

Alloa Athletic 1 Heart of Midlothian 4

SPFL Championship, Saturday 31 January 2015 – Indodrill Stadium

Much has been written in the printed and on-line media this week about how Hearts would react to their first league defeat of the season following Falkirk's 3-2 victory at Tynecastle last Saturday. Would there be an adverse reaction to this setback? Would doubts be placed in the minds of the players? Would their confidence now turn to nerves? These questions were answered in emphatic fashion in Clackmannanshire on Saturday evening when Robbie Neilson's men returned to winning ways by coasting to a 4-1 victory over Alloa Athletic.

Neilson had said during the week he would have made changes to the Hearts team for this game regardless of the result in Gorgie last week. Sure enough, Jordan McGhee, Sam Nicholson and Genero Zeefuik had to be content with places on the substitute's bench while their replacements Alim Ozturk, Miguel Pallardo and James Keatings took to the field on a cold, windy winter's evening.

As is customary, Hearts began on the offensive from the kick off. James Keatings had the game's first chance after just two minutes but he hit the side netting. Three minutes later, however, Hearts went ahead with a spectacular goal. Miguel Pallardo fired in a screamer from 25 yards which gave Alloa keeper McDowall not an earthly. As against Falkirk last week, Hearts had made the perfect start.

Jamie Walker then almost made it two when he was set up by Osman Sow but the youngster's effort only found the side netting. It was a miss Hearts almost regretted when former Jambo Stephen Simmons hit the post as play swung to the other

end of the field. However, with just 11 minutes played, Hearts were 2-0 up thanks to a quite brilliant solo goal from James Keatings. The hard-working forward showed great skill by dancing past the Alloa defence before firing in a low shot to double the visitors' lead. It was a superb effort, one of the goals of the season.

It was all Hearts now and Osman Sow fired in an effort which was well saved by McDowall. Then Keatings fired in another effort which rattled the crossbar as Hearts threatened to go on the rampage. The only minor gripe for the Maroon Army was that their heroes were only two goals ahead at the interval.

Half-time Alloa Athletic 0 Hearts 2

Hearts were still dominant in the second half. Therefore, it was something of a shock to the system when the Wasps pulled a goal back on the hour mark. As against Falkirk last week, the Hearts defence looked none too clever when Spence resisted a less than convincing challenge from Pallardo to head home. Hearts discomfort, however, only lasted five minutes. Simmons gave the ball away to Jamie Walker and the youngster thrust into the Alloa penalty box before firing the ball past McDowall. 3-1 to Hearts and the fire in the Alloa bellies had been doused.

Walker almost scored again after fine work from Eckersley but this time McDowall palmed the ball clear.

Hearts ended the game in fine style and scored a fourth goal in stoppage time when Callum Paterson headed home substitute Billy King's corner.

So Hearts answered their critics in style with a fine, dominant performance to stretch their lead over Rangers at the top of the SPFL Championship to 16 points. Two games now follow against bottom side Livingston. After the disappointment of last week, Hearts fans are delighted to see Robbie Neilson's side back to their best.

Alloa Athletic: McDowall, Doyle, Gordon, Benedictus, Meggatt, Docherty, McCord, Simmons, Holmes, Spence, Buchanan

Hearts: Alexander, Paterson, Wilson, Ozturk, Gomis, Walker Pallardo, Buaben, Keatings, Sow , Eckersley.

Referee: Stephen Finnie

Att: 2,592

Top man: James Keatings. What a goal!