

Football – Heart of Midlothian v Aberdeen



Heart of Midlothian 1 Aberdeen 1

SPFL, Wednesday 2 April 2014 – Tynecastle

(Photo by John Preece)

Like a champion boxer knocked to the canvas but crawling back up the ropes for one last punch, Hearts refuse to accept the inevitability that is relegation without putting up one hell of a fight. Having thwarted their city rivals and spoiled the 'relegation party' by defeating Hibernian on Sunday, Hearts refused to let even a numerical disadvantage get the better of them by storming back for a well-deserved draw against high-flying Aberdeen at Tynecastle on Wednesday evening.

The consensus was that, while taking great delight in denying Hibernian the opportunity to demote them, Hearts plight was irretrievable, and defeat from a team who lifted the League Cup a couple of weeks ago would confirm relegation. When the Dons took the lead in the second half and Hearts skipper Danny Wilson was sent off, it seemed that was that. However, there is no team in Scotland with more spirit than Gary Locke's Hearts and, like they did in August, they denied Aberdeen victory with a late goal and one that means the Boys in Maroon are still clinging on to the lifejacket tossed from SS Relegation.

One of the heroes from Sunday's Edinburgh derby victory – Dale Carrick – was injured meaning on-loan striker Paul McCallum was leading the line.

Aberdeen brought a sizeable travelling support to Scotland's

capital city and the Dons wasted little time in posting their intentions. After just five minutes, good play from Pawlett set up McGinn who brought out a fine save from Hearts keeper Jamie MacDonald. The ever-dangerous Rooney then got away from his marker only to be thwarted by the Hearts keeper before McGinn followed up his blocked free-kick with an effort from 20 yards which went perilously close. It was all Aberdeen in the first half although their fine play seemed to lack a cutting edge. They almost paid for this just before half-time when Ryan Stevenson failed to connect properly with David Smith's cross and a rare chance for the home side was lost. Right on half-time, Paul McCallum had the ball in the Aberdeen net but his challenge on Dons keeper Langfield was deemed illegal by referee Kevin Clancy and the Englishman received a booking for his trouble. Perhaps if he had been a Rangers player the goal would have stood, bearing in mind the Ibrox side scored from a similar situation against Albion Rovers in the Scottish Cup a few weeks back.

McCallum was replaced by Scott Robinson at half-time with both sides looking to make the breakthrough after an entertaining but ultimately goalless first half. The change seemed to energise Hearts with Stevenson and Smith both having ambitious efforts on goal. Midway through the second half, Hearts almost took the lead. A superb pass from Jason Holt found Calum Paterson on the right. The big man surged past two Dons defenders before firing in a ferocious shot from more than 20 yards which Dons keeper Langfield did well to save.

Hearts were now in the ascendancy and for the first time in the evening it was the Dons who were on the back foot. However, with 20 minutes to go, Hearts were deflated when captain Danny Wilson pulled back a Dons player on the edge of the penalty box and received his second yellow card of the evening. An early bath for the skipper and things went from bad to worse for the home side when Flood fired home the resultant free-kick to give the Dons the lead, much to the

delight of the travelling support in the Roseburn Stand.

Hearts though, as so often this season, refused to throw in the towel. With seven minutes left they were handed the chance on a plate to equalise when Ryan Stevenson pounced on an error from the Dons defence in the penalty area but, with an open goal to aim at, the former Ayr United player failed to hit the target. Stevenson fell to the ground with his head in his hands and the home support wailed in anguish. That seemed to be the final nail in Hearts relegation coffin. However, this battling Hearts team had other ideas.

With just four minutes to go, the tireless Calum Paterson ran through the Aberdeen defence only to be brought down by Logan in the penalty box. Penalty said the referee and Jamie Hamill, who had driven his team on all night, coolly sent the ball past Langfield to give Hearts a deserved share of the spoils.

The atmosphere at the end of the game was one of high emotion. Hearts aren't relegated yet – but they can only match St. Mirren's 28 points. Gary Locke's side must win all of their six remaining games while praying the Paisley Saints lose all of theirs. As Locke said in the programme prior to the game this isn't going to happen. But Hearts are at least going down fighting.

Locke was proud of his players afterwards. "First half I thought Aberdeen played well" said the manager. "I felt we had to make the change at half-time to get ourselves back in the game because we weren't getting enough of the ball. But, credit to the boys again. I thought they were absolutely brilliant, every one of them.

"While we've got Partick Thistle on Saturday, the main focus for the club is Monday."

Locke was referring to the potentially crucial creditors meeting between Ukio Bankas and UBIG, where it is hoped a deal will be agreed to save Hearts from liquidation. Locke, like

every other Hearts fan, is keeping his fingers crossed. "We just hope that we can get a good result Saturday, then Monday's the big day for us and hopefully all goes well there as well,"

Hearts: MacDonald; Paterson, McGowan, Wilson, McHattie; Hamill, Stevenson, Holt; Smith, McCallum, Nicholson

Aberdeen: Langfield, Logan, Anderson, Reynolds, Considine, Jack, Flood, Robson, Pawlett, Rooney, McGinn.

Referee: Kevin Clancy

Att: 13,913

Top man: Jamie Hamill – he may not be the most gifted of footballers but no one can beat his sheer drive and determination.