

Heart of Midlothian 2 Ross County 0



Hearts Callum Paterson

– photo by John Preece

SPFL Premiership, Saturday 19 April 2014 – Tynecastle

It seemed like the dawning of a new era at Tynecastle on Saturday. The news during the week that Hearts look very likely to exit administration before too long – a situation they have been in since June last year – enabling Ann Budge to take over the running of the club before passing it over in years to come to the Foundation of Hearts, the supporters group, has instilled a fresh spirit of hope and anticipation in Gorgie. Yet again, the Hearts supporters turned up in their numbers – nearly 13,700 to see a team already relegated – and they chanted their support for their club incessantly, declaring they will do this forever more. Even the weather joined in the new beginning for the club as bright sunshine beamed on Tynecastle Stadium as the feel-good factor made a rare visit.

As befitting such an occasion, the Hearts players ensured the result the home support wanted by recording their third win in four league games against a Ross County side themselves embroiled in a relegation battle, with the eleventh placed side in the SPFL Premiership faced with a dreaded relegation play-off against a Championship promotion hopeful. It's a situation Hearts city rivals also find themselves in and when legendary stadium announcer Scott Wilson announced that Hibernian were a goal down in Paisley before Hearts had even kicked off, it brought predictable loud acclaim from those in maroon.

Hearts manager Gary Locke, whose name was chanted by the home support, opted to have Dale Carrick playing the lone attacker with Ryan Stevenson playing just behind the youngster. It was Stevenson who had the game's first real chance after six minutes when his effort from the edge of the County penalty box curled past the post.

Fine play from Carrick and another impressive youngster, Billy King, saw the latter have an opportunity to open the scoring. With this reporter having the Queen's Shilling on King to be first scorer, I tried manfully to contain my disappointment when the youngster opted to pass to Stevenson rather than shoot for glory and the chance was lost.

The visitors enjoyed much possession but did little to threaten Hearts keeper Jamie MacDonald. The next chance fell to Hearts Ryan Stevenson but his effort from some distance flew wide, in keeping with the pattern of the first half. Half-time arrived with the game goalless but there was some cheer for the home support at the interval when Tynecastle legend Rudi Skacel appeared to make the half-time draw. Hearts fans still retain hope the great man will line up for Hearts in the Championship next season.

The second half soon adopted the pattern of the first. Carey soon had an opportunity for the visitors but his effort on goal ended in the Roseburn Stand much to the chagrin of those from Dingwall. On the hour mark, Hearts Sam Nicholson played a one-two with Billy King on the edge of the County penalty box but young Sam's effort was easily saved by the County keeper, Brown, who was the Hibernian goalkeeper who shipped five goals in the 2012 Scottish Cup final, a fact the goading home support were keen to remind him.

Moments later, a goal did arrive in somewhat controversial circumstances. Hearts Kevin McHattie set off on a trademark run into the opposition penalty box only to be thwarted by County's Kiss. Penalty declared referee Willie Collum who, it

has to be said, didn't enjoy the best of afternoons. The award seemed of the softish variety and the County players voiced their displeasure. Hearts Jamie Hamill, who had been booked a few moments earlier, stepped up and executed the penalty with his customary precision and Hearts were ahead. However, Hamill celebrated by picking up the ball and running towards the Hearts support in the old main stand, pursued by the referee and a posse of County players – one of whom, Songo'o, pushed the Hearts man. When County manager Derek Adams tried to intervene, he and Hamill clashed with the Staggies boss tumbling to the ground. Referee Collum then flashed a second yellow card to Hamill meaning the end of the game for the Hearts player – and also meaning he will miss next week's Edinburgh derby at Easter Road.

A man short, Hearts were now on the defensive but it was Scott Robinson who had a chance to clinch victory; however, he opted to shoot straight at keeper Brown to ensure County remained in the game. Nonetheless, Hearts sealed a fine win in the fourth minute of stoppage time when they broke forward from a County attack. Robinson squared the ball for Dale Carrick and the youngster duly despatched the ball beyond Brown to end the scoring and continue a curious penchant for late goals in this fixture.

Hearts, it seems, have found form at a point in the season when it is too late to rectify their league position. Remarkably, victory at Easter Road next Sunday will mean Hearts will have won more league games than Hibernian this season – and also increase the prospect of both Edinburgh sides being relegated this season.

As the Hearts supporters streamed out of Tynecastle on Saturday, the spring sunshine beaming on their backs, the old adage of hope springs eternal sprang to mind. Hearts have been a sick patient this season. As it draws to a close, Ann Budge and the Foundation of Hearts resuscitation of this great club appears to be sparking a much-hoped for recovery. Perhaps next

season Hearts will be fighting fit once more.

Hearts: MacDonald; Paterson, McGowan, McKay, McHattie; King, Hamill, Holt, Nicholson, Stevenson, Carrick.

Ross County: Brown, Cikos, Boyd, Kiss, Brittain, Quinn, Tidser, Carey, Slew, Oikonomu, Sango'o.

Referee: Willie Collum

Att: 13,692

Top man: Dale Carrick