

# Battling Hearts Make Their Point at Celtic Park

Celtic 0 Heart of Midlothian 0

Ladbrokes SPFL Premiership, Saturday 26 September 2015, Celtic Park

Given recent results and recent defensive displays, Hearts secured an unlikely point from their visit to league champions Celtic on Saturday. Indeed, it was an inspired performance from the much-maligned defence which the home side failed to breach and ended Hearts run of three successive league defeats.

Hearts Head Coach Robbie Neilson isn't averse to changing his team and he made four changes from the side that knocked Kilmarnock out of the League Cup on Wednesday evening with Jamie Walker, Juwon Oshaniwa, Miguel Pallardo and Juanma all starting. The main surprise was the omission of captain Alim Ozturk who had to be content with a place on the substitute's bench – apparently the defender was feeling the effects of a niggling injury.

When Hearts visit Celtic Park they are usually put under pressure from the start and Saturday's game proved no different. Hearts defence looked to be carrying on their uncertain form of recent weeks and gave the ball away far too cheaply. However, the home side failed to capitalise and the first real chance of the game fell to the visitors when Jamie Walker's corner fell to Sam Nicholson but the winger's effort on goal sailed over the bar.

Celtic's Commons then came close with a 25 yard free-kick before, moments later, the Scotland player shot straight at Neil Alexander in the Hearts goal. Former Hibernian Leigh Griffiths then launched a long-range effort which looked net

bound before Alexander punched clear.

At the other end, Osman Sow set up Juanma but the Spaniard's shot on goal was just too high.

Celtic were pressing for the breakthrough and Forrest hit the post from 20 yards before Rogic and Griffiths passed up glorious chances as Hearts began to ride their luck somewhat.

### **Half-time Celtic 0 Hearts 0**

Seven minutes into the second half the vociferous travelling support thought their side had taken the lead when Jamie Walker's chip found Igor Rossi but the defender only found the side netting and the Maroon Army's joy was short-lived.

Celtic continued to pile on the pressure and Brown came close with another long-range effort.

Hearts gave a debut to new signing Arnaud Djoum with ten minutes to go. Moments later Bitton headed wide when it seemed easier to score for the home side. Griffiths was again posing a threat and a curling shot from the striker was well saved by Alexander.

The game was petering out for a goalless draw although Hearts had a great opportunity to steal all three points right at the end when Sam Nicholson was clean through on goal only to be crudely brought down by Ambrose who was shown a red card by referee Kevin Clancy. From the resultant free-kick, Callum Paterson's effort on goal was blocked by the Celtic defence. Celtic then had an effort ruled out for offside before the final whistle blew seconds later.

Afterwards, Robbie Neilson declared himself satisfied with his side's afternoon's work. "We're pleased with a point but long term I'd like to build a team that comes here and wins three points." he told the official Hearts website "That's what we want to do, build a team that can come here and compete, play

better football and dominate the game.

“We rode our luck a little bit in the first half but you have to do that here. We had a couple of chances in the game and could’ve nicked it but all in all, a point is a decent result for us.”

In the end, Hearts came away with a hard-earned point and a clean sheet, something it has to be said very few Hearts supporters expected.

**Celtic:** Gordon, Lustig, Boyata, Ambrose, Izaguirre; Brown, Bitton, Commons, Rogic (Ciftci, 75’), Forrest, Griffiths.

**Hearts:** Alexander, Paterson, Augustyn, Rossi, Oshaniwa, Gomis, Pallardo, Nicholson, Walker (Djoum, 79’), Sow (Buaben, 64’), Juanma (Reilly, 76’).

**Referee:** Kevin Clancy

**Att:** 46,297

**Top man:** Neil Alexander – the former Rangers keeper kept the Celtic attack at bay.