

Hearts Defy the Odds



Heart of Midlothian 2 Ross County 0

Ladbrokes SPFL Premiership, Saturday 24 October 2015 – Tynecastle

After returning to winning ways last Sunday at Dundee United, Hearts continued in a similar vein with an impressive victory over Ross County at another packed Tynecastle on Saturday. A fine first half display which saw the Maroons a goal ahead seemed to be undone when stand-in captain Blazej Augustyn was sent off early in the second half. However, Robbie Neilson's hard-working side not only held on for the three points but managed to double their lead.

Neilson made three changes from the team that won at Tannadice six days ago. Juwon Oshaniwa, Danny Swanson and Miguel Pallardo made way for Callum Paterson – now free from suspension – Jamie Walker and recent signing Arnaud Djoum.

Hearts usually begin games on their own patch on the front foot. However, it was Ross County, on a decent run of form of late, who took the game to their hosts in the early stages. Yet, it was Hearts who had the first decent chance when Juanma turned inside the penalty box but struck his effort on goal high into the Roseburn Stand.

Then it was Callum Paterson's turn to shoot for goal and his effort from 20 yards whistled past Woods' post. However, the young full back's moment of glory was only delayed.

In the 14th minute, Sam Nicholson's shot on goal was blocked before the young winger was tackled in going for the rebound. The ball fell for Paterson whose rasping shot flew into the net to give the home side the lead.

Hearts tails were up and Jamie Walker was next to force Woods into a fine save as the Jambos sensed blood. County were struggling to contain the hard-working Nicholson and he was next to try his luck on goal but his effort was closer to the visiting support in the Roseburn Stand than the net.

Woods again denied Hearts when Walker linked up well with Juanma and the youngster's shot was goalbound until the Dingwall keeper pushed it over the bar. The half ended with Hearts in front and dominant – but this had been the case against Kilmarnock at Tynecastle three weeks ago and victory still had to be earned.

Half-time Hearts 1 Ross County 0

One suspected the game was about to turn following two incidents at the beginning of the second half. First, Nicholson found Walker and he was clean through with only Woods to beat. However, the Hearts man's low shot on goal went just wide and heads were held in hands around most of Tynecastle.

Then, just three minutes into the second half, Igor Rossi was punished for careless play when County's Graham pounced on the defender's mistake to set Boyce free on goal. Hearts skipper Blazej Augustyn then fouled the County man and this was deemed as denying a goalscoring opportunity by referee Alan Muir who duly ordered the home defender off. The resultant free-kick was blasted high into the stand but Hearts were facing playing for 40 minutes with just ten men.

Robbie Neilson reacted by replacing Juanma with young defender Liam Smith. Curiously, Jordan McGhee was moved to left back with Callum Paterson moving to the middle of defence. Neilson has spoken about McGhee's best position being in the middle of the defence so this was a decision which seemed perplexing to some of the Maroon Army.

It was all County now but they struggled to create many real

chances as Hearts rear-guard battled manfully.

With 23 minutes left a goal did arrive – but not at the end of the stadium most expected. Igor Rossi broke free from defence and passed to Osman Sow. The big Swede, who worked tirelessly as the sole forward since Hearts were reduced in numbers, did marvellously before feeding Jamie Walker. The youngster returned the ball to Sow who took the ball round keeper Woods only to seemingly trod on the ball. But the striker recovered his composure to fire home from six yards to double Hearts lead.

The relief around Tynecastle was palpable although the visitors should have scored when Curran contrived to hit the post from just a couple yards when it was easier to score.

Hearts saw out the rest of the game comfortably to record a fine win, particularly when one considers they played almost half of it a man down. There were fine performances from Jordan McGhee, Jamie Walker, Osman Sow and Callum Paterson. But for this reporter, Arnaud Djoum was the pick of the bunch. Djoum has played in the top division of Dutch football and it showed. Here is a man who can tackle, chase and, above all, pass with precision. He looks like being a valuable addition to this Hearts team who are now five points clear in third place in the Ladbrokes SPFL Premiership.

Robbie Neilson was a happy man at the post-match press conference.

“To put in such a good performance, and then with ten men, is something I’m delighted with” he told the official Hearts website. “When we lost a man, we gave the ball but played on the counter and performed very well.

“I know I’ve said before that we train with ten men,” he continued, “but it’s true, we practice for all scenarios. It’s just about keeping discipline, shape and being compact. We showed them wide and dealt with their crossing.”

“I thought Arnaud Djoum did really well today. He’s been playing in the under 20s to get fitness, and he’s played top-flight in Holland for six years, as well as in Turkey and Poland.

“I expected a good performance and he delivered one, so I’m very satisfied with his first start.”

Hearts: Alexander, Paterson, Augustyn, Rossi, McGhee, Buaben, Djoum, Walker (Pallardo, 85’), Nicholson (Gomis, 75’), Sow, Juanma (L. Smith, 52’).

Ross County: Woods, Fraser, Reckford (Franks, 46’), Robertson, Gardyne, Graham (Curran, 61’), Boyce, Foster, Davies, Murdoch (M. Woods, 52’), Irvine.

Referee: Alan Muir

Att: 16,264

Top man: Arnaud Djoum – early days but he looked a class above anything on the Tynecastle pitch today.

It was alleged on social media websites after the game that a Ross County supporters bus was attacked by a group of youths purporting to be Hearts ‘fans’. The more decent element among the Hearts support – the majority it should be said – joined their Dingwall counterparts in trying to identify the culprits.

Meanwhile, Hearts have announced details of a Memorial Garden to be created at Tynecastle Stadium. The Forever In Our Hearts Memorial Garden, which will be unique in British football, is due for completion in November 2015 and will be located on the site of the famous Shed – at the corner of the Wheatfield and Roseburn Stands.

Fans will have the opportunity to honour those who have gone before them with a personalised engraved heart that will adorn the walls of the garden and be a fitting tribute to

generations of Hearts supporters and a permanent reminder to future generations to come.

Hearts will announce further details of this venture in the weeks ahead.