

# Hearts Turn on the Style at Tynecastle



**Heart of Midlothian 5 Inverness Caledonian Thistle 1**

**Ladbrokes Premiership – Saturday 20 August 2016, Tynecastle**

We may still be in mid-August and the Edinburgh Festival is barely into its second half but there have already been murmurs of discontent in Gorgie over Hearts performances and results this season as well as criticism of Head Coach Robbie Neilson.

Former Hearts players Gary Mackay and Michael Stewart have not been slow in adding their voices to the criticism with the latter stating on television last week he thought Hearts performances this season had been 'industrial'.

On a driech Saturday afternoon at Tynecastle, Neilson and his Hearts team sought to answer their growing band of critics as Inverness Caledonian Thistle – a bogey team to Hearts in recent years – visited the capital. Come 5.00pm, the boys in maroon had answered their critics in some style with a crushing 5-1 victory over the Highlanders.

Neilson was particularly upset by the criticism directed at his players after their goalless draw at Aberdeen last Saturday. A point at a venue which usually proves difficult against the team which finished as runners-up in the Ladbrokes Premiership last season was seemingly not good enough for the critics. However, the Hearts Head Coach made just one change from that side, Perry Kitchen coming in for Prince Buaben. There was a place on the substitute's bench for striker Bjorn Johnsen, following Fifa's much-awaited decision in whether he was eligible to play for Hearts.

The visitors opted to have Hearts kick towards the Gorgie Stand in the first half, the opposite of what normally happens at Tynecastle. However, if the Caley Jags thought this would gain them some kind of psychological advantage they were proved wrong after just seven minutes.

Hearts defender John Souttar sent a long pass forward which was deftly dummied by stand-in skipper Don Cowie and picked up by Conor Sammon. The former Kilmarnock striker, a prime target for much of the criticism this season, laid the ball back into the path of Cowie who curled a superb shot beyond ICT keeper Fon Williams to open the scoring. It was the former Scotland player's first goal in a maroon shirt and there was no disguising his delight at scoring against the team he used to play for.

Five minutes later, a flick from Sammon set up Tony Watt who forged his way through the visitors' defence. His shot on goal, however, was saved by Fon Williams.

Hearts were buoyed by their impressive opening and in the 17<sup>th</sup> minute they doubled their lead. Great play from Tony Watt down the right wing teased the ICT defenders and when the ball was eventually delivered into the penalty box Conor Sammon headed home.

Hearts were dominant now and the commanding Don Cowie fired in a free-kick ten minutes from half-time which was met by the head of Callum Paterson but his header was saved by the ICT keeper.

The Caley Jags almost pulled a goal back when Polworth was allowed too much time and space by the home defence and he set up Boden. Fortunately for Hearts, the Caley Thistle man blasted his effort wide.

### **Half-time Hearts 2 Inverness Caledonian Thistle 0**

Hearts took just two minutes of the second half to increase

their lead. It was remarkably similar to the opening goal, although it was Tony Watt, rather than John Souttar who ran forward and passed to Sammon. The big striker set up Don Cowie who replicated his opening goal to put the Jambos 3-0 up.

The fall-out from Jamie Walker's dive against Celtic a couple of weeks ago continues as the Maroons were denied an obvious penalty when Sam Nicholson was tripped by Warren inside the penalty box. But no penalty said referee Steven Maclean who, it has to be said, didn't enjoy the best of afternoons with some curious decisions – and non-decisions.

Fisher then produced an overhead kick in the Hearts penalty box which was saved well by Hearts keeper Jack Hamilton as the visitors tried desperately to get something from the game. However, it was Hearts who came closest to the game's next goal when fine linking play between Tony Watt and Don Cowie set up the latter whose effort on goal was deflected.

With 17 minutes to go, Conor Sammon left the field to a rousing ovation from the Hearts support – which hasn't always been the case this season. He was replaced by Bjorn Johnsen and the big striker made an immediate impact with a brilliant back-heel pass to Sam Nicholson who drilled the ball past Fon Williams from around 18 yards to make it 4-0 to Hearts.

Sixty seconds later, the brilliant Cowie set up young Sam again and, despite Fon Williams best efforts, Nicholson's shot trundled into the net to make it 5-0 for the now rampant home side.

Caley Thistle did pull a goal back with three minutes to go when Draper prodded the ball home in spite of Callum Paterson's efforts to keep the ball out. However, the final whistle blew soon after and Hearts had recorded their first domestic victory this season with a commanding performance and a scoreline that delighted the Maroon Army. After all, who doesn't enjoy a 5-1 win?

Robbie Neilson was a contented man afterwards and he picked out Don Cowie's magnificent contribution as being a key to the victory.

"Don's goals were really simple, but brilliantly executed." Neilson told the official Hearts website. "The first goal was a great pass from John Souttar, but Don's dummy, the lay-off and the finish were just all top quality, and his second was almost a carbon copy.

"Don's been brilliant for me. He's the captain at the moment since Alim is out the side, and he gives us strength on the park.

"He's a leader on and off the pitch, and he sets the tone for the way we want things done at Hearts."

**Hearts:** Hamilton, Paterson, Souttar, Rossi, Rherras, Nicholson, Cowie (Muirhead 79'), Kitchen (Buaben, 69'), Djoum, Watt, Sammon (Johnsen, 73').

**Inverness CT:** Fon Williams, Raven (Horner, 59'), Tremarco, Warren, Meekings, Polworth, Draper, Vigurs, Mulraney (Doran, 64'), Tansey, Boden (Fisher, 53').

**Referee:** Steven MacLean

**Top man:** On an afternoon when Tony Watt, Perry Kitchen, Conor Sammon and Sam Nicholson all impressed, there was no finer player on the field than Don Cowie. Magnificent.

**Att:** 15,880