

Hearts Deny Dons in Friday Night Thriller



Heart of Midlothian 2 Aberdeen 1

Ladbrokes SPFL Premiership, Friday 8 April 2016 – Tynecastle

Having recovered sufficiently from the gastroenteritis bug which laid so many of their players low at the beginning of the week, Hearts ended the week by seeing their hopes of clinching second place in the Ladbrokes Premiership boosted when they defeated Aberdeen in a pulsating Ladbrokes Premiership match at Tynecastle on Friday evening.

Two goals from Juanma turned the game around after the Dons took an early lead to give Hearts an important victory – and all but bury Aberdeen's hopes of winning the league title.

Hearts Head Coach Robbie Neilson made just one change from the team that performed well but got no reward at Celtic Park last Saturday – and this was an enforced one with Blazej Augustyn returning to the defence in place of the suspended Juwon Oshaniwa.

The full house signs were out again at Tynecastle despite it being an unusual Friday evening kick-off. And the majority of the crowd were almost on their feet after just three minutes when Sam Nicholson's shot on goal trundled just wide. Sixty seconds later, however, calamity for Hearts.

Aberdeen looked dangerous coming forward and so it proved in just the fourth minute when Shinnie's cross into the Hearts penalty box was poked into the net by Church with Hearts keeper Neil Alexander and defender Augustyn not covering themselves in glory.

It was all Aberdeen in the first twenty minutes. McGinn shot wide when it seemed easier to score before the same player was thwarted by Alexander. The Dons looked like they could score every time they came forward with the Hearts defence looking none too sure of themselves.

Hearts were looking like a team who hadn't shaken off that virus which forced the postponement of their game with Inverness Caledonian Thistle last Tuesday night. However, Blazej Augustyn had a header well saved by Brown.

Gradually, Hearts hauled themselves back into the game as Aberdeen's early incessant pace began to wear off. The Dons seemed intent on adopting a physical approach and Taylor could count himself fortunate not to be booked for a lunge on Jamie Walker. Hearts captain Alim Ozturk's subsequent 25 yard free-kick was pushed over the bar by the Dons keeper.

In the 33rd minute, Hearts were level. Skipper Ozturk ambled forward and from 20 yards fired in an effort which Brown could only push away. Hearts Spanish striker Juanma was the only player to react and he drilled the ball into the net to draw parity.

Juanma had another chance just before half-time when he collected a pass from Sam Nicholson before turning and firing his shot on goal just over the crossbar.

The visitors suffered a blow just before the interval when Jack had to be stretchered off injured.

Half-time Hearts 1 Aberdeen 1

After a brief flurry from the visitors at the start of the second half, Hearts threatened again when Juanma fired in a cross which fell for Prince Buaben but the former Dundee United player's effort on goal was deflected.

From the corner that followed, Hearts Igor Rossi blasted in a

shot that smashed against the crossbar as the home support roared their encouragement.

After an hour, the home fans really did have something to cheer when Hearts took the lead. Brilliant play by Jamie Walker saw the youngster deliver a sublime cross towards Juanma and the unmarked hitman nodded the ball home and set off to celebrate with players and fans alike.

The game should have been all over moments later. Buoyed by the turn of events, Hearts swarmed forward with the on-form Juanma dancing past three Aberdeen defenders before setting up Jamie Walker. However, the young Scot's effort on goal was wide and the Dons breathed again.

It was Walker again who combined with Sam Nicholson before his low shot was saved by Brown.

The Dons thought they had equalised towards the end but McGinn side-footed his effort wide much to the delight of the Hearts support.

The game ended soon after and the Maroon Army bellowed 'Aberdeen – we're coming for you!' as they saw their side move to within nine points of the Dons in the Ladbrokes Premiership. Victory in Inverness next Tuesday will see this reduce to six – with Hearts and Aberdeen still to play each other again before the end of the season.

Hearts: Alexander, Souttar, Ozturk, Augustyn, Rossi, Kitchen, Djoum, Buaben (Pallardo, 79'), Nicholson, Walker (McGhee, 83'), Juanma.

Aberdeen: Brown, Logan, Shinnie, Taylor (Considine, 80'), Reynolds, McLean, McGinn, Hayes, Church, Jack (Flood, 43'), Storie (C. Smith, 75').

Referee: Steven McLean

Att: 16,995

Top man: Juanma – the Spaniard was immense. Which begs the question – why can't he play like that every week?