

# Disappointing Hearts Draw a Blank at Tynecastle



**Heart of Midlothian 0 Ross County 0**

**Ladbrokes Premiership – Saturday 24 September 2016, Tynecastle**

The Hearts Museum opened its doors to the public on Friday with its wonderful array of stories of glory and heartbreak over more than 140 years of this wonderful football club.

Hearts fans turned up at Tynecastle on Saturday for the visit of Ross County wondering if this game would be in the former category. Given Hearts up and down form this season – three successive wins in the Ladbrokes Premiership was followed by defeat at St Johnstone last Saturday – no one could be wholly confident the Maroons would take all three points to keep the pressure, such as it is, on league leaders Celtic. And such doubts were justified as Hearts were held to a goalless draw by Ross County.

Hearts Head Coach Robbie Neilson made a couple of changes to the team that dominated last Saturday's game at St Johnstone but still lost. Arnaud Djoum replaced Jamie Walker while Conor Sammon was given the nod ahead of Bjorn Johnsen.

It was a gloomy day in the capital city and the start to the game seemed to reflect this. Nothing of great note happened in the early minutes and it wasn't until the 10<sup>th</sup> minute there was a threat of a goal. Conor Sammon won a 50-50 challenge and raced down the park. He found Tony Watt whose shot on goal was pushed over the bar by County keeper Fox.

Then Callum Paterson had a chance for the home side but his header was straight at the visiting keeper.

The game began to open up and there was almost an agony and ecstasy moment for the Maroon Army (yet another full-house at Tynecastle today) A free-kick for County from the right found the head of Davies who thought he had scored – only to see his header smack off the crossbar and bounce on the goal line. No goal said referee Alan Muir as Hearts collected the ball and raced to the other end of the field. Sam Nicholson drove forward and crossed towards Tony Watt. The Scotland player slipped the ball to Sammon whose low shot on goal was well saved by Fox.

Like St Johnstone's keeper last week, Fox was proving to be a thorn in Hearts side and the County keeper denied Hearts again as he blocked Igor Rossi's header.

With half an hour gone, Tony Watt's header went wide as Hearts continued to apply pressure. However, they suffered a setback moments later when John Souttar was forced to leave the field with what appeared to be a thigh injury. He was replaced by the man who was displaced as club captain this week – Alim Ozturk, who came on to a warm welcome from the Tynecastle faithful.

Eight minutes before half-time Hearts should have opened the scoring. A brilliant pass from Watt found Sammon who was through on goal but the former Kilmarnock striker's shot lacked conviction and was saved by Fox. Then Sam Nicholson set up Don Cowie who laid the ball for Arnaud Djoum but the eventual shot on goal was wide.

### **Half-time Hearts 0 Ross County 0**

The second half followed much the same pattern as the first. But Ross County were proving to be dangerous on the counter-attack.

Tony Watt was being closely marked but when he did break free he set up Nicholson – only for the youngster to see his shot go wide. It was that sort of afternoon.

As the game drifted towards a goalless draw, there was a glimmer of hope that Hearts could break the deadlock when County's McShane committed an awful foul on Faycal Rherras and was shown a second yellow card by referee Muir – followed by a red. In truth, the 'challenge' could have merited a straight red card.

Despite five added minutes of stoppage time, Hearts – for the second week in a row – could not make the breakthrough. The boos from the Maroon Army at the end of the game told its own story.

Robbie Neilson was understandably disappointed after the game. He told BBC Sport Scotland:

"It's a disappointing result but the first 60, 70 minutes the performance was great. Again we created loads of chances but we are not taking those chances as we should be. It's that final little bit, if we had done it today we would have another three points on the board."

**Hearts:** Hamilton, Paterson, Souttar (Ozturk, 30'), Rossi, Rherras, Nicholson, Kitchen, Djoum, Cowie (Walker, 68'), Watt, Sammon (Johnsen, 79').

**Ross County:** Fox, Fraser, Routis, Gardyne, Woods, Boyce (Curran, 64'), Davies (McEveley, 79'), Franks (Dingwall, 46'), McShane, Van Der Weg, Quinn.

**Referee:** Alan Muir

**Att:** 16,321

**Top Man:** Sam Nicholson