

Heart of Midlothian 2 Rangers 2 – Hearts Lift the Championship Trophy



SPFL Championship, Saturday 2 May 2015 – Tynecastle Stadium

And so they faced the final curtain...Hearts momentous SPFL Championship winning season drew to a close at a packed Tynecastle Stadium on Saturday as the champions produced a performance full of guts, determination and character to ensure they didn't end the campaign with a defeat to the side installed as title favourites when the season began back in August.

Hearts Head Coach Robbie Neilson made five changes to the team that needed a last minute winner against Cowdenbeath last Saturday with Scott Gallacher, Danny Wilson, Soufian El Hassnaoui, Sam Nicholson, and Miguel Pallardo coming into the team.

Rangers, with former Jambos Marius Zaliuksa and Lee Wallace in their line-up, knew a win was required if they wanted to clinch second place in the league and, therefore, two less play-off games – and hope second-placed Hibernian slipped up at Falkirk.

With the home support in party mood, Hearts kicked off in determined fashion with the intensity which has been missing of late back with abundance. Miguel Pallardo split the Rangers defence early on and his brilliant pass found Jamie Walker through on goal. However, the youngster's effort was thwarted by Rangers keeper Bell.

Moments later, Bell was scurrying across his goal as

Pallardo's deflected effort flashed wide as the home side rampaged forward at will. Sam Nicholson and Jamie Walker were giving the Rangers defence a torrid time and there were some desperate physical challenges from the visitors at times.

That said, it was Rangers who nearly broke the deadlock after 15 minutes when veteran Kenny Miller moved down the right wing but the former Hibernian striker's delivery into the penalty box failed to find a colleague.

After 32 minutes, Rangers were awarded a hotly disputed free-kick. Law's fine delivery was headed home by McGregor who, it has to be said, was left unchallenged by the home defence.

If the home support were left irritated by this they were infuriated five minutes before half-time when the Ibrox side doubled their lead. The goal came from a Hearts attack. Osman Sow, who had been booked by referee Callum Murray for diving earlier in the game, was clean through on goal and looked certain to equalise. Rangers keeper Bell ran out to meet the Swede and unceremoniously upended the former Crystal Palace striker. It had to be a penalty to Hearts and a red card to the Rangers keeper. Nothing doing said Mr Murray who waved play on, pursued by a posse of angry Hearts players. Rangers burst forward to the other end of the field. Foster crossed to the grateful Miller who stroked the ball home to double Rangers advantage.

Tynecastle was a cauldron of fury and there was no one more furious than Robbie Neilson who was then sent to the stand by referee Murray for his trouble.

Half-time: Hearts 0 Rangers 2

With the news that Hibernian were two goals ahead thus rendering any Rangers win redundant, the second half began with less intensity. The always-dangerous Jamie Walker fired in an effort from 25 yards which was saved by Bell before Kevin McHattie also had a shot saved.

With 15 minutes to go, Rangers should have finished the game when Hearts 2012 Scottish Cup winning captain Marius Zaliukas met Vuckic's free kick inside the six yard box – with Hearts defender Callum Paterson caught napping. However, the Lithuanian somehow contrived to put his header wide when he should have scored. It was a price he was to pay.

As if angered by his mistake, Paterson then clattered into former Hibernian player Dean Shiels. His challenge was greeted with warm applause by the home support who recognised the big defender was at least showing some determination to rectify matters. Whatever the moral argument about this, it seemed to spark a resurgence in the home side and with eight minutes left they pulled a goal back. Morgaro Gomis delivered a superb cross into the penalty box where substitute Genero Zeefuik headed beyond Bell.

With passions roused once more, Hearts swarmed forward in search of an equaliser. After a woeful defensive clearance by the Rangers defence, it was Zeefuik again who poked the ball past Bell in the 92nd minute to grab a wholly deserved equaliser and ensure the championship celebrations would start on a high.

Robbie Neilson was delighted with the result, despite his side not winning the game.

“It was a brilliant way to end the season,” said the Hearts Head Coach. “It almost felt like a win, to come back in that style. In a way, it sums up our whole season. We have belief and we fight until the end.

“We wanted to win, or at least get something from it. I couldn't believe we were 2-0 down, we got into good positions and were wasteful. We lost two bad goals, but a draw was the least we deserved.”

Hearts were then presented with the SPFL Championship trophy

and embarked on a lap of honour before an ecstatic home support.

It has been an astonishing season for Heart of Midlothian FC. For the next few summer weeks, the dust will settle – before life in the top flight of Scottish football resumes in August.

Hearts supporters simply can't wait!

Hearts: Gallacher, Paterson, McHattie, Wilson, Ozturk, Gomis, Walker, El Hassnaoui, Nicholson, Pallardo, Sow.

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

Referee: Callum Murray

Att: 16,874

Top man: Genero Zeefuik