

Emotional Hearts Beat Rangers to Go Second



Heart of Midlothian 2 Rangers 0

Ladbrokes SPFL Premiership, Wednesday 30 November 2016 – Tynecastle

Hearts welcomed Rangers to Gorgie on St Andrews night for their re-arranged Ladbrokes Premiership game. The game was originally due to be played at the end of last month but was postponed due to Rangers involvement in the Betfred League Cup semi-finals. Five weeks on, the fixture took on a new significance as it marked Robbie Neilson's final game as Head Coach of Heart of Midlothian. Earlier in the day, Neilson agreed terms with MK Dons to become their new manager.

It was, therefore, an emotionally-charged Tynecastle which greeted Neilson for the last time. It's true to say not every Hearts fan is sorry to see the former defender leave Tynecastle; it's just ten months since some of the fans hired a plane to fly over Tynecastle displaying a banner wanting Neilson out. But there are others who reckon he has done a fine job in resurrecting Hearts from the ashes of administration to winning the Ladbrokes Championship and achieving a third-place finish in the Ladbrokes Premiership last season.

Whatever one's opinion, no one can question Neilson's commitment and dedication to Heart of Midlothian, both as a player and Head Coach. The Edinburgh Reporter wishes him every success at Milton Keynes.

For his last game in charge of Hearts, Neilson surprised everyone by going with the same team that comprehensively defeated Motherwell at the weekend. This was most unlike

Neilson – perhaps he had other things on his mind.

Tynecastle is at its best when there's a full house and a big game and this is particularly so under the floodlights. There was a raucous atmosphere in the old stadium right from the off. Hearts threw themselves at Rangers, snapping at their heels at every opportunity. With just nine minutes played, Bjorn Johnsen – who was to prove too difficult for Rangers to handle – soared above the visiting defence to head Callum Paterson's long throw-in goalwards. Robbie Muirhead was just inches away from connecting and a chance to open the scoring went agonisingly close.

Former Hearts player Jason Holt was driving Rangers forward and he set up Tavernier whose shot from 25 yards went over the crossbar.

It was a tousy affair but class did shine through occasionally. Hearts Jamie Walker turned the Rangers defence inside out just after half an hour's play but when he eventually shot a goal it was straight at Gers keeper Foderingham.

Callum Paterson then forced a save from the Rangers number one – curiously wearing a blue shirt, not dissimilar to his colleagues. A good job Fifa didn't know about this.

As half-time approached it was all Hearts with Rangers desperately hanging on. Former Hibernian player Kenny Miller seemed to sum up the Glasgow side's frustration and he could consider himself fortunate not to receive a booking from referee Craig Thomson for a foul on Callum Paterson. From the free-kick, Johnsen's header was again saved by Foderingham.

The Rangers keeper was earning his wages and he produced another brilliant save from Johnsen five minutes from half-time. The Norwegian-American's powerful header looked a goal all the way until the Rangers goalie tipped it over the bar.

For all Hearts dominance, it looked like the teams would go

into the break on level terms. But the Maroons weren't quite finished. A lovely flick from Johnsen let Arnaud Djoum through on goal. He returned the ball to Johnsen who crossed to the far post for Robbie Muirhead to fire past the despairing Rangers keeper to put Hearts ahead. Tynecastle bounced.

Yet, Hearts almost undid their good work when slack play from Souttar allowed Halliday an attempt on goal but Hearts keeper Jack Hamilton saved well.

Half-time Hearts 1 Rangers 0



Hearts began the second half the way they began the first – on the attack. Jamie Walker, looking back to his best, tested Foderingham and Rangers were struggling to cope with Arnaud Djoum's sheer class in midfield. Yet, it looked like the visitors had grabbed a scarcely-deserved equaliser after 51 minutes. A shot from Miller was pushed out by Jack Hamilton only as far as Doodoo who fired the ball into the net. The Rangers forward raced to celebrate with the Rangers fans in the Roseburn Stand and Hearts heads were momentarily down – until they saw the assistant referee raise his flag for offside, presumably against Forrester.

The pattern of the game – Hearts dominating – soon resumed and the magnificent Bjorn Johnsen forced Foderingham into yet another save.

On the hour mark, Hearts dominance was rewarded with a second goal. More fine play from Djoum set Jamie Walker off down the right wing. He crossed for Robbie Muirhead to fire home for his second goal of the evening and Hearts were 2-0 ahead.

Hearts were threatening to run riot now and sublime play from John Souttar – superb skill from a centre half – ended with his passing to Johnsen who, yet again, was denied by a fine save from the Rangers goalie.

Near the end, Hearts should have been awarded a penalty when Faycal Rherras was tripped by O'Halloran inside the Rangers penalty box. Referee Craig Thomson inexplicably waved play on, much to the fury of the Hearts support and the disbelief of the Hearts players.

The game ended soon after and the Hearts players received a tumultuous reception from the delighted Maroon Army, some of whom stayed behind to see if Robbie Neilson would appear to say his farewells. He didn't but he told the media afterwards that the night was not about him, it was about the players.

'It's been an incredible journey' he said, 'And I'm proud to have been a part of it'.

I don't think I've ever seen Hearts outplay Rangers – in any of their guises – as much as they did at Tynecastle on Wednesday. Robbie Neilson began his Hearts managerial career with a win over Rangers. He's ended it in the same way.

And now the next chapter in Hearts story is about to begin.

Hearts: Hamilton, Paterson, Souttar, Rossi, Rherras, Walker, Kitchen, Cowie (L. Smith, 83'), Djoum, Muirhead (Buaben, 77'), Johnsen (Sammon, 90').

Rangers: Foderingham, Tavernier, Kiernan, Wallace, Wilson, Miller, Dodoo (Garner, 66'), Forrester (O'Halloran, 60'), Halliday, Crooks (McKay, 66'), Holt.

Referee: Craig Thomson

Att: 16,803

Top man: Yet again, Arnaud Djoum was a class act. He'll be a huge loss to Hearts when he plays in the African Nations Cup in January