

Heart of Midlothian 2 Raith Rovers 1



SPFL Championship, Saturday 18 April 2015 – Tynecastle

Hearts returned to winning ways on Saturday afternoon with a workmanlike victory over Raith Rovers in the SPFL Championship at Tynecastle.

After last Sunday's meek display in the defeat in the Edinburgh derby at Easter Road, Hearts Head Coach Robbie Neilson brought in keeper Scott Gallacher, Sam Nicholson, Soufian El Hassnaoui and Kenny Anderson as injuries and suspensions took their toll.

The game began with a fervoured atmosphere as news arrived at Tynecastle of Hibernian's unfortunate but somewhat inevitable Scottish Cup demise earlier that afternoon. The champions began the game in determined fashion, as is their wont in Gorgie, but the best chance of the opening period fell to Raith's Calum Elliot, one of several former Jambos in the Starks Park squad. Elliot's shot from the edge of the penalty box went high and wide.

Hearts had an opportunity to break the deadlock in the 25th minute when Callum Paterson appeared to be fouled in the penalty box but referee Willie Collum – clearly a popular figure at Tynecastle – let play carry on and Jamie Walker's shot was blocked.

Ten minutes before half-time, Hearts went ahead with a fine goal. Osman Sow fed the ball to Sam Nicholson and the young winger shrugged off a couple of chances before firing a shot

past goalkeeper Cuthbert to the joy of yet another huge home support.

However, Raith really should have drawn level right on half-time when Conroy was allowed the freedom of Gorgie to control the ball inside the penalty box but his effort on goal was too high and the Maroon Army breathed a sigh of relief.

Half-time Hearts 1 Raith Rovers 0

Ten minutes into the second half, Hearts went two goals ahead. Great play from Callum Paterson on the right wing saw the full back set up Soufian El Hassnaoui who drove the ball into the net from just inside the penalty box. Kevin McHattie then had a great chance to seal the game but his effort was saved by Cuthbert.

Hearts were in command now so it was all the more surprising when the visitors pulled a goal back when former Hearts striker Calum Elliot finished well from inside the penalty box.

Hearts introduced 17-year-old Sean McKirdy to the fray and the youngster gave an assured performance for the time he was on the park.

Referee Willie Collum was not endearing himself to either set of fans with some curious decisions and the home support chanted they thought the controversial official had an active sex life, albeit a solitary one...

Jamie Walker fired in an effort from 25 yards which came back off the post as Hearts sought to add to their lead. Substitute Gary Oliver then saw an effort blocked by the Raith keeper before the ball hit the post.

Hearts almost rued those missed chances when Elliot tried his luck from outside the box but home keeper Gallacher pushed the ball over the crossbar.

In the end, Hearts never looked like losing although the team at its peak would have put at least four goals past a Raith Rovers side that tried manfully to salvage something from the game.

Robbie Neilson was pleased with the win although not overly-enthused with the performance. He told Hearts official website "Football is ultimately about winning games. We did what we had to do, after losing the derby match last weekend. I made a few changes, and the fresh players gave us a lift.

"The wheels can come off the tracks a bit when your season ends so early, it can be hard to get up for matches, so we're trying to drill personal targets and pride into the players' mentalities.

"Three months ago, we'd have been delighted with a 2-1 victory over Raith Rovers," he continued. "Going for the title, every point is so vital, but today we're a bit flat due to not hitting standards.

"The expectations are extremely high around the club, so the place is a bit down every after winning. In a way it's a good thing, but we still need to enjoy victories because we won't have as many next season."

Hearts: Alexander, Paterson, McHattie, Wilson, Ozturk, Gomis, Walker, El Hassnaoui, Nicholson, Sow, Anderson

Raith Rovers: Cuthbert, Thomson, Watson, Moon (Fox, 61'), Stewart, Elliot, Callachan, Conroy, McKay, McKeown, Barr.

Referee: Willie Collum

Top man: Sam Nicholson

Att: 15,405