

Hearts Go Down Fighting at Celtic Park

Celtic 3 Heart of Midlothian 1

Ladbrokes SPFL Premiership, Saturday 2 April 2016 – Celtic Park

Hearts attempt to attain second place in the Ladbrokes SPFL Premiership was dealt another blow when Robbie Neilson's men lost at Celtic Park on Saturday. It was, however, a much-improved display – particularly in the first half – from two weeks ago when the Maroons were outplayed by St. Johnstone at Tynecastle.

Jamie Walker gave Hearts the lead after just five minutes but it was the champions who went in ahead at half-time thanks to goals from Mackay-Steven and Roberts. Roberts added a third early in the second half which was tough on the visitors who had Juwon Oshaniwa red-carded at the end of the game.

Robbie Neilson rang the changes to the side that capitulated to the Perth Saints a fortnight ago. Skipper Alim Ozturk replaced Blazej Augustyn while Igor Rossi and Juwon Oshaniwa replaced teenagers Jordan McGhee and Liam Smith respectively. Prince Buaben and Sam Nicholson also started the game at the expense of Don Cowie and Abiola Dauda.

Hearts have been known to adopt a somewhat cautious approach to games in the east end of Glasgow but the Maroons got off to a sensational start by grabbing the lead after just five minutes. Juanma used his strength to fend off the attentions of Boyata inside the Celtic penalty box before setting up Jamie Walker. The youngster blasted the ball high into the net past former Hearts keeper Craig Gordon to stun the majority of the 49,000 crowd inside Celtic Park.

Hearts looked impressive in the opening stages but, somewhat against the run of play, the champions levelled things in the 16th minute. Griffiths forced a fine save from Hearts keeper Neil Alexander from a free-kick but from the resultant corner, Mackay-Steven fired in a low shot past the former Scotland keeper to draw parity.

Hearts continued to impress, however, and a trademark long-range effort from captain Alim Ozturk – a 25 yard free-kick – smashed against the crossbar with Gordon well beaten.

Hearts had the majority of possession but lacked the presence to finish things off. How they have missed former talisman Osman Sow. Despite their good work, it was somewhat inevitable Celtic would take the lead and they did ten minutes before half-time. A fine piece of skill Roberts saw the on-loan Manchester City player leave Alexander helpless with a fine lob and had the home crowd in raptures.

Half-time Celtic 2 Hearts 1

The second half began in explosive fashion. Hearts Nigerian full back Oshaniwa appeared to catch Celtic's Rogic which left the Hoops player with a nasty looking facial injury. Celtic's former Hibernian player Leigh Griffiths took exception to this and he tangled with Hearts Prince Buaben – both players were booked by referee Bobby Madden.

Just four minutes into the second half, Celtic increased their lead with another fine goal from Roberts when the youngster applied a fine finish following build up play from Griffiths and Johansen.

Hearts appeared deflated by this third goal and their misery was complete in injury time when Juwon Oshaniwa received a second yellow card and therefore a red for what seemed an innocuous foul.

A disappointing result for Hearts and catching Aberdeen is now

looking a somewhat forlorn hope. Two games in the next six days – at Inverness Caledonian Thistle on Tuesday evening and against Aberdeen at Tynecastle next Friday evening – may define the rest of Hearts season.

Celtic: Gordon; Lustig; Boyata; Sviatchenko; Tierney; Brown; Johansen; Roberts; Rogic; Mackay-Steven; Griffiths.

Hearts: Alexander; Souttar; Ozturk; Rossi; Oshaniwa; Buaben; Kitchen; Walker; Djoum; Nicholson; Juanma

Referee: Bobby Madden

Att: 49,009

Top man: Neil Alexander