

Queen of the South 1 Heart of Midlothian 2

SPFL Championship, Saturday 21 February 2015 – Palmerston Park

Last December, when Queen of the South came to Tynecastle I thought it was one of the best displays seen by a visiting side to Gorgie this season and the 4-1 scoreline in favour of Hearts was something of an injustice. Given the Doonhamers are very much in the race for a promotion play-off place and recently knocked out the Scottish Cup holders St. Johnstone from this season's competition, Robbie Neilson's table-topping Hearts team knew they faced a stern test in Dumfries on Saturday. However, yet again, the Maroons rose to the challenge and returned to the capital city with three hard-earned but what may prove to be crucial points.

Neilson made two changes to the Hearts team that laboured to a 1-0 win over Livingston last week with Morgaro Gomis and Billy King replacing Kenny Anderson and James Keatings.

As they have done in most games this season, Hearts started on the offensive although Queens' Burns tested Hearts keeper Neil Alexander with a shot early on.

As the half wore on, both sides looked dangerous but it was the home team who were dominating territorially and one sensed they were the more likely of the two teams to score. This sense was justified in the 23rd minute when fine play from Kidd on the right saw his cross fall to Carmichael who was left to his own devices by the visiting defence and had the relatively easy task of tapping the ball home to give the Doonhamers the lead.

Hearts looked shocked and it could have been even worse just

minutes later when Gomis – not for the first time this season – was far too casual in his approach and was dispossessed by Paton. The former Aberdeen player bore down on goal and only fine defending from Adam Eckersley prevented Queens from doubling their lead.

Hearts Chief Robbie Neilson had the look of a man quietly fuming but his mood must have changed just after half an hour's play when his team equalised. Callum Paterson crossed for the impressive Billy King to half-volley a fine effort beyond home keeper Clark to draw parity. This seemed to change the pattern of the game and Hearts threatened to score again through Zeefuik and Walker.

Half-time: Queen of the South 1 Hearts 1

Hearts replaced Prince Buaben with Kenny Anderson at the start of the second half and the Dutchman had an early chance to score when he was found with a fine pass from Eckersley but the home defence managed to clear their lines. Hearts were now looking the livelier of the two sides with Jamie Walker and Billy King tormenting the home defence. Gomis and the busy Zeefuik had chances which they couldn't convert and while Hearts were enjoying a much better second half, it looked like Robbie Neilson's men would spill two points in the race for the Championship. However, with just six minutes left, the always-threatening Adam Eckersley knocked a ball into the Queens penalty box which was steered home by Zeefuik, via a deflection off a Queens defender, for a dramatic late winner, much to the delight of the 2,500 travelling Maroon Army.

Hearts lead at the top of the table, therefore, remains at 20 points. This may well prove to be a defining game in a long season. Queen of the South have been mightily impressive this season as Hibernian and Rangers have found to their cost. For Hearts to leave Dumfries with all three points when many didn't think they would do so is further evidence – if any were needed – that the Gorgie Boys have what it takes to win

this league and return to the SPFL Premiership at the first time of asking.

Hearts have had some tricky away fixtures recently with potential banana skins at Alloa, Livingston and Queen of the South – yet have won at all those venues. As Hibernian and Rangers look from afar, no one can doubt Hearts will take some catching now.

Queen of the South: Clark, Dowie, Durnan, Higgins, Holt, Burns, Millar, Kidd, Carmichael, Paton, Lyle

Hearts: Alexander, Paterson, Wilson, Ozturk, Gomis, Walker, King, Pallardo, Buaben, Zeefuik, Eckersley.

Referee: Euan Anderson

Att: 5,100

Top man: Adam Eckersley