

It's Plane To See – Hearts Are Flying High



Heart of Midlothian 1 Partick Thistle 0

Ladbrokes SPFL Premiership, Saturday 5 March 2016 – Tynecastle

Hearts recorded their third Ladbrokes Premiership win in seven days with a hard-fought victory over Partick Thistle at Tynecastle on Saturday. A goal in the first half from Arnaud Djoum was enough to conclude a very satisfying week for Robbie Neilson's side who now move to within six points of second placed Aberdeen.

Neilson is prone to changing his team to reflect the opposition and he made two changes from the team that defeated Inverness Caledonian Thistle on Tuesday evening with Don Cowie and Juanma back in the starting eleven at the expense of Gavin Reilly and Abiola Dauda.

The exclusion of Reilly irked this reporter as the former Queen of the South striker was immense in midweek. However, my irritation was nothing compared to the feelings of a Hearts fan – or fans – who arranged for a light aircraft to fly over Tynecastle as the game kicked off with a banner which read 'No Style, No Bottle, Neilson Out'. Looking at where Hearts are now and where they were when Neilson was appointed less than two years ago, it beggars belief that someone would go to the lengths they did to try and influence a decision to remove the former defender. We enjoy freedom of speech in this country but there's a line between this and sheer stupidity which, in my opinion, is what this action constituted.

The Hearts players seemed undaunted by the antics of the pilot and his banner and went close to going in front after just

three minutes. Great play from Jamie Walker saw him round Thistle keeper Cerny but he couldn't connect properly with his shot on goal. The ball fell to Arnaud Djoum but his attempt was blocked.

As was the case against the other Thistle on Tuesday evening, it was end-to-end stuff and the Maryhill Jags almost broke the deadlock when Pogba's strong header was superbly saved by Hearts keeper Neil Alexander.

Juanma then thought he had scored in the 15th minute but referee Bobby Madden – who lived up to his name with some curious decisions which enraged both sets of supporters all afternoon – decreed the Hearts man had committed a foul as he went through on goal.

Skipper Alim Ozturk then went close with a free-kick before Igor Rossi saw his headed saved by Cerny.

Hearts broke the deadlock in the 25th minute. Don Cowie, who enjoyed a fine afternoon, delivered a corner from the left and Djoum headed firmly past Cerny to put Hearts 1-0 ahead.

Bobby Madden incurred the wrath of the home support ten minutes before the break when he waved away home appeals for a penalty kick after Jamie Walker was brought down in the penalty box by Booth.

Hearts seemed certain to double their lead right on half-time when another fine delivery from Cowie found Rossi on his own about eight yards out. Inexplicably, the Brazilian headed wide when it seemed easier to score.

Half-time: Hearts 1 Partick Thistle 0

The visitors had more of the game in the second half as they chased an equaliser but it was still Hearts who were creating the more clear cut chances. More fine play from Don Cowie set up Juanma but the Spanish striker fired his effort over the

bar from close range.

Substitute Abiola Dauda then had a chance but fired his effort high into the Roseburn Stand from the edge of the penalty box. Sam Nicholson then had an effort well saved by Cerny but Hearts couldn't find the second goal to kill the game off.

Thistle threw everything at the home side in the closing minutes but Hearts held on for another three valuable points. Their third league win in a week means the Maroons have now officially clinched a top six place in the Ladbrokes Premiership, something many Hearts supporters would have bitten your hand off for at the beginning of the season. Apart from those with a hankering of being Biggles of course.

After the game, Robbie Neilson played down the banner incident.

"That's football, we are sitting third in the league and we are doing well but there is always somebody that's not happy. If somebody wants to spend their money on that, I would rather they put their money into the Foundation of Hearts like everyone else, but if that's how they want to do it then fair enough."

Something to ponder for those who are dissatisfied with Robbie Neilson. Hearts record-breaking league championship winning side of season 1957/58 lost only one league game all season and won the league by 13 points, scoring an astonishing 132 league goals, a record unlikely to be beaten. However, they were knocked out of the Scottish Cup at Tynecastle by Hibernian. I haven't read any reports of planes with banners declaring 'Walker Out' in the spring of 1958...

Hearts: Alexander, L.Smith, Ozturk, Souttar, Rossi (McGhee, 78') Cowie, Djoum (Dauda, 68'), Buaben, Nicholson, Walker, Juanma (Reilly, 85').

Partick Thistle: Cerny, Miller, Seaborne, Welsh, Booth, Osman,

Amoo (Nesbitt, 77'), Bannigan (Edwards, 45'), Lawless, Lindsay, Pogba (Doolan, 82').

Referee: Bobby Madden

Att: 16,558

Top Man: Don Cowie – a find display from the former Scotland international