

Hearts Edged Out in Tynecastle Thriller



Heart of Midlothian 1 Celtic 2

Ladbrokes Premiership – Sunday 7 August 2016, Tynecastle

It's been a summer of European Championship football and the Olympics have just begun in Rio de Janeiro. But for the majority of the 16,777 crowd inside a raucous Tynecastle Stadium on Sunday afternoon, the Ladbrokes SPFL Premiership – for all its many flaws and limitations – was what they had been waiting for since season 2015/16 ended what seems like just a few days ago.

Hearts welcomed league champions Celtic to Gorgie and it was yet another sell-out crowd inside the old stadium. Head Coach Robbie Neilson threw in on-loan striker Tony Watt for his Hearts debut – against the team with which he made his name – while the veteran Don Cowie was made captain in the absence of the suspended Alim Ozturk.

Hearts hadn't played since their nightmare exit from the Europa League second qualifying round at the hands of Maltese side Birkirkara two and a half weeks ago. Nonetheless, the Maroons began the game in impressive fashion and Conor Sammon had the game's first real chance but his effort on goal was well wide of target.

There was a tempo about Hearts play that was sadly missing against the Maltese but there was something inevitable about Celtic taking the lead after only eight minutes. Hearts failed to clear their defensive lines and Forrest took advantage of the slackness by curling a well-placed shot beyond Hearts keeper Jack Hamilton.

This seemed to stun Hearts but they soon responded in the manner the Maroon Army hoped. In the 23rd minute, determined play by Callum Paterson saw the Scotland full back cross deep towards Tony Watt. The former Celtic man had a free header on goal from around six yards – but he could only send his header wide, to the anguish of the home support.

Hearts almost immediately rued that miss when Celtic broke forward and former Hibernian striker Griffiths got on the end of a long ball forward and lobbed the ball over the advancing Jack Hamilton – only to see his effort go over the bar.

It was Hamilton who came to Hearts rescue on the half hour mark when he produced a brilliant save to deny Forrest a second goal.

It was beginning to look like the visitors had weathered Hearts storm when the home side drew level nine minutes before half-time – in controversial circumstances. Jamie Walker made progress into the Celtic penalty box and was challenged by O'Connell. There appeared to be minimal contact but referee John Beaton – who didn't have the best of afternoons, booking eleven players in total – awarded Hearts a penalty kick. Walker duly converted before foolishly running towards the Celtic support in the Roseburn Stand. He was duly booked for his stupidity.

Celtic nearly went back in front when a shot from Dembele was deflected enabling Hearts Igor Rossi to head the ball off the line and into the grateful arms of his goalkeeper.

The impressive Tony Watt then had former Hearts keeper Gordon scrambling to save his effort on goal as half-time approached.

Half-time Hearts 1 Celtic 1

It was the visitors who had the first notable chance of the second half when Griffiths fired in a low effort which Hamilton did well to save. Hearts were seeing plenty of

possession without really testing their former goalkeeper and the home side had John Souttar to thank for keeping them on level terms when he blocked Dembele's effort which looked like it was going in.

With 12 minutes left, it appeared to many that Robbie Neilson was settling for a share of the spoils when he took off striker Conor Sammon and replaced him with a midfield player, Prince Buaben. Three minutes later, that plan was in tatters when Celtic broke upfield through Griffiths who passed to substitute Sinclair who fired what proved to be the winner from close range.

A valiant effort from Hearts and a much-improved performance from the Maltese debacle two and a half weeks ago. Nonetheless, it's yet another defeat for Robbie Neilson's side against Celtic.

One final note. If the Scottish Government are really serious about stamping out sectarian behaviour in Scotland then they really need Police Scotland to act. Many of the Celtic support were bellowing out a pro-IRA song towards the end of the game. One fan in particular was standing on the stairway leading the chanting but, despite the presence of stewards and police officers, nothing was done. Why was this? If he had been beating the living daylights out of someone then, doubtless, action would have been immediate. But sectarian chanting? Answers on a postcard to Police Scotland...

Hearts: Hamilton, Paterson, Souttar, Rossi, Rherras, Walker, Cowie, Djoum, Nicholson, Watt (Muirhead, 61'), Sammon (Buaben, 78').

Celtic: Gordon, Lustig, Toure, O'Connell (Rogic, 73'), Tierney, Forrest, Brown, Armstrong (Sinclair, 60'), McGregor, Dembele, Griffiths.

Referee: John Beaton

Att: 16,777

Top Man: Arnaud Djoum