

Heart of Midlothian 4 Falkirk 1



Photo- Mike Smith

SPFL Championship, Saturday 30 August 2014 – Tynecastle

Hearts maintained their 100% record so far in the SPFL Championship this season with a comprehensive victory over Falkirk at Tynecastle on Saturday. Having already defeated Rangers, Hibernian and Raith Rovers, Robbie Neilson's men were anxious to avoid the fate of their city rivals Hibernian who lost to The Bairns last week at Easter Road. In truth, there was never any likelihood of this happening in Gorgie as The Maroons produced a display full of skill, free-flowing football, energy and goals to increase their lead at the top of the table.

Neilson made eight changes to the side that knocked Stenhousemuir out of the League Cup on Tuesday evening with Osman Sow, having served his suspension, returning to link up with the hat-trick hero from last week's 4-0 win in Kirkcaldy, James Keatings.

In front of Scotland's second biggest crowd of the day – more than 16,000 were inside Tynecastle at kick-off, another hugely impressive turn out from the Maroon Army – Hearts began the game brightly. After just five minutes, Billy King's corner was headed on by skipper Danny Wilson. McCracken cleared but only to the feet of Prince Buaben. However, the former Dundee United player pulled his shot wide.

A magnificent tribute from the Hearts support to Robbie McDonald, the 14 year old Hearts fan who lost his life during the week, came in the 14th minute and the crowd's rousing

applause seem to inspire the players. Falkirk keeper Jamie MacDonald – a hero from Hearts Scottish Cup winning team of 2012 – was the busier of the two keepers and it was no surprise when he was finally beaten in the 17th minute. King's corner from the left was headed home by young Jordan McGhee although Jamie Mac may have felt he should have done better with the cross.

Falkirk threatened on the counter-attack but all they had to show for their efforts was a free-kick from Alston which went wide. Hearts were looking hungry for more goals and they were handed a golden opportunity to double their lead in the 24th minute. Sam Nicholson displayed some wonderful footwork to get the better of former Hearts full back Alan Maybury who brought the Hearts youngster down in the penalty box. James Keatings took the subsequent penalty kick but his effort was saved superbly by MacDonald. However, the former Hearts custodian could only push the ball back into Keating's path; the ex-Hamilton forward saw his second effort pushed away by MacDonald only for the ball to fall to Billy King who drove the ball home to put Hearts two goals ahead.

A Keatings effort was then brilliantly saved by MacDonald before Danny Wilson headed over the bar from just six yards when it seemed easier to score. The hard-pressed Falkirk defence were struggling to contain this marauding Hearts side and seven minutes before half-time the Maroons scored a third goal. The impressive Keatings delivered a delightful cross into the penalty box for Billy King to score his second goal and put the home side on easy street. There was no stopping Hearts now and it should have been 4-0 on the stroke of half-time but Osman Sow, having done the difficult part in collecting a loose pass and taking the ball round MacDonald, then contrived to fire his effort into the side net to the relief of the travelling support in the Roseburn Stand. **Half-time Hearts 3 Falkirk 0**

The second half began in a similar fashion to the way the first period ended – with Hearts on the attack. MacDonald was again the hero for the visitors when he pulled off yet another fine save to deny a brilliant half-volley from Sam Nicholson. Billy King and James Keatings also had chances with the home team in total ascendancy. This was until the 72nd minute when Prince Buaben was shown a red card for a lunge on Durojayie and this seemed to give Falkirk a spark of hope. It was a spark that was quickly extinguished six minutes later when Sow was brought down in the penalty box and while the award seemed of the softish variety, the big Swede took the kick himself, sending his effort past MacDonald to put Hearts 4-0 ahead.

The Bairns did pull a goal back five minutes from the end when Bia-bi scored following fine work from Loy but it was too little far too late for the visitors who were outplayed on their second visit to Edinburgh in a week – unlike last week's affair across the city.

Hearts are now three points ahead at the top of the SPFL Championship table. In particular, their first half display was as good as anything I've seen from a Hearts team since the Hearts side of 2005, under George Burley, made a storming start to the season. Robbie Neilson has his players playing neat, possession football with the accent on passing rather than the aimless punt up the park that has been all too familiar in the last couple of seasons.

'I thought we played really well in the first half' Neilson told the Hearts official website afterwards, 'although the players did get a wee bit sloppy in the second half. The boys did a lot of the things we've been working on in training, particularly in the first half. They didn't do it so much in the second half and that's something we'll all need to work on in training'

Rest assured, Robbie Neilson will not let his players rest on their laurels. The future looks brighter in Gorgie than it has

for some time.

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

Falkirk: MacDonald, Durojayie, McCracken, Vaulks, Taiwo, Alston, Sibbald, Dick, Maybury, Cooper, Loy.

Referee: Kevin Clancy

Att: 16,369

Top man: At the risk of sounding like a stuck record, **Morgaro Gomis** was again the man who made Hearts tick. His influence in the middle of the park is a huge factor in Hearts impressive start to the season.