

Football – Heart of Midlothian 3 Annan Athletic 1

Petrofac Training Cup 1st Round, Saturday 26 July 2014 – Tynecastle

After a season when the club was traumatised by administration and suffered relegation from the SPFL Premiership as a consequence, Hearts ended their first competitive fixture of the new season with a comfortable victory over League Two side Annan Athletic in the first round of the Petrofac Training Cup at Tynecastle on Saturday.

That Hearts are in this competition is directly because they are no longer in the top flight of Scottish football. Thus, they faced Annan Athletic for the first time and the outcome of the game was never seriously in doubt.

Billy King was the tormentor in chief in the early stages and he opened the scoring after just eight minutes with a brilliant effort, dancing past a bewildered Annan defence before blasting the ball into the net beyond Annan keeper Mitchell.

It was, as you might expect, mostly one-way traffic towards the Annan Athletic goal. However, the visitors did have a free-kick from Hopkirk which Hearts keeper Neil Alexander dealt with comfortably.

After 20 minutes the home side were 2-0 ahead. Dale Carrick flicked a pass towards Osman Sow and the former Crystal Palace striker used his experience to outfox an Annan defender before slipping the ball beyond Mitchell from around 16 yards.

Sam Nicholson was proving a handful for the visitors hard-pressed defence and the youngster had two efforts on goal, one which went just over the crossbar and the other which was

directly at keeper Mitchell.

Hearts did get the third goal their play richly deserved just before half-time. Billy King's corner from the right was powerfully headed home by Callum Paterson. Sadly, the right back suffered an injury just before the interval and was replaced by Jordan McGhee for the second half. Half-time: Hearts 3 Annan Athletic 0.

The second half followed the same pattern as the first with Sow, King, Carrick, McHattie and Nicholson all having decent attempts on goal. Credit to Annan Athletic, though, who worked incredibly hard, particularly in defence, to keep the Hearts team at bay. There was only one more goal in the second half – but not at the end most people thought it would be.

In the final minute Annan substitute Davidson scored with a fine finish which went beyond Neil Alexander from the edge of the box.

Overall, it was another decent performance from Hearts and one can see the way Robbie Neilson wants his young team to play. Possession is the name of the game these days in Gorgie and the ethos seems to be if the opposition don't have the ball then they can't do you any damage. It's certainly pleasing on the eye.

With several new signings it's going take a little while for this new-look Hearts team to gel but some of the football they played on Saturday and last Friday against Manchester City has been delightful. If I'm being picky I could say that Hearts need to be more ruthless in the opposition penalty box. It could and indeed should have been 6-1 to the Maroons today. And new recruit Alim Ozturk will need to be told that the Scottish Championship is not a league where he will be able to dwell too long on the ball!

That aside, the early signs look promising for Hearts.

Hearts: Alexander, Paterson, McHattie, Wilson, Ozturk, Gomis, Sow, Nicholson, King, Buaben, Carrick.

Annan Athletic: Mitchell, Watson, Chisholm, McNiff, Black, Swinglehurst, McStay, Flynn, Todd, Hopkirk, Carcary.

Referee: Callum Murray

Att: 6,708

Top Man: Billy King. The youngster made a blistering start, then faded before coming back into the game again. A real prospect.