

Heart of Midlothian 5 Dumbarton 1



Hearts maintained their nine point lead at the top of the SPFL Championship by hammering the one team they hadn't yet beaten in the league this season – until Saturday afternoon. Dumbarton, managed by former Hibeer Ian Murray, held the marauding Maroons to a goalless draw five weeks ago but, at Tynecastle, found they were no match for Robbie Neilson's table-toppers.

Hearts captain Danny Wilson had been suffering from a hamstring injury so, with the Edinburgh derby looming next weekend, wasn't risked. Morgaro Gomis wore the captain's armband while Jamie Walker and Dale Carrick made way for Sam Nicholson and Soufian El Hassnaoui.

Another huge crowd of over 15,000 were at Tynecastle and they saw another dominant start from the home side, as has been the case in so many games this season. Another former Hibby, van Zanten made a hash of a passback in the opening minutes. Osman Sow was the grateful recipient but Taggart saved the day for the Sons with a vital tackle.

Hearts were camped in the Dumbarton half with the visitors struggling to make any progress beyond the halfway line. Callum Paterson's dangerous cross was just missed by Sow before the Swedish striker collected a pass from Gomis but couldn't get his shot on target. Hearts were creating chance

after chance without bulging the net and the afternoon was beginning to take on the look of 'one of those days'. However, in the 26th minute, Hearts finally got the breakthrough they deserved. Another fine delivery from the right by Paterson was headed home by Sow from six yards and the relief around Tynecastle was palpable.

Having barely ventured into the Hearts half, Dumbarton suddenly realised they would have to do so if they wanted anything from the game. A header from Graham was brilliantly saved by Neil Alexander to keep the Maroons in front. It was a miss the Sons immediately regretted as Hearts doubled their lead seven minutes from half-time. The ever-dangerous Billy King was fouled just inside the penalty box. Prince Buaben took the spot kick which wasn't one of his best and keeper Rogers very nearly kept it out. However, unlike Hibs effort at Easter Road last Saturday, this time the ball clearly went past Rogers and Hearts were two goals ahead.

El Hassnaoui almost made it 3-0 right on half-time but his effort was superbly saved by Rogers. **Half-time Hearts 2 Dumbarton 0**

The second half began the same way as the opening period – with Hearts on the attack. Sam Nicholson set off on a trademark run, dancing through the visiting defence before firing in a ferocious effort which almost snapped the crossbar. The youngster held his head in his hands but not for long. Ten minutes into the second half, substitute Jason Holt – on for Osman Sow – fired home a low shot to put Hearts three goals ahead. Game over – or so we thought.

Another former Hibeer – Nish – headed towards Fleming who cracked home a fine goal to give the small scattering of travelling fans some hope. Frustration threatened to boil over for the home side when El Hassnaoui was the victim of a crude challenge and looked in considerable discomfort – only for referee McKendrick to a) not award a foul, b) not book the

Dumbarton player and c) incredibly, tell the Hearts man to get up and get on with things. This invited collective fury from Hearts players and supporters alike and for a brief spell it looked like Dumbarton might capitalise. However, with six minutes left, Callum Paterson headed home a corner to seal the game at 4-1.

Four minutes later, Billy King broke forward and with the visiting defenders trailing in his wake, fired in a fine effort which went beyond keeper Rogers to complete the scoring at 5-1 to Hearts. A scoreline, of course, which is synonymous with a certain Scottish Cup final victory over Hibernian, something the home crowd were only too keen to remind the Dumbarton manager.

A rather curious afternoon ended with Hearts still nine points clear at the top of the SPFL Championship table. Curious in that Hearts played well in patches but, particularly when they went three goals up, let their guard down somewhat and sloppiness and a casual approach crept into their play. Given this is the third home game in a row where Hearts have scored five goals, this is perhaps no great surprise but it's something Head Coach Robbie Neilson will be only too keen to eradicate.

The final word on the afternoon's events, sadly, has to be about the referee. Mr McKendrick let many crude challenges by some Dumbarton players – step forward Colin Nish as the main culprit – go unpunished, yet seemed uninterested when some Hearts players were left in a crumpled heap. The referee only booked two players – Dumbarton's Nish and Fleming – and on both occasions the players walked away from the official before he showed the yellow card meaning he had to chase after them to administer punishment. Not the best refereeing performance by any manner of means.

Next up for Hearts is a trip to Easter Road next Sunday – clearly, a game Hearts supporters are relishing.

Hearts: Alexander, Paterson, Ozturk, Gomis, El Hassnaoui, Nicholson, King, Buaben, Sow, McGhee, Eckersley.

Dumbarton: Rogers, van Zanten, Linton, Graham, Gilhaney, Agnew, Nish, Megginson, Kirkpatrick, Taggart, Fleming.

Referee: John McKendrick

Att: 15,522

Top man: Sam Nicholson – there's a buzz generated every time this young man gets the ball.