

# Rangers 2 Heart of Midlothian 1

**SPFL Championship, Sunday 5 April 2015 – Ibrox Stadium**

It's not often this season the Edinburgh Reporter has had to report on a defeat for Heart of Midlothian FC. However, for only the second time in the league this season, the SPFL Champions were beaten as promotion hopefuls Rangers recorded their first victory over Hearts this season.

Rangers featured former Hearts stars Zaliukas, Black and Templeton – the latter pair having to make do with places on the substitute bench. One could only have imagined their thoughts as they and their team mates formed a guard of honour to welcome the league winners on to the Ibrox pitch. Hearts goalkeeper Neil Alexander, of course, used to adorn the number one shirt of Rangers and his return to Govan was akin to a man bumping into a former girlfriend only to find she was a pale imitation of what she used to be and was no longer the temptress who once offered fame and fortune.

A fortnight has passed since Hearts clinched the SPFL Championship when their hosts of this afternoon defeated Hibernian at Easter Road. As against Queen of the South last week, Robbie Neilson's men, despite the public utterings of being professional and doing their utmost to win their remaining games, had the look of a team that knows the job has been done. Neilson made a couple of changes to the side that defeated the Doonhamers last Saturday with Kevin McHattie and Sam Nicholson starting the game in place of Adam Eckersley and Billy King respectively.

We've been used to Hearts starting games on the offensive this season but today it was Rangers who began in determined fashion. Law had the first attempt on goal in the opening two

minutes but his volley was well saved by Alexander.

Rangers dominated the opening period and the Maroons had to resort to counter-attacking moves through Nicholson and Sow to threaten. That said it was young Jamie Walker who came closest to opening the scoring with a ferocious shot from 25 yards which drifted just wide.

After 28 minutes, Rangers took the lead. Former Jambo Wallace sped down the right wing and his cross was prodded home by former Hibe Miller to the delight of the home crowd. For a brief moment the huge travelling Maroon Army ceased their anthems.

Hearts tried hard for an equaliser through Alim Ozturk and Nicholson before Walker again almost found the net but his effort was blocked by Rangers keeper Bell.

Six minutes before half-time, Rangers went two goals ahead when Vuckic had far too much time and space to swing a shot beyond Alexander to silence the Hearts support once more. Right on half-time, Rangers McCulloch was shown a red card for a dangerous challenge on Osman Sow, the Rangers player appearing to elbow the Swede.

### **Half-time Rangers 2 Hearts 0**

Hearts may have had a man advantage but they were two goals behind. And it could have been three when Clark was left on his own in the penalty box early in the second half but the son of the former Hearts and Rangers favourite Sandy could only manage a tame effort on goal which Alexander gratefully received.

Hearts enjoyed the lion's share of possession as one might expect but, unusually, they were proving toothless in front of goal. Ozturk had a great chance to pull a goal back but he blazed the ball high and wide from inside the penalty box and the chance was gone.

There were just seven minutes remaining when Hearts finally got a goal back. Osman Sow headed Ozturk's cross towards goal and Genero Zeefuik poked the ball home to give hope to the Maroons.

Hearts poured men forward in search of an equaliser but, sadly, it didn't arrive and the home side emerged with what may prove to be a crucial three points as they leap-frogged Hibernian into second place in the league. If truth be told, the home side deserved the win as Hearts never really got going until it was too late.

After the game, Hearts Head Coach Robbie Neilson was refreshingly honest in his assessment of the 90 minutes.

"I don't think we did enough to win the game" said Neilson. "First half, we didn't do enough of the things we were trying to work on. We let them press us and it wasn't until we went with two up front that we started to cause them some problems.

"Second half, we dominated, but when teams sit in like that, it's really hard to break them down. It can be difficult for the players to really get motivated and Rangers still have a lot to play for.

"The intensity level wasn't quite there for us."

Neilson confirmed that full-back Adam Eckersley will not be offered a new contract, while Jason Holt, Brad McKay and Scott Robinson will also move on at the end of the campaign.

"It's important that we change the squad a bit and get better players in. We're a Championship team that's been promoted, so we must make sure we bring quality in. I'll be looking at four, five, maybe six players. I've got the nucleus of a really good side and I want to keep hold of the ones I want."

**Rangers:** Bell, Wallace, McCulloch, Law, Vuckic, Clark, Miller, Shiels, McGregor, Zaliukas, Murdoch.

**Hearts:** Alexander, Paterson, McHattie, Wilson, Ozturk, Gomis, Walker, Nicholson, Pallardo, Sow, Zeefuik.

**Referee:** Bobby Madden

**Att:** 40,521

**Top man:** Jamie Walker