

Heart of Midlothian 2 Hibernian 1 – Hearts Triumph Once More in Edinburgh Derby

SPFL Championship, Sunday 17 August 2014 – Tynecastle

History was made at Tynecastle this afternoon. Given the amount of times there is an Edinburgh derby these days you may question that statement. However, this afternoon saw the first ever Hearts-Hibs fixture to be played in the second flight of Scottish league football.

After the fall out of relegation for both capital clubs, this summer has seen major changes at Tynecastle and Easter Road. Both clubs now have new managers, a sprinkling of new players and there is now a powerful and successful woman at the helm of both Edinburgh clubs.

It was with this in mind that a full house packed Tynecastle Stadium for the first of at least four Edinburgh derbies this season. Hearts had something of a pre-match goalkeeping crisis with first choice keeper Neil Alexander ruled out for a month after fracturing his cheekbone in last week's victory over Rangers at Ibrox and his understudy Scott Gallacher also being ruled out with an ankle injury. It was left to 20-year-old Jack Hamilton, whose loan to Stenhousemuir had to be curtailed due to the goalkeeping crisis, to make his competitive first-team debut for Hearts.

It may have been a Sunday lunch-time kick-off but it was a typically fervent Edinburgh derby atmosphere at Tynecastle. Hibs supporters, despite their agonies of last season, nearly filled the Roseburn Stand and gave their team tremendous backing. The Hearts support responded in kind and the unfurling of a banner in the old main stand which read 'Tick Tock Who's Laughing Now' was an obvious reference to those

Hibs supporters who took great demise in their city rivals sinking into administration just over a year ago.

The first half, it has to be said, was as far-removed from some of the free-flowing football on display at the World Cup in Brazil this summer as was possible. The midfield became a battleground with a stream of fouls and misplaced passes and one yearned for a playmaker to put their foot on the ball and calm things down. Sadly, this didn't happen.

There were few highlights of that opening 45 minutes. Michael Nelson headed just over for the visitors while Hearts Jason Holt delivered an inviting cross into the Hibs penalty box – unfortunately, no one was willing to accept the invitation.

There was plenty of effort and determination from both sides but with half an hour gone neither goalkeeper had been called to make a save of any note. Then came the game's first real chance.

Hibs Daniel Handling raced into the Hearts penalty box with Hearts keeper Jack Hamilton racing to meet him. The Gorgie youngster brought him down and referee Willie Collum immediately pointed to the penalty spot. The Hearts players and fans alike were aghast when the official reached for a card but, thankfully for the home side, it was just a yellow and the goalkeeper remained on the pitch. Hibs' Liam Craig stepped up to take the penalty kick but his effort went wide to the delight of the goading home support in the Gorgie Stand.

Eight minutes before the interval, Hearts Sam Nicholson volleyed a first-time effort which forced Hibs goalkeeper Mark Oxley into a fine save. Following his remarkable goal against Livingston at Easter Road last weekend, Oxley was being suitably encouraged by the Hibs fans in the Roseburn Stand behind his goal to shoot at every opportunity...

The only other chance of a hugely disappointing first half was

right on the stroke of half-time when Hearts young defender Jordan McGhee fired in an effort from 25 yards which whistled past the post. **Half-time: Hearts 0 Hibs 0**

Those supporters hoping Messrs Neilson and Stubbs might have offered few words of encouragement to their players to actually play football which was pleasing on the eye were somewhat disappointed when the second half quickly began to mirror the first – Hearts Jason Holt was fouled within six seconds of the re-start. Although the game was end-to-end there seemed little danger of the goal nets actually making contact with the ball – until the 76th minute and a most welcome display of skill and finishing.

Hearts Sam Nicholson evaded a weak challenge before striding forward and unleashing a superb shot from 25 yards which flew into the net past a startled Oxley to give the home side the lead. Tynecastle erupted in a cacophony of noise from the home support as another derby win beckoned.

Just four minutes later, Hearts doubled their lead. Hibs Scott Robertson pulled down Prince Buaben in the penalty box and Buaben himself made no mistake with the penalty, shooting high into the net. Robertson was shown a yellow card which, being his second of the game, meant it was an early bath for the Hibs midfielder. And an early exit for hundreds of Hibs supporters who had seen enough and decided to head for home (or the pub to drown their sorrows)

However, Hearts never do things easily. Against ten men and with a two goal advantage, you might have expected the Maroons to comfortably see out the game. Not a bit of it. Hibs striker El Alagui almost pulled a goal back but his effort was brilliantly saved by young Hamilton in the Hearts goal.

Moments later, Hearts were also reduced to ten men when striker Osman Sow was shown a red card for extensive use of his elbow. Having been thwarted minutes earlier, El Alagui did

score for the visitors following a mistake from Hearts skipper Danny Wilson, the Hibs man heading past Hamilton.

Hearts were then content to play out the four minutes of stoppage time and when referee Collum did eventually blow his whistle there was much relief from the home support.

After the game, Hearts Head Coach Robbie Neilson was quick to praise youngster Jack Hamilton.

“I had no issues about bringing Jack in. I worked with him last year,” said the former youth coach. “He could have been man of the match today. It was an intense atmosphere. He handled it like a seasoned pro.”

For Hibs boss Alan Stubbs it was a bitter end to his first Edinburgh derby.

“Anyone who watched the game would come away thinking we didn’t deserve to get beat,” said the former Everton and Celtic defender. “I don’t think the scoreline reflected the game.”

Not the greatest Edinburgh derby you’ll ever see but Hearts won’t be complaining too much as they celebrate yet another victory over their rivals.

Hearts: Hamilton, McHattie, Wilson, Ozturk, Gomis, Holt, Nicholson, King, Buaben, Sow, McGhee.

Hibs: Oxley, Gray, Nelson, Forster, Harris, Robertson, El Alagui, Craig, Stanton, Stevenson, Handling

Referee: Willie Collum

Att: 17,280

Top man: Hearts Sam Nicholson – a wee gem in an afternoon which rarely sparkled.