

Heart of Midlothian 2 Rangers 0



SPFL Championship, Saturday 22 November 2014 – Tynecastle

The last time Hearts played Rangers was back in August at Ibrox Stadium on the first weekend of the new season. Robbie Neilson's men recorded a fine 2-1 victory over their main challengers for promotion and since then hadn't tasted defeat in the league all season. Ally McCoist's men came to Gorgie on Saturday for the return fixture – and again left empty-handed as the Maroons stormed to another victory.

Neilson hinted during the week at a couple of changes to the team which won at Falkirk last Saturday and he duly obliged with Callum Paterson replacing Jordan McGhee and Jason Holt coming in for Prince Buaben who picked a knock in training during the week and was deemed only fit enough for a place on the substitutes bench.

Another huge crowd of over 17,000 packed into Tynecastle to create a raucous atmosphere. However, the importance of the occasion seemed to get to the players in the opening period of the game. Hearts seemed to have got sucked into counter-attacking mode with Rangers overly physical approach and long ball tactics unsettling the home side.

This physical approach reached boiling point in the 21st minute when Rangers Steven Smith lunged into Callum Paterson with his studs leaving referee Craig Thomson no alternative but to show a red card to the Ibrox player. Hearts began to show more attacking moves but it was Rangers who almost took the lead when Law's free-kick was saved well by Neil Alexander.

Hearts then threatened with Alim Ozturk's free-kick and then a long-range effort from Morgaro Gomis before a header from Brad McKay was brilliantly saved by Rangers keeper Simonsen right on half-time. The ten men of Rangers held on to keep the game goalless at the break. **Half-time: Hearts 0 Rangers 0.**

Rangers approach to the game seemed to be to stop Hearts at any cost and this didn't change in the second half. Former Scotland striker Kenny Miller lunged into Kevin McHattie five minutes after the break with a challenge that seemed as bad as Smith's one in the first half. However, referee Thomson deemed it only worthy of a yellow card and Miller was substituted shortly after. Kevin McHattie, sadly, wasn't able to continue and was replaced by Adam Eckersley.

Moments later, Hearts deservedly took the lead. Callum Paterson, doing a power of work down the right wing, delivered another teasing cross which was only partially cleared by the Rangers defence. The ball broke to Jason Holt who fired a brilliant shot past the despairing arms of Simonsen to open the scoring. Cue bedlam at Tynecastle.

The old cliché is that teams are at their most vulnerable when they've just scored and this was almost proved correct as Rangers came close to equalising immediately. Neil Alexander produced a brilliant save from close range from Law with Foster hitting the crossbar with the rebound. Tynecastle heaved a huge sigh of relief.

Jamie Walker then spurned a chance to seal the game when he dragged his shot wide as Hearts passing game had the visitors chasing shadows at times. Rangers replaced MacLeod with veteran Kris Boyd much to the disgust of the travelling support who let Ally McCoist know their feelings in no uncertain terms. Their disgust turned to anger a few minutes later when Jamie Walker was fouled by former Hearts hero Ian Black inside the penalty box. Walker took the penalty himself with the expertise of a veteran and this secured a deserved

victory the Maroons.

The football, particularly in the first half, wasn't the best quality but Hearts eventually stuck to what they're best at and played their opponents off the park. It has to be said that Rangers were brutal at times and the tide seems to be turning against their manager Ally McCoist. Rumour has it that the ball and Craig Thomson's whistle were taken to Edinburgh's Royal Infirmary after the game for recuperation...

This will be of no concern to Robbie Neilson and his Hearts team who now sit nine points clear at the top of the SPFL Championship. While we've still to reach the halfway point in the season, it's surely better to be in Hearts shoes than anyone else's.

Hearts: Alexander, Paterson, McHattie, Ozturk, Gomis, Walker, El Hassnaoui, Holt, King, Pallardo, McKay.

Rangers: Simonsen, McGregor, McCulloch, Mohsni, Wallace, MacLeod, Law, Black, Smith, Daly, Miller

Referee: Craig Thomson

Att: 17,004

Top man: Alim Ozturk – possibly his best display of the season.