

Hearts to the Four as Kilmarnock Are Thrashed



Heart of Midlothian 4 Kilmarnock 0

Ladbrokes Premiership, Tuesday 27th December 2016 – Tynecastle

It's that time of the year. The 'busy Christmas schedule' – and with three games in eight days this was particularly so for Hearts and their supporters. After collapsing at Dundee two nights before Christmas Day, the Gorgie Boys had a chance to redeem themselves before another full house at Tynecastle two nights after Christmas Day.

The standard greeting as December staggers towards Hogmanay is 'did you have a good Christmas?' Some Hearts fans who were present at Dens Park on Friday evening – and even those who weren't there – may well have answered 'not particularly' after witnessing/hearing their team had thrown away a two-goal lead and succumbed to defeat to the Dark Blues.

With the gleaming floodlights of Tynecastle illuminating the Gorgie sky, the old ground welcoming back absent brothers and sisters who support Hearts from afar but have returned to the capital city to be with family and friends for Christmas and New Year, Hearts looked to breathe new life into their increasingly forlorn looking bid to finish in second place in the Ladbrokes Premiership.

The obstacle in their way was Kilmarnock, a team that has caused Hearts much angst in recent seasons.

Hearts Head Coach Ian Cathro, still seeking his first win as the man in charge, made two changes to the team that capitulated in Dundee – Don Cowie, who was taken off injured

during that game, was replaced by Prince Buaben while Faycal Rherras replaced Liam Smith who dropped to the substitute's bench.

Included in the Kilmarnock team was Kris Boyd who has been critical of Hearts appointing Ian Cathro as Head Coach. Boyd was suitably welcomed by the Maroon Army...

Hearts began the game by penning the visitors in their own half although former Jambos keeper Jamie MacDonald, now the Killie number one, was rarely troubled in the opening moments.

In fact, it was Killie who nearly opened the scoring with their first serious attack when Boyd followed a long ball forward. Hearts keeper Jack Hamilton raced from his goal to avert the danger but his clearance appeared to strike Boyd's hand – not that referee Craig Thomson saw it (like so many other things the official didn't see) Thankfully for the home team Igor Rossi cleared things up.

After just eight minutes Hearts went ahead. Jamie Walker's corner wasn't properly dealt with by the Killie defence and Callum Paterson volleyed home from the edge of the penalty box to the delight of the home support.

However, seven minutes later, Paterson was forced to leave the field after incurring a knee injury after going into a tackle – he was replaced by Liam Smith. The Scotland defender looked in considerable discomfort as he was stretchered off.

Hearts defensive frailties were still apparent when Coulibaly missed a great chance to equalise for the visitors when, despite being given the freedom of Gorgie Road, he headed wide of the target.

Hearts were looking rather unsure of themselves with John Souttar guilty of surrendering possession – something his captain, Perry Kitchen, wasn't slow in telling him.

In the 20th minute, Bjorn Johnsen thought he had doubled Hearts lead but his header was cleared off the line by Smith.

With half-time fast approaching and Hearts leading by just a single goal, the game was taking on an all-too familiar look. However, with three minutes until the break, Hearts doubled their lead. Determined play from Liam Smith saw the young defender deliver a fine cross for Arnaud Djoum who stabbed the ball past MacDonald.

Half-time Hearts 2 Kilmarnock 0



Ian Cathro said after the Dundee defeat that his team would not surrender a two-goal lead again under his watch. And his players began the second half determined to ensure this wouldn't happen.

Jamie Walker shot wide in the opening seconds of the second half before the winger all but sealed the win for Hearts by scoring his ninth goal of the season in the 48th minute. Prince Buaben's twenty-yard effort was pushed out by MacDonald but only towards Walker who fired the ball home – and Hearts were in easy street.

Minutes later, the aforementioned Boyd was substituted, much to the delight of the goading home support. The lumbering striker had a poor game and it was no surprise to see him depart so early in the second half. The consensus among the Maroon Army was that Boyd had an active sexual life, albeit a solitary one...

Hearts could finally relax and they began to play some sweet football with the link up play between Djoum, Walker and Johnsen pleasing on the eye.

Walker almost grabbed his second goal when he took the ball past MacDonald and seemed certain to score – only for Killie

defender Wilson to deny the Hearts man. The home support screamed for a penalty but referee Craig Thomson was having none of it.

With twenty minutes left, Jamie Walker did score his second and Hearts fourth goal when he seized on a woefully short pass back from Boyle, drove forward and fired past MacDonald to put the result beyond any doubt.

Hearts were all over Killie like a rash now. Krystian Nowak hit the post from twenty-five yards before having a header cleared off the line by a desperate Killie defence.

In injury time, Hearts were given the perfect opportunity to make it 5-0. Substitute Dario Zanatta was fouled inside the penalty box. Sadly, the young striker's penalty kick was brilliantly saved by MacDonald and Hearts had to settle for 4-0.

Head Coach Ian Cathro said after the game he was more satisfied than relieved after Hearts recorded their first win in four weeks and their first since he took charge of the team.

"There's always something, parts in our play we can improve on," Cathro told the official Hearts website. "We can move the ball quicker, it can be calmer and clearer but these are small steps we're talking about. Really, it's a similar message from me, we've just got to keep working.

"It's a little bit easier when you see a reward for your work, and to feel good and strong, and stay on top and in control, and they all deserve to feel good about their performance.

"The moments where we managed to stay in the opponents' half were promising, players are starting to release themselves and free themselves, with a little bit more energy or inspiration. We're getting more comfortable with our work and play day-by-day.

“I asked everyone to find a little bit more, and I think tonight, everybody found that little bit more.”

A decent performance from the Maroons, akin to a fruit trifle after Friday's unsavoury stuffing. However, Ian Cathro knows better than anyone else his defence will have to improve when Aberdeen come to Tynecastle on Friday evening.

Hearts: Hamilton, Paterson (L. Smith, 15'), Souttar, Rossi, Rherras, Buaben (Muirhead, 65'), Nowak, Kitchen, Walker (Zanatta, 77'), Djoum, Johnsen.

Kilmarnock: MacDonald, S. Smith, Boyle (Webb, 72'), M. Smith (Jones, 56'), Dicker, Boyd (Hawkshaw, 56'), Tyson, Adams, Coulibaly, Taylor, Wilson.

Referee: Craig Thomson

Att: 16,696

Top Man: Perry Kitchen – he gave a real captain's performance.