

Dons Left Dignity Behind For Tynecastle Trip

Four weeks ago Hearts lost a Ladbrokes SPFL Premiership game at Aberdeen. While it was a poor performance from the Gorgie players it took an inexplicable hand ball from Hearts defender Jordan McGhee towards the end of the game to give the home side a penalty, which they subsequently converted for the only goal of a scrappy game. It was, though, a win the Dons deserved, for they were the better team, something Hearts Head Coach Robbie Neilson alluded to after the game while expressing disappointment in his own side's performance.

This didn't prevent some Aberdeen players commenting that Hearts were a long-ball team with a brutal approach to the game. Yes, there were some robust challenges that afternoon but this could be said of both sides – some of the Dons players weren't averse to 'mixing things up', to use a well-worn cliché, during the game.

Fast forward a month and to the William Hill Scottish Cup Fourth Round tie between the sides at Tynecastle, in front of the BBC cameras for live television broadcast. Aberdeen brought around 3,500 fans and they contributed to a cracking atmosphere as they always do. Perhaps the Aberdeen players were pumped up by this; it might explain their aggressive stance to the game right from kick-off – or it could be they felt the need to show Hearts they had a brutal side to their game.

In the first half Hearts played more of a passing game than has been evident in recent weeks. The visitors seemed to resort to long-ball tactics even though they had in their ranks, Johnny Hayes, who has the trickery of wing players of yesteryear who would bring fans to the edge of their seats. Moreover, Aberdeen were making some physical challenges of the

sort they had condemned Hearts for last month. One incident involving Adam Rooney should have been punished by referee John Beaton but wasn't – giving the impression the referee was not entirely in control of what was going on.

Hearts scored in the second minute through the impressive Callum Paterson who, as well as his fine goal, was clearly not allowing himself to be intimidated by Aberdeen's tactics. The home side dominated the first half and the only note of concern for the Maroon Army at half-time was that their favourites only had one goal to show for their superiority. Robbie Neilson acknowledged after the game that his team need to learn how to kill teams off.

Although Aberdeen came more into the game in the second half, it was Hearts who still managed to create the better chances and who deservedly won the tie. Perhaps it was this that so annoyed Aberdeen manager Derek McInnes who vented his anger on some of the Hearts players at the final whistle – and also on Neilson who he accused of trying to get Dons player Graeme Shinnie yellow-carded. Conveniently, McInnes chose to overlook Shinnie's late lunge which incurred the wrath of the Hearts bench as the Dons became ever more desperate.

The visitors dispensed with sporting integrity – what they had of it – in the final minutes when Hearts captain Alim Ozturk went down with cramp. The defender has only recently returned to the first team following a few weeks out through injury and, given the bruising nature of Saturday's game, it was understandable he was feeling its effects. Hearts keeper Neil Alexander booted the ball out of play to enable Ozturk to receive treatment. To his credit, the aforementioned Hayes was about to give the ball back to Hearts from the resultant throw-in – only for his manager to instruct him to ignore the accepted practice of immediately giving the ball back, much to the disgust of the home fans.

McInnes could not contain his anger after the game and

criticised Hearts Spanish striker Juanma, Neilson and, yet again, Hearts approach to the game. Now, in the immediate aftermath of a game your side has just lost, emotions can run high. Aberdeen's exit from this season's Scottish Cup at the first time of asking – at the same stage they took their exit from the competition last season when McInnes said his team was by far the better team despite a 2-1 loss to Dundee – has seen their only realistic chance of silverware this campaign disappear. The loss of revenue from a cup run and the likelihood that attendances at Pittodrie will suffer until the end of the season will be all too apparent to the Aberdeen board of directors – and, unquestionably, to McInnes himself who may feel his job is less secure following his side's disappointing cup defeat.

However, the former Rangers player really should consider his words more carefully. His post-match comments at Tynecastle intimated Hearts had cheated to victory and had a reputation for it. This from a man whose team includes Peter Pawlett who has a reputation of his own for 'simulation' (diving to you and me) and was given a two game suspension from the SFA in 2011 for obtaining a penalty by unfair means against Hibernian. It seemed to me on Saturday evening his behaviour hasn't changed much.

Three decades ago, during the Alex Ferguson era, Aberdeen were one of the best teams in Europe. They won every trophy going in Scotland as well as the (now defunct) European Cup Winners Cup in 1983.

My ten-year-old grandson Jack asked me why the Aberdeen fans threw toilet rolls on to the Tynecastle pitch on Saturday evening. I gave an admittedly sarcastic reply that this was something fans did generations ago and that Aberdeen fans were stuck in the past. That Aberdeen team of the 1980s didn't lose often but, if memory serves me well, when they did dignity was quite often posted missing.

Derek McInnes has shown he is now deep in the ethos of Aberdeen FC. Losing graciously is something that doesn't seem to happen in the Granite City.