

Alexander Earns Ten-Man Hearts Point in Perth

St Johnstone 0 Heart of Midlothian 0

Ladbrokes SPFL Premiership, Saturday 19 December 2015 – McDiarmid Park

A backs-to-the-wall performance by ten-man Hearts secured a point in a goalless draw with St. Johnstone in Perth on Saturday. The Maroons knew that defeat would see the Perth Saints leapfrog them in the Ladbrokes SPFL Premiership and things looked ominous when Spanish striker Juanma was ordered off with less than half an hour gone. However, Robbie Neilson's men fought for the maroon cause and came away with a point which many would have settled for before the afternoon's events unfolded.

Head Coach Robbie Neilson made two changes from the team that lost a late goal at Aberdeen seven days ago and neither of the changes were surprising. Miguel Pallardo – replaced in the first half in the Granite City – and Jordan McGhee, whose inexplicable hand ball cost Hearts the game last week – were left out and replaced by Morgaro Gomis and Juwon Oshaniwa respectively.

The visitors had the first decent chance of the afternoon after eight minutes when strong play from Juanma set up fellow striker Osman Sow and the Swedish striker's low shot was saved by Saints keeper Mannus.

Prince Buaben then fired in an effort from twenty yards which went wide.

As at Pittodrie last week, the game seemed a tad on the physical side with Hearts keeper Neil Alexander suffering a head knock and there were 'meaty challenges' from both sides.

The home side should have gone in front when Anderson rose unmarked to head Craig's corner but his header lacked power and the recovered Alexander saved well.

After threatening to boil over, the game did so in the 28th minute. Juanma and Saints Wotherspoon went for a ball with the former Hibs player hitting the floor. Wotherspoon picked himself up and appeared to aim a kick at the Hearts player who then aimed a head butt towards him. Although there was no contact the intent was there and referee Kevin Clancy duly sent Juanma packing with a straight red card and Hearts were up against it. The striker appeared reluctant to leave the field and had to be ushered off by Callum Paterson.

St Johnstone should have made their numerical advantage count moments later when Fisher set up Davidson but the Saints player dragged his effort on goal wide when it seemed easier to score.

Former Jambo John Sutton then headed over as Hearts were keen to get to half-time with the scoreline still blank.

Half-time St Johnstone 0 Hearts 0

Robbie Neilson re-organised his troops during the break but Hearts still had to rely on keeper Neil Alexander to keep them on level terms early in the second half when he pushed away an effort from Easton.

However, Hearts weren't completely out of things. A great cross from the hard working Sam Nicholson was met by Osman Sow but the striker's effort on goal took a deflection. Then Prince Buaben set off on a lung-bursting run of fully forty yards but his effort on goal was saved by Mannus.

O'Halloran had two chances for the home side but was denied by Paterson and Alexander.

Then came what looked like a costly mistake by the visitors.

Substitute Pallardo brought down Kane in the penalty box resulting in the inevitable penalty kick to the home side. However, MacLean incurred the wrath of the home support by blazing his spot kick over the bar and Hearts breathed again.

Kane was proving a handful for Hearts and he had great chance to snatch victory for the Saints but he was denied by a brilliant save from Alexander. The Hearts keeper denied the home side again moments later with a block with his feet and Hearts held on until the final whistle to claim a draw in trying circumstances.

In the end it was a decent point for Hearts but, not for the first time, Juanma's discipline let him down.

Robbie Neilson attempted to explain the striker's actions after the game. "He is a big boy and he gets targeted a lot," Hearts Head Coach told BBC Scotland.

"It's difficult for him coming from a different culture and there are things that happen on the pitch that in Spain result in a free-kick – but not in Scotland"

Hearts fans will be hoping he learns his lessons soon.

St Johnstone: Mannus, MacKay, Anderson, Davidson, MacLean, Wotherspoon, Sutton (Kane, 70'), Fisher (Shaughnessy, 84'), Easton, Craig, O'Halloran.

Hearts: Alexander, Paterson, Augustyn, Rossi, Oshaniwa, Gomis, Buaben (Pallardo, 70'), Djoum (McGhee, 86'), Nicholson, Sow (Reilly, 74'), Juanma.

Referee: Kevin Clancy

Att: 4,780

Top man: Neil Alexander