

Heart of Midlothian 2 Falkirk 3



SPFL Championship, Saturday 24 January 2015 – Tynecastle

After the mid-winter farce that was Hearts visit to Glasgow eight days ago, Robbie Neilson's SPFL Championship leaders got back to football business when they entertained Falkirk at Tynecastle this afternoon. On the Bairn's last visit to Gorgie in August, Peter Houston's side caused the Maroons more than a few problems and the 4-1 scoreline in the home team's favour scarcely did the match justice. And on a cold winter afternoon in Edinburgh, Falkirk did more than cause a few problems for Robbie Neilson's men – they ended the Maroons unbeaten SPFL Championship run.

Yet the afternoon started so brightly for Hearts. With striker Osman Sow back from long-term injury – it was the Swede's first appearance since October – the pairing of the former Crystal Palace player with recent signing Genero Zeefuik seemed a mouth-watering prospect. And so it proved after just a minute's play.

Zeefuik fought well for possession before passing to Sow. The Big 0 raced down the left wing before crossing for the Dutchman to fire the ball home. Another huge crowd of over 16,000 rose to acclaim their heroes and sat back in expectation of another goal fest. Sadly, they were to be disappointed.

The warning signs were there. Grant should have had the Bairns on level terms soon after but he scooped Sibbald's cross over the bar from just six yards. It was a let off for the home side but one they didn't heed.

Sam Nicholson had a chance but his weak effort trundled wide of former Hearts keeper Jamie MacDonald's goal. At the other end, the home defence was looking none too sure of themselves and keeper Neil Alexander almost gifted an equaliser when his weak clearance felt to Sibbald who drove his effort wide. Leahy and Kerr then had further chances as Hearts struggled to contain the visitors. That said, Osman Sow nearly doubled Hearts lead when he drove a fierce low effort which went inches wide.

After 32 minutes, Falkirk's pressure paid off when they were awarded a penalty. Hearts Jordan McGhee – in for the suspended Alim Ozturk – clumsily tackled Loy. Baird duly despatched the spot kick to draw parity.

Half-time: Hearts 1 Falkirk 1

It had been a distinctly average first half from the hosts and the Maroon Army were hoping Robbie Neilson would have issued some harsh words at half-time. Despite a bright start, just seven minutes had gone in the second period when Falkirk went in front. Again, Jordan McGhee looked suspect when Loy eased past him to fire home from 20 yards.

The home support bellowed their encouragement and it looked as if Hearts would get a penalty when Sow was pushed inside the penalty box by Grant – only for referee Robertson to ignore the vehement penalty claims. Shortly after, Sam Nicholson headed what we all thought was the equaliser – only for Jamie Mac to produce a brilliant save, something he did frequently during his Tynecastle days.

Hearts replaced the tiring Sow with James Keatings and the former Hamilton Accies striker almost made an immediate impact with an effort which MacDonald saved with his legs. However, seconds later Keatings was celebrating when he fired home Hearts equaliser from barely six yards. An end-to-end game was now 2-2 and the home support urged their heroes to go for the

winner.

Sadly, Hearts defensive shortcomings were exposed again. This time Morgaro Gomis was all too easily dispossessed by Sibbald who punished the former Dundee United player by firing the winner into the bottom corner. Gomis was replaced by Jason Holt soon after.

As the full-time whistle blew there were a few disgruntled noises from the home support. Hearts looked distinctly unsure of themselves today and if second-placed Rangers win their games in hand the gap at the top of the league drops down to seven points. Promotion still has to be earned, something Robbie Neilson has always maintained.

Credit, though, has to go to an impressive Falkirk team who thoroughly deserved their victory. On this form, they will not only be involved in the promotion play-offs at the end of the season – they will fancy their chances of getting into the SPFL Premiership.

Hearts: Alexander, Paterson, Wilson, Gomis, Walker, Nicholson, Buaben, Sow, Zeefuik, McGhee, Eckersley.

Falkirk: MacDonald, Duffie, Vaulks, Taiwo, Alston, Sibbald, Kerr, Grant, Leahy, Loy, Baird

Referee: Don Robertson

Att: 16,206

Top man: On a difficult afternoon, Jamie Walker stood out for the home side.