

Hearts Win Seven Goal Thriller



Heart of Midlothian 4 St. Johnstone 3

Ladbrokes SPFL Premiership, Sunday 2 August 2015 – Tynecastle

There were some football pundits who thought this particular fixture in the opening weekend of the Ladbrokes SPFL Championship may have brought a scarcity of goals. This was on the premise that Hearts new-look team may find things tough on their return to top-flight football while the Perth Saints have struggled to find goals of late. How wrong those pundits were as Hearts and St. Johnstone served up a seven goal thriller in front of a near full house at an overcast Tynecastle.

Hearts Head Coach Robbie Neilson gave Igor Rossi, Blazej Augustyn and Juanma their debuts and there was a welcome return for Prince Buaben who missed the final part of last season through injury.

Before kick-off Hearts owner Ann Budge unfurled the SPFL Championship flag, presented to the Gorgie club after their emphatic title win last season. The majority of the huge Tynecastle crowd lapped it up and they had barely settled into their seats when their favourites took the lead.

Just four minutes had been played when Saints defender Brad McKay – released by Hearts during the summer – stumbled inexplicably on the edge of his own penalty box allowing Hearts new striker Juanma to run in on goal and slip the ball beyond goalkeeper Mannus to give the home side an early lead.

The impressive Juanma was proving a real handful to the Saints

defence and he came close again with an effort which went wide before another new Jambo – Igor Rossi – also had an effort on goal which was blocked.

However, it was far from one-way traffic. The Perth Saints were dangerous on the counter-attack with Lappin, Shaughnessy and another former Jambo John Sutton causing problems.

Just after the half-hour mark, Hearts Osman Sow did brilliantly to create space for himself but his effort on goal was blocked. However, it was Saints who nearly scored the next goal when Sutton's header was scooped off the line by Sam Nicholson.

Half-time Hearts 1 St. Johnstone 0

St. Johnstone resumed after the break in determined fashion but it was Hearts who scored again with their first real attack of the second period. Brilliant play by Juanma saw the Spaniard racing through on goal with the visiting defenders trailing him. He slipped the ball to Sam Nicholson whose run into the penalty box was foiled illegally. Penalty said referee Steven McLean – one of the few decisions he got right all afternoon – and Osman Sow duly took the spot kick. His effort was saved by Mannus but Jamie Walker reacted to the rebound quicker than anyone to blast the ball home to put the home side 2-0 ahead.

Hearts two goal advantage didn't last long. Shaughnessy's long throw into the Hearts penalty box startled home keeper Neil Alexander who could only palm the ball to Lappin who fired home. 2-1 to Hearts now and there were accusing looks among the home defence.

After Jamie Walker almost scored his second goal, the young forward then played a delightful pass to Callum Paterson and the big utility player drove the ball past Mannus to put Hearts 3-1 ahead. Sam Nicholson then had a glorious chance to put the game to bed but he opted for power rather than

precision with his shot on goal from six yards out and his effort sailed into the Gorgie Stand.

It looked like the youngster's miss would prove costly for the home side. St. Johnstone pulled a goal back when Sutton glanced a header beyond the despairing Alexander before Shaughnessy's effort spun off Cummings to equalise for the visitors.

Anguish emanated from the Tynecastle stands as Hearts appeared to have thrown away a two goal lead. But Sam Nicholson made up for his earlier miss when he got on the end of a superb cross from the hard-working Callum Paterson to give Hearts a sensational winner.

Gorgie gaffer Robbie Neilson was a relieved man after the game.

"It was a really nerve wracking game for us," he told BBC Radio Scotland. "We wanted to get three points, we managed to do it, but the manner in which we did it wasn't what we were looking for.

"We pride ourselves in being defensively strong, but fatigue played a big part in this because we had four or five boys who have hardly any pre-season.

"We patched them up to try to get them out for this game – Rossi, Augustyn, Juanma, Prince Buaben as well, but I thought they were all fantastic.

"They really worked hard and you could see in the last 30 minutes they were out on their feet, but they kept their character and kept going, winning their headers, winning their tackles, and got us the three points."

Hearts: Alexander, Paterson, Ozturk, Augustyn, Rossi, Nicholson, Buaben, Gomis, Walker (McGhee, 87'), Sow (Reilly, 90'), Juanma (McHattie, 77').

St Johnstone: Mannus, Scobbie, Lappin (Cummins, 68'), Millar (Brown, 20'), Wotherspoon (Kane, 85'), Sutton, Shaughnessy, McKay, Easton, Craig, O'Halloran.

Referee: Steven McLean

Att: 16,334

Top man: Callum Paterson – what a power of work this laddie put in.