Four minutes later there was a small glimmer of hope for the vociferous travelling support when Callum Paterson headed home Kevin McHattie's corner to make it 3-1. This hope didn't last long, however, when man of the match McFadden headed home Vigur's corner to complete the scoring and another miserable afternoon for Hearts.

Gary Locke didn't mince his words in the press conference after the game.

"We've taken great strides in the last few weeks, but today we've gone backwards again. You're never going to win a game if only three or four players turn up. We've got to make sure we compete all the time, and today we were second best in too many areas of the pitch. It's a young team and we're learning all the time. You've got to work hard to get anything out of games in this league, and I felt Motherwell – especially James McFadden and his experience – caused us all sorts of problems which we never got to grip with."

With Hearts now 20 points behind Partick Thistle and Ross County at the foot of the Army, the Gorgie side are just four games away from relegation and may well have suffered this fate before Easter.

Looking to come straight back up to the top flight a year from now must be the focus of everyone at Tynecastle.

Motherwell: Hollis, Read, Francis-Angol, Lasley, Huchinson, McManus, Ainsworth, Leitch, McFadden, Sutton, Vigurs.

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

Referee: John Beaton

Att: 4,914

Top Man: Jamie MacDonald