

Falkirk 1 Heart of Midlothian 2

SPFL Championship, Saturday 15 November 2014 – The Falkirk Stadium

After last week's struggle to overcome Raith Rovers by a single goal at Tynecastle, I looked at this weekend's fixtures and felt there was the distinct possibility of Hearts lead at the top of the SPFL Championship being reduced. Robbie Neilson's men faced a tricky visit to Falkirk and the Maroon's record at the Falkirk Stadium has hardly been impressive of late. With Rangers playing Alloa Athletic at Ibrox, I suspect I wasn't alone in thinking Hearts lead at the top of the table might be reduced to two or even a solitary point. At the end of Saturday evening, I needn't have worried. Not only did Hearts record another victory to extend their unbeaten run to a highly impressive 13 games, thanks to Rangers only mustering a draw against the Wasps, the table-toppers actually increased their lead to six points. And with fellow promotion contenders Hibernian also dropping points, it was a good afternoon for Robbie Neilson's side.

Neilson had spoken during the week about not rushing injured stars Danny Wilson and Osman Sow back too early and about utilising the squad. Thus, the skipper and the striker remained on the sidelines while Miguel Pallardo replaced Sam Nicholson and Kevin McHattie came in for the injured Adam Eckersley.

As has been the case so often this season, Hearts began the game on the offensive. El Hassnaoui brought out a fine save from former Jambo keeper MacDonald in the opening minutes before Prince Buaben fired an effort into the side net. Falkirk were defending resolutely but the breakthrough for Hearts came in the 27th minute. The ever-dangerous Billy King

set off on a mazy run before passing to Kevin McHattie. The young full back showed the composure of a seasoned striker as he turned inside the penalty box before firing the ball high into the net past a startled MacDonald to give the visitors a deserved lead.

Ten minutes later, Hearts doubled their lead. Jamie Walker sped down the left wing and sent over a dangerous cross into the Falkirk penalty box where El Hassnaoui got to the ball first to poke it home. Half-time arrived with Hearts fully deserving of their 2-0 lead. **Half-time Falkirk 0 Hearts 2**

Hearts fans know full well, however, that their team seldom do anything the easy way (apart from Scottish Cup finals against their city rivals) If the first 45 minutes belonged to the visitors, the second period was, in the main, dominated by the home side whose half-time substitution which brought about the arrival of Cooper brought an immediate change. He forced a fine save from Neil Alexander and the Hearts defence were struggling to keep Cooper at bay. That said, Jamie Walker should have secured victory for Hearts with just over 20 minutes left when he intercepted a poor pass back from Biabi but found his effort on goal well saved by MacDonald.

The Bairns gave themselves a lifeline when Vaulks was allowed to run through the Hearts defence before passing to Biabi who was given too much time to turn the fire the ball past Alexander. From looking comfortable, Hearts were now having to defend although substitute James Keatings had a great chance to finish the game near the end when he latched on to Walker's cross only to fire his effort wide of the post.

The game did finish moments later and Hearts had clinched an impressive three points at a venue where they have often struggled. With Rangers unexpectedly dropping two points at home, Hearts lead at the top of the league is now six points and with Rangers visiting Tynecastle next Saturday for an eagerly-anticipated clash, another home victory – and Hearts

have won every home game so far this season – would extend that lead to nine. Hearts other main contenders for promotion – Hibernian – are now 16 points behind.

‘We shall not be moved’ bellowed the Maroon Army who made up about half of the 7,000 crowd on Saturday. Another three points next Saturday and they may be proved correct...

Falkirk: MacDonald, Shaughnessy, McCracken, Vaulks, Taiwo, Alston, Smith, Sibbald, Grant, Leahy, Loy.

Hearts: Alexander, McHattie, Ozturk, Gomis, Walker, El Hassnaoui, King, Pallardo, Buaben , McKay, McGhee.

Referee: Calum Murray

Att: 7,003

Top Man: Morgaro Gomis – yet again, the wee man was everywhere.