

Rangers 1 Heart of Midlothian 2

SPFL Championship, Sunday 10 August 2014 – Ibrox

Just a short time ago not even the seventh son of a seventh son could have forecast that Rangers and Hearts would be kicking off their league campaign at Ibrox in the second tier of Scottish football. However, both clubs' financial predicaments of recent years have resulted in Rangers and Hearts – two of the biggest clubs in the land – commencing season 2014/15 outside the top flight. It didn't prevent a crowd of over 43,000 and the Sky Television cameras from heading to Govan for the season's opening league game.

Prior to kick-off there was a fine tribute to former Rangers and Hearts defender Sandy Jardine who died last April. Hearts had two former Rangers players in their starting line-up – goalkeeper Neil Alexander and skipper Danny Wilson – while Rangers had four former Jambos in their side, David Templeton, Lee Wallace and Scottish Cup winning duo Marius Zaliukas and Ian Black.

Rangers, unbeaten in their entire league campaign last season, began on the offensive and a slack pass-back in the opening minutes put Hearts goalkeeper Neil Alexander under pressure from former Ibrox team-mates Kenny Miller and Kris Boyd but the Gorgie custodian managed to recover.

After an early spell of pressure from the home team, Hearts began to settle and had most of the possession of an admittedly disappointing first half. That said, they were given a huge let-off after 20 minutes when a deflected effort from Miller fell for Templeton and the former Hearts winger headed over from six yards when he really should have scored.

As the first half wore on, Hearts began to control the game

and a teasing cross from Danny Wilson was pushed wide of the Rangers goal by Alim Ozturk before Sam Nicholson's rather weak header, which was easily saved by home keeper Bell, was the game first attempt at goal to be on target. Half-time arrived with the game goalless.

Eight minutes after the interval, Hearts took the lead. Billy King's corner was met by the head of Danny Wilson and the skipper eluded the challenge of McCulloch and Wallace to head into the corner of the net to put the Maroons in front. Joy for the vociferous travelling support.

Midway through the second half there was a blow for Hearts. Goalkeeper Neil Alexander took the full force of an elbow from colleague Ozturk meaning he had to be stretchered off, his replacement being another former Rangers player Scott Gallacher.

The injury meant there was six minutes stoppage time to be added. In the first of these, Law found room in the Hearts penalty box to hook the ball beyond Gallacher to grab the equaliser and what most people believed would be a share of the points.

However, straight from the kick-off, Sam Nicholson raced forward and slipped the ball through to Osman Sow. The big Swedish forward, so impressive in pre-season friendlies, took a touch before firing a low shot beyond Bell to put Hearts back in front – and secure three valuable points. It was a brilliant finish by the former Crystal Palace player and he took the acclaim of the 1,700 strong travelling Hearts support as referee Craig Thomson blew the final whistle moments later.

All in all, it was a fine performance from Hearts and a superb result at the home of many people's favourites for the SPFL Championship this season. Losing their goalkeeper and then an injury-time equaliser but still winning the game is a huge testament to the character of this emerging Hearts team. Head

Coach Robbie Neilson wore the look of a delighted man at the end of the game as well he might.

Next Sunday, Hearts welcome Hibernian to Tynecastle for another game live on Sky Sports. It should be a cracker to match anything the Edinburgh Festival Fringe has to offer!

Rangers: Bell, Zaliukas, McCulloch, Foster, Wallace, Templeton, Black, Law, MacLeod, Miler, Boyd.

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

Referee: Craig Thomson

Att: 43,683

Top man: Skipper Danny Wilson – covered every blade of grass at Ibrox and scored a goal into the bargain.