

Alloa Athletic 0 Heart of Midlothian 1



SPFL Championship, Saturday 11 October 2014 – Inodrill Stadium

Hearts headed to the Inodrill Stadium on Saturday very much aware of the threat Alloa Athletic posed in this SPFL Championship meeting. Rangers were held to a draw there recently while Hibernian fared even worse by coming away with nothing at all. Rangers manager Ally McCoist bemoaned Alloa's plastic pitch so Hearts Head Coach Robbie Neilson was leaving nothing to chance. He took his Hearts team there in midweek to train and practice on the surface – the Tynecastle club paying for the privilege. It was money well spent as the Maroons secured another vital victory to extend their lead at the top of the SPFL Championship table to an impressive nine points.

Neilson made one change to the team that triumphed on another plastic pitch seven days ago at Queen of the South – Dale Carrick replacing Soufian El Hassnaoui.

It was Carrick who created Hearts first real opportunity in the opening stages when he fell to the ground chasing a ball in the Alloa penalty box – but referee Calum Murray wasn't interested in awarding a penalty kick.

The home side seemed content to absorb Hearts pressure and chances were few and far between in the first half. It was Carrick again who threatened most just before the half hour mark when Osman Sow's cheeky flick set up the youngster whose long-range effort went inches wide. Alloa then had a great opportunity to open the scoring when Cawley went to go past Hearts keeper Neil Alexander only for the former Scotland goalie to save bravely. Shortly afterwards, Jamie Walker's effort from 20 yards hit the post and the home side breathed

easily once more. **Half-time Alloa Athletic 0 Hearts 0**

Carrick was replaced by Sam Nicholson for the second half while Callum Paterson came on in the early minutes of the second period for Jordan McGhee. It was still mostly Hearts with the Wasps prepared to use the sting in their tail on the break.

Hearts created another opportunity on the hour mark when Billy King turned the ball across the face of the Alloa goal only to see Osman Sow blaze the ball over the bar from six yards out when it seemed easier to score. Prince Buaben then fired in a long range effort which came to nothing and it began to look, as it did at Dumbarton a few weeks ago, like it was going to be one of those afternoons for the Maroons. A feeling which intensified when Alloa's McCord almost opened the scoring 15 minutes from the end with an effort which trundled past Alexander's post. Ferns also had a chance which he wasted moments later and there must have been a considerable number of the 2,500 travelling Maroon Army who, at that stage, may have settled for a point. However, with just four minutes left, one point turned into three for the league leaders.

A free-kick awarded some 35 yards from goal appeared to offer little threat, particularly as Hearts skipper Danny Wilson – so often a threat at set pieces – had to leave the field because of injury. However, Adam Eckersley stepped up to fire in a ferocious kick which took a deflection off at least one Alloa player before landing in the net – to the absolute joy of Hearts players and supporters alike.

Head Coach Robbie Neilson was a satisfied man after the game.

“I hope we can maintain this momentum through the rest of the season,” he told Hearts official website. “We got a wee bit of luck with the goal. We need to keep playing and keep trying to win games. There will be other times in the season where it is 0-0 for 85 minutes but we've got that belief now that we can

go and do it again.

We went to ten men and lost our captain but there was still that belief and drive to go and win it. This is a difficult venue to come to – neither Rangers nor Hibs could win here – so to drop down to ten men and still get a 1-0 win is fantastic.”

Hearts are now nine points clear of second-placed Rangers – who didn't play today – and a remarkable fourteen points ahead of promotion rivals Hibernian. After entertaining Dumbarton next week – the only team Hearts haven't yet beaten in the league – the Gorgie Boys head to Easter Road. A win in Leith will surely put them out of sight of their city rivals.

Alloa Athletic: McDowall, Doyle, Docherty, Gordon, Benedictus, Simmons, McCord, Holmes, Cawley, Buchanan, Spence

Hearts: Alexander, Wilson, Ozturk, Gomis, Walker, King, Buaben, Carrick, Sow, McGhee, Eckersely.

Referee: Calum Murray

Att: 3,067

Top Man: Adam Eckersely – the defender took some stick for his own goal at Celtic Park a few weeks back so, as the player said himself on Twitter, it was good to see him score at the correct end!