

Hearts Back To Winning Ways

❌ Heart of Midlothian 3 Dundee United 2

Ladbrokes SPFL Premiership, Wednesday 30 December 2015 – Tynecastle

Hearts recorded a narrow but thoroughly deserved victory over basement club Dundee United in front of another sell-out Tynecastle on Wednesday evening.

The Maroons got off to the worst possible start by conceding a penalty kick in the opening minute but stormed back with three first half goals through Gavin Reilly, Prince Buaben and Osman Sow before conceding another right on half-time.

Hearts Head Coach Robbie Neilson made three changes to the team that battled for a 2-2 draw with champions Celtic at the weekend – captain Alim Ozturk returned to the team at the expense of Blazej Augustyn while Jordan McGhee replaced the injured Callum Paterson and Billy King took the place of Arnaud Djoum who limped off on Sunday afternoon and was considered only fit enough for a place on the substitute's bench.

In the United team was Hearts 2012 Scottish Cup winning hero Ryan McGowan who was given a warm reception from the home crowd.

Any notions this was going to be an easy game for Hearts were dispelled in the first few seconds when Juwon Oshaniwa needlessly fouled Fraser inside the penalty box leaving referee Bobby Madden no option but to award United a penalty kick. McKay duly converted to the delight of the 744 United fans.

Sam Nicholson then had a header saved by United keeper Szromnik before the winger almost connected with a raking pass

from the impressive Gavin Reilly.

Hearts pressure was rewarded in the 17th minute. Billy King's corner eventually found Reilly who fired home from six yards to level the score at 1-1.

Moments later, Reilly almost put Hearts ahead from a cross from McGhee but his header was agonisingly wide.

In the 25th minute Hearts went ahead. Prince Buaben collected the ball on the edge of the United penalty box and his effort on goal was straight at Szromnik. However, the United keeper inexplicably parried the ball which squirmed past him and into the corner of the net to the horror of the watching away support.

Five minutes later, Hearts went further ahead. Billy King was brought down inside the penalty box and Osman Sow made his usual efficient job with the penalty kick. 3-1 to Hearts and seemingly game over. Not so, however.

Right on half-time a Fraser free-kick was given the 'after you, Claude' treatment by the Hearts defence as the ball sailed past them all and into the net to put United back in the game.

There was still time for one last piece of drama in a remarkable first half when United's Durnan was sent off for denying Gavin Reilly a goalscoring opportunity. From the resultant free-kick, Alim Ozturk saw his effort blocked.

Half-time Hearts 3 Dundee United 2

Robbie Neilson replaced Morgaro Gomis with Arnaud Djoum for the start of the second half and it didn't take the Belgian long to fire in an effort that Szromnik saved well.

Thereafter Reilly, Sow, King and Nicholson all had chances as Hearts sought to put the game to bed. It was Jordan McGhee who

had perhaps the best chance towards the end but his effort from six yards out was saved well by Szromnik.

The final whistle sounded a few minutes later with United pressing for the equaliser and while there was disappointment that Hearts hadn't added to their lead it was a welcome first win in six games.

Robbie Neilson was satisfied with the result if not ecstatic with the performance.

"I thought we responded really well and got ourselves into a really good position and then lost another bad goal from a set-play that goes directly in," he told BBC Scotland.

"Second half, they had a man sent off and we were a bit gung-ho. We just didn't finish things off and it became a bit tense in the end. We huffed and we puffed and we had four or five clear-cut chances and didn't take them.

"Overall, I was pleased – it was a good result against a team that are fighting for their lives."

Hearts: Alexander, McGhee, Ozturk, Rossi, Oshaniwa, Buaben, Gomis (Djoum, 46'), King, Nicholson (Zanatta, 82'), Reilly, Sow (Swanson, 80').

Dundee Utd: Szromnik, Dixon, Morris (Dillon, 45'), McKay (Spittal, 46'), Rankin, Erskine, McGowan, Durnan, Gunning, Fraser, Demel (Souttar, 79').

Referee: Bobby Madden

Att: 16,721

Top man: Gavin Reilly