

Heart of Midlothian 4 Queen of the South 1



SPFL Championship, Saturday 6 December 2014 – Tynecastle

After the controversy of last week's Scottish Cup defeat to Celtic, Hearts returned to the more routine matter of trying to secure promotion from the SPFL Championship. Queen of the South, one of Hearts main competitors for promotion, visited Tynecastle on Saturday and Robbie Neilson's men knew they faced a tough test. And it proved to be a curious afternoon with the Doonhamers no doubt feeling they were on the wrong end of a harsh scoreline.

Another huge crowd of more than 15,000 came to Tynecastle on a bitterly cold afternoon less than three weeks before Christmas – a testament to the magnificent Hearts support and also to a decent following from Dumfries.

Hearts, with skipper Danny Wilson back in the side for the first time since sustaining injury at Easter Road in October, began impressively, as they have done so often this season. Alim Ozturk was the first to threaten with his now customary long-range effort on goal before superb build-up play between youngster Robbie Buchanan – making his first start for Hearts – and Callum Paterson saw the latter fire an effort wide of Clark in the Queens' goal.

At this stage, it was all Hearts with the Doonhamers content to hit on the break. In the 12th minute, the hard-working James Keatings fired in shot which sailed over the bar as the Maroons threatened every time they came forward. Inevitably, the deadlock was broken in the 20th minute in spectacular style by that man Keatings. Danny Wilson launched a long ball which

Keatings let bounce before volleying in from 20 yards past a startled Clark. Tynecastle rose to acclaim the former Hamilton Accies player who ran to the main stand, rather appropriately where the Dumfries Hearts Supporters flag was draped.

After Callum Paterson came close again, the home side were awarded a rather dubious looking penalty when the Scotland defender was deemed to have been pushed inside the penalty box. Prince Buaben took the spot-kick but his effort smacked off the post and was cleared. The visitors clearly felt justice had been served and they came more into the game as half-time approached. However, Hearts should have scored again when Jamie Walker dispossessed a Queens defender and bore down on goal only to see his half-hearted effort cleared.

Half-time Hearts 1 Queen of the South 0

The Dumfries side began the second half in determined fashion and, for the first time, Hearts began to look rattled. Home keeper Neil Alexander saved well from McShane as uncertainty crept into the home side's game. It was no surprise, therefore, when Queens equalised following the award of another dubious penalty when Jamie Walker was adjudged to have pushed McShane. Russell did an expert job with the penalty and the visiting support roared their approval.

They were nearly celebrating again when Alexander saved brilliantly from Higgin's header and the anxiety from the home support became palpable, particularly with the news that Rangers had taken the lead against Cowdenbeath at Ibrox and it looked as if Hearts lead at the top of the table might be cut. However, in the 66th minute, Tynecastle breathed a huge sigh of relief.

James Keatings' cross pin-balled inside the Queen's penalty box before captain Danny Wilson marked his return to the side by heading home. Seven minutes later, Hearts all but secured victory when Prince Buaben atoned for his penalty miss by

turning his man inside the penalty box and driving the ball home for Hearts third goal.

Five minutes later the game was indeed all over when Callum Paterson delivered a fine pass to Billy King who fed Adam Eckersley who drove the ball into the corner of the net to complete the scoring at 4-1 to Hearts. There was just time for 17 year old midfielder Nathan Flanagan to make his Hearts debut as the Hearts youth academy rolled out yet another starlet from its production line.

The apprehension which had clouded over Tynecastle early in the second half had now disappeared and the Hearts support went home happy, particularly when they heard Hibernian had lost again. Yet, Queen of the South were the best visiting team I have seen at Tynecastle this season and I have little doubt they will be in the play-offs for a place in next season's SPFL Premiership. While the automatic promotion place is a two-horse race between Hearts and Rangers, no one will want to face the Doonhamers on this form.

Hearts remain nine points clear of Rangers – and are now 19 ahead of Hibernian. In the next five weeks, Rangers have to visit Queen of the South and Hibernian while Hearts go to Ibrox in the middle of January. While one shouldn't really look too far forward, if the gap between first and second has increased further at the end of this period, it may well be game over for automatic promotion.

Hearts: Alexander, Paterson, Wilson, Ozturk, Walker, King, Pallardo, Buaben, Keatings, Buchanan, Eckersley.

Queen of the South: Clark, Dowie, Durnan, Higgins, K. Holt, McShane, Kerr, Russell, Kidd, Reilly, Dzierzawski

Referee: Craig Charleston

Att: 15,459

Top man: James Keatings – not only did he score a contender for goal of the season, his work-rate was phenomenal.