

Hearts Secure Impressive Win In Dingwall

Ross County 0 Heart of Midlothian 3

Ladbrokes SPFL Premiership, Wednesday 10 February 2016, The Global Energy Stadium

Hearts bounced back from the disappointment of letting Hibs off the Scottish Cup hook with a fine victory over League Cup finalists Ross County in Dingwall.

Three second half goals from the Maroons – one from the returning Jamie Walker and a double from new signing Abiola Dauda – saw Robbie Neilson's men secure a vital three points in the race for European football next season.

After Sunday's bruising encounter, Neilson made five changes to the team with Juwon Oshaniwa, Jamie Walker and Juanma returning to the first team and John Souttar and Don Cowie making their full debuts, the latter returning to the ground where he made his name.

There were just 20 seconds on the clock when Hearts almost opened the scoring. Fine play from Juanma saw him fire a cross along the 18 yard box where Arnaud Djoum set up Sam Nicholson but the youngster's effort on goal was wide.

Young Sam came close again minutes later when Jamie Walker picked him out but Nicholson's shot from the edge of the penalty box was too high.

Ross County have been in decent form of late and McShane's free kick in the 13th minute was saved by Hearts keeper Neil Alexander.

Four minutes later, McShane's corner was met by the head of

Irvine and his header went just over the bar.

County were beginning to dominate proceedings and striker Goodwillie – on loan from Aberdeen – skipped past Jordan McGhee before firing an effort which looked a certain goal – until Hearts debutant John Souttar headed off the line.

Half-time Ross County 0 Hearts 0

Minutes into the second half, County's Boyce hit the crossbar with an effort from 18 yards before the forward forced Alexander into another fine save. The travelling Maroon Army were hoping they weren't going to witness another poor second half showing as happened at Tynecastle on Sunday and their wish was granted when Hearts took the lead in the 53rd minute. Don Cowie's corner was met by home defender Irvine but, in attempting to clear, the County player's header hit the back of Jamie Walker and the ball spun agonisingly for the home side into the net.

Schalk then had a chance for the Staggies before Hearts thought they had a penalty kick with 15 minutes to go when Sam Nicholson went down inside the penalty box after a challenge – only for referee Steven McLean to book the Hearts man for diving.

There were just four minutes remaining when Hearts sealed all three points. Substitute Dauda got on the end of a long pass from Oshaniwa and used his pace to get into the penalty box before bending the ball past Fox to make it 2-0.

Three minutes later, fine play from another Hearts substitute Dario Zanatta set up Dauda whose first-time shot flew into the net to end the night at 3-0 to Hearts.

The final scoreline may have flattered them but this was, nonetheless, an impressive win for a Hearts team missing so many regular first team players.

Ross County: Fox, Gardyne, McShane, M. Woods, Goodwillie (Schalk, 58'), Foster, Davies, Boyce, Fraser, Irvine (Franks, 78'), Quinn.

Hearts: Alexander, Paterson, Souttar, McGhee (L. Smith, 81'), Oshaniwa, Cowie, Djoum (Dauda, 61'), Pallardo, Nicholson, Walker (Zanatta, 74'), Juanma.

Referee: Steven McLean

Att: 3,391

Top Man: Callum Paterson – captain for the night and never put a foot wrong.