

Heart of Midlothian 3 Alloa Athletic 0



The cliché used by too many journalists last weekend following Hearts 2-1 defeat at Ibrox was that Robbie Neilson's men had 'packed away the tools'. This was a reference to the fact they had clinched the SPFL Championship title a couple of weeks before and so the intensity needed to win in Govan wasn't there. This irked Neilson who refuted the allegations and anyone who knows the Hearts Head Coach knows he demands a will-to-win approach at all times.

On a balmy spring Wednesday evening Hearts entertained an Alloa Athletic side who had a need-to-win philosophy drilled into them by newly-appointed manager Danny Lennon, the former St. Mirren boss and one-time player of Hibernian.

Neilson rang the changes and seven players from the side which lost on Sunday made way with young goalkeeper Jack Hamilton joining El Hassnaoui, Billy King, James Keatings, Kenny Anderson and two players heading out of Tynecastle Brad McKay and Adam Eckersley who made surprise appearances. With Hearts due to cross the capital city on Sunday to face Hibernian, the Head Coach was clearly resting a few legs.

Despite yet another impressive crowd of more than 15,000, it was one of those games that was difficult to get enthused about. The fans, having celebrated the SPFL Championship title success at games against Queen of the South and Rangers, seemed content to sit back and enjoy the weather. The biggest noise came in the 22nd minute when a pre-planned appreciation for Shaun Cole, the Hearts supporting soldier who lost his life on holiday the other week was invoked by the home support.

Adam Eckersley was at least trying to gee up his team mates and was clearly heard shouting to those in maroon to *****g move as he tried to instigate an attack. The left back was causing the visiting defence problems with his pace but it seemed no one else in maroon was keen to take advantage.

After half an hour of nothing of note, Hearts almost took the lead when skipper Danny Wilson cut the ball back for James Keatings but the striker's effort smacked off the post. A huge groan emanated from this reporter who had backed the former Hamilton Accies player to open the scoring...

This seemed to spark some life into the home team as well as the home support. Morgaro Gomis brought out a fine save from Alloa keeper McDowall before Billy King set off on a trademark run before firing his effort from an acute angle over the bar.

If you are wondering what Alloa Athletic were doing at this point the answer is not a great deal. The game looked to be heading for a goalless stalemate as half-time approached – until Callum Paterson drove forward on the right, cut inside the full back and unleashed a brilliant effort from 20 yards which fizzed into the bottom corner of the net. At last, the Wasps resistance had been broken.

Half-time Hearts 1 Alloa Athletic 0

While it took the Maroons 42 minutes to open the scoring, it took them just four minutes of the second half to double their lead. James Keatings swung in a corner from the right and Danny Wilson rose unchallenged to head home Hearts second goal.

A fine flowing move almost resulted in a third goal for the home side but Sam Nicholson's header from Paterson's cross was brilliantly saved by McDowall.

There was a rare moment of danger for Hearts when Flannigan fired in a long-range effort which whistled past Jack

Hamilton's post but this merely irked the home side. With 20 minutes left, El Hassnaoui scored a rare goal when he fired home a volley from around 20 yards to seal three comfortable points for Hearts.

Robbie Neilson's side should have been given the opportunity to make it 4-0 when substitute Gary Oliver was brought down inside the penalty box, However, for reasons known only to him, referee Andrew Dallas – whose father Hugh was such a popular refereeing figure at Tynecastle in the 1990s – refused to award the penalty kick. He did, however send off Alloa's Docherty a few moments later for a second bookable offence.

Job done for Hearts who can now turn their attention to the Edinburgh derby on Sunday and the clash with promotion play-off hopefuls Hibernian.

Hearts: Hamilton, Paterson, Wilson, Gomis, El Hassnaoui, Nicholson, King, Keatings, Anderson, McKay, Eckersley

Alloa Athletic: McDowall, Ferguson, Docherty, Gordon, Benedictus, Tiffoney, Flannigan, Holmes, McCord, Cawley, Buchanan

Referee: Andrew Dallas

Att: 15,156

Top man: Adam Eckersley – it's such a shame Robbie Neilson is letting him go. The left back was immense and must have covered every blade of the Tynecastle pitch.