

Lacklustre Hearts Go Down at Fir Park

Motherwell 1 Heart of Midlothian 0

Ladbrokes SPFL Premiership, Saturday 23 April 2016 – Fir Park

After Aberdeen's defeat at St. Johnstone on Friday evening, Hearts looked to reduce the gap between themselves and the Dons by taking three points from their game against Motherwell. However, Hearts recent record at Fir Park is nothing to write home about and so it proved again on Saturday when Robbie Neilson's side went down to a first half goal from Ainsworth meaning Hearts hopes of snatching second place in the Ladbrokes Premiership have all but disappeared.

Neilson made four changes to the team that was largely uninspiring at Inverness a week past Tuesday; Juwon Oshaniwa was suspended while Blazej Augustyn, Miguel Pallardo and Dario Zanatta also made way. In came Callum Patterson, making a welcome return from injury, Liam Smith, Sam Nicholson and Prince Buaben.

In truth, Hearts never really got going. They looked like a team who can't wait for their summer holidays although the irony is their summer break will be over quicker than a Boris Johnson welcoming party for President Obama, as a third place finish in the Ladbrokes Premiership will mean Hearts opening tie in next season's Europa League will be on 30 June..

The Maroons did go close in the sixth minute when Buaben released Jamie Walker down the right. The forward fired in an effort what went just wide.

Soon after, Juanma fed the busy Walker whose cross fell to Prince Buaben but the former Dundee United player, celebrating his 27th birthday, saw his effort saved by Well keeper Samson.

In the 28th minute, Motherwell went in front. From a throw-in, the ball fell to Ainsworth who was given too much time to turn and fire home from 18 yards.

It should have been 2-0 to the home team soon after but Johnson fired an effort from 20 yards wide when he should have done better.

It had been a lacklustre first half from the visitors and few of the Maroon Army could complain about their team going in behind at the break.

Half-time Motherwell 1 Hearts 0

Hearts looked brighter at the start of the second half and fine play from Buaben set up Liam Smith but the young full back's effort was straight at keeper Samson.

On the hour mark, Motherwell came close again when Moul't's low shot struck the post before going out of play.

Twenty minutes into the second half, slack play from birthday boy Buaben should have been punished but McDonald fired his shot on goal high over the bar when it looked easier to score.

There was unease among the travelling Maroon Army at just how their team were being outplayed. That said, the returning Callum Paterson fired in an effort from Sam Nicholson's corner which was brilliantly saved by Samson.

However, it was the home side who came closest to scoring again when fine play from Johnson brought out a superb save from Hearts keeper Neil Alexander.

The game ended in defeat for the Maroons which is a major blow in their attempts to pip Aberdeen to second place. The last time Hearts played the Steelmen they produced arguably their best display of the season in recording a crushing 6-0 win at Tynecastle in January. This performance was a million miles

away from that one.

Motherwell: Samson, Hammell, McManus, Ainsworth (Chalmers, 82'), Johnson, Lasley (Leitch, 46'), Kennedy, Law (Hall, 39'), Moulton, Cadden, McDonald.

Hearts: Alexander, Paterson, Ozturk, Souttar, L. Smith, Nicholson (Dauda, 67'), Kitchen, Djoum, Buaben (Cowie, 79'), Walker, Juanma (Reilly, 79').

Referee: Andrew Dallas

Att: 5,125

Top man: Perry Kitchen