

# Hearts Win at Dens Park

**Dundee 0 Heart of Midlothian 1**

**Ladbrokes SPFL Premiership, Saturday 12 March 2016 – Dens Park**

Dens Park, Dundee has never been a particularly happy hunting ground for Heart of Midlothian and we're fast approaching the thirtieth anniversary of one of the darkest moments in the club's history, the calamitous conclusion to season 1985/86 when silver-shirted Hearts players saw their dreams of landing their first Scottish league championship title in more than a quarter of a century disappear in the final eight minutes of the season with a 2-0 defeat to an Albert Kidd inspired Dundee.

However, three decades on Hearts appear to have overcome their Dens Park demons and on Saturday they recorded their second Ladbrokes Premiership win of the season at the home of the Dark Blues.

A second half goal from Jamie Walker was enough to earn a fourth successive league win for Robbie Neilson's side and all but ensure a place in next season's Europa League – a notable achievement for a side who were promoted to the top flight of Scottish football last season.

Neilson made just one change to the team that beat Partick Thistle at Tynecastle seven days ago and it was an enforced one with the injured Igor Rossi being replaced by youngster Jordan McGhee – one of five Hearts players called up for the Scotland Under 21 squad this week.

A whirlwind start to the game by the visitors nearly resulted in a goal in the opening seconds. Liam Smith's pass found Arnaud Djoum who then fed Jamie Walker but the young forward fired his effort wide.

Walker was in the thick of the action a couple of minutes later when he left Holt for dead then delivered a fine cross for Juanma whose flick on goal was saved by Bain.

Dundee appeared to be experiencing a Scottish Cup hangover following their mauling by Championship side Rangers last weekend and it was all Hearts. Fine play from McGhee saw him send over a fine cross which was knocked on by Djoum only for the move to come to a crushing end when Don Cowie fired the ball high into the stand.

Juanma then produced a fine save from Bain before Djoum headed into the side netting. The home side were struggling to contain their guests but there was frustration that Hearts hadn't converted their dominant play into goals. A frustration which intensified when Dundee's Stewart was given too much space to gallop forward and deliver a tempting cross into the Hearts penalty box which, thankfully for the visitors, didn't reach Hemmings whom the Hearts defence didn't think worthy of marking.

Hearts were soon back on the attack and ten minutes from the half-time interval, fine play from Jamie Walker found Don Cowie and his effort on goal was just over the crossbar. Moments later, Jordan McGhee headed home Cowie's free-kick but the young defender was adjudged to be in an offside position.

Right on half-time, a fine pass from Juanma was collected by Cowie who then set up Djoum but the Belgian missed a glorious chance to open the scoring when he poked the ball wide from just six yards. The groans from the 1,500 travelling Maroon Army told its own story.

### **Half-time Dundee 0 Hearts 0**

Dundee manager Paul Hartley clearly had some words of 'encouragement' for his players at half-time as they looked a different team in the second half. Hearts keeper Neil Alexander pulled off a brilliant save from McGowan before

Harkins fired in a long-range effort which went wide. Then Kerr had a great chance for the home side but his attempt on goal was more likely to trouble the International Space Station than Neil Alexander...

In the 52<sup>nd</sup> minute, after some intense Dundee pressure, a goal did arrive – for Hearts. A fine pass from Djoum set up Jamie Walker who rounded keeper Bain before stroking the ball home to the delight of the vociferous travelling support.

Juanma and Cowie then had chances to double Hearts lead as the Maroons seemed to grab a second breath. However, it was Dundee who nearly equalised when Loy was through on goal only to be thwarted by the combined efforts of Alexander and young Liam Smith.

Hearts brought on new signing USA internationalist Perry Kitchen for Sam Nicholson and the midfielder put in a decent 20 minutes or so.

There was just time for McGhee to have another crack on goal but his effort was deflected and the danger for the home side was averted.

The final whistle blew soon after and thus Hearts recorded their fourth league win in succession – and a fourth clean sheet. Interestingly, since John Souttar made his full debut for Hearts (omitting his substitute's appearance against former club Dundee United) Robbie Neilson's side haven't yet conceded a goal.

Neilson was a delighted man after the game.

"I thought in the first half especially, we were excellent" he told the official Hearts website. "We created a load of chances, and I can't believe we didn't take one of them. We gave up a few to Dundee as well in the second half.

"They've got a really imposing strike force, so that's to be

expected, but I thought it was an entertaining game and I'm very pleased we managed to keep another clean sheet.

"The back four were excellent, and because they're so young, there's still plenty of improvement to come from them too. Dundee won't be shut out of many games this season, so more credit to us."

**Dundee:** Bain, Holt, Stewart, Hemmings, Ross, McGowan, McGinn, O'Dea, Gadzhalov (Wighton, 72'), Harkins (Loy, 76'), Kerr.

**Hearts:** Alexander, L. Smith, Ozturk, Souttar, McGhee, Buaben, Cowie, Djoum, Nicholson (Kitchen, 72'), Walker (Pallardo, 89'), Juanma (Reilly, 76').

**Referee:** Willie Collum

**Att:** 6,195

**Top man:** John Souttar