

Heart of Midlothian 1 Raith Rovers 0



SPFL Championship, Saturday 8 November 2014 – Tynecastle

Remembrance weekend is always an emotional time of the year and this year was particularly poignant for those who turned up at Tynecastle in large numbers for the SPFL Championship game between Hearts and Raith Rovers. One hundred years have passed since the beginning of the Great War and the story of how the table-topping Hearts team of 1914 became one of the first clubs in Britain to sign up to fight for King and country is perhaps the most important part of the rich history of this famous old club. Raith Rovers, inspired by their Edinburgh counterparts, did likewise days afterwards and it was fitting both these clubs should come together the day before Remembrance Sunday. A lone piper played as the teams lined up immediately before kick-off and the 16,000 plus crowd stood in absolute silence, a fitting tribute to those players from both clubs who gave the ultimate sacrifice for their country a century ago. The only sound was from the rain battering the roof of the Wheatfield Stand which gave an added poignancy to a sombre occasion.

The game itself, sadly, was not one which will live as long in the memory as those players who were the victims of war. Hearts made three changes to the team that deflated city rivals Hibs a fortnight ago with Callum Paterson suspended and captain Danny Wilson and Osman Sow injured. Jordan McGhee, Brad McKay and Jamie Walker were the respective replacements.

Alim Ozturk, whose 40 yard screamer which gave Hearts a 94th minute equaliser at Easter Road nearly two weeks ago, was given a rousing reception from the appreciative home support as the game kicked off. Hearts camped themselves in the Raith Rovers half, teasing and probing for openings. When, just four minutes in, the ball broke to Ozturk 40 yards out the call came from the home support to shoot. The Turk defender strode forward ten yards, looked up and fired in another long-range effort which cannoned off the gloves of Rovers keeper McGurn and spun into the net to put Hearts a goal ahead. Bedlam at Tynecastle!

Ozturk had another long-range effort moments later with a 25 yard free kick which just went wide. It was beginning to look like the big defender was keen on finding another role for him at Tynecastle – that of leading goalscorer!

If the home support sat back and waited for the anticipated goal rush, as has been the case in so many games at Tynecastle this season, they were to be disappointed. Raith Rovers stuck to their game plan of thwarting Hearts forward moves at every opportunity.

As the game wore on, Hearts continued to enjoy possession – but they were unable to make it count for anything. There were passes aplenty from the home side but many were made sideways or, frustratingly for the increasingly anxious home support, back towards the defence and goalkeeper Neil Alexander.

Towards the end of the game, Raith finally began to believe in themselves and began to threaten an equaliser, a prospect which seemed unlikely during a rather mundane first half but looked more likely in the final ten minutes when Hearts were reduced to ten men when full back Adam Eckersley was forced off with injury with the home side having already used all three substitutes. Thankfully, for the maroon hordes, Hearts held out and so remain four points clear at the top of the SPFL Championship table.

To his credit, Hearts Head Coach Robbie Neilson didn't try to pull the wool over the eyes of the Hearts support after the game.

"The result was more important and impressive than the performance, if I'm honest" he told the Hearts official website. "We started really well and I thought we'd build on that, but we got selfish at times. The boys made the wrong runs, didn't use the ball well enough and it wasn't happening for us. However, it gives us something to work on, so we'll get the boys in tomorrow and try to fix it."

And there is the difference between the Hearts approach of this season compared to others. Whilst before, some of the players might have spent their Saturday night enjoying a beer or two, now they are getting an early night ahead of what will undoubtedly be a tough training session on Sunday morning.

For the second game in succession, Hearts have played poorly – but still remain unbeaten. There now follows a tough run of games starting with a tricky trip to Falkirk next week before Rangers come calling to Gorgie – and Celtic then come on Scottish Cup business.

No one needs to tell Robbie Neilson there will need to be a marked improvement in performance if Hearts are to get take anything from these games.

Hearts: Alexander, Ozturk, Gomis, Walker, El Hassnaoui, Nicholson, King, Buaben, McKay, McGhee, Eckersley.

Raith Rovers: McGurn, Thomson, Perry, Watson, Fox, Anderson, Moon, Elliot, Scott, McKay, McKeoen.

Referee: Crawford Allan

Att: 16,372

Top Man: Alim Ozturk – as the fans bellowed 'he scores when he wants!'

