

Tynecastle Torment for Hearts



Heart of Midlothian 1 Partick Thistle 1

Ladbroke's SPFL Premiership, Saturday 17th December 2016 – Tynecastle

Hearts new Head Coach Ian Cathro took his bow in front of the Hearts supporters at Tynecastle on Saturday as a new era in Gorgie beckoned. The Maroons recent run of good form came to an end at Ibrox last weekend as Hearts succumbed all too easily to a 2-0 defeat to Rangers. However, the Jambos form at Tynecastle has been good this season and another near full-house took their places on Saturday afternoon, with maroon Santa hats aplenty raising cash for Save the Children. But the afternoon didn't go entirely to plan...

Cathro made a couple of changes from the side that disappointed last week – and they were somewhat surprising ones. Full back Faycal Rherras – a hero in recent weeks for his trait of clearing goal bound efforts off the line was replaced by Liam Smith while Robbie Muirhead could count himself unfortunate to lose his place to Prince Buaben.

Thistle attacked straight from the kick-off but it was Hearts who imposed themselves on the game in the early stages. Although there were plenty of passing moves from the boys in maroon, there was little serious threat on goal until the 13th minute. A free-kick from Don Cowie found the head of Callum Paterson but the Scotland defender headed wide.

But Hearts seemed buoyed by this and took the lead in the 18th minute. Fine play from Paterson sent Liam Smith down the right wing and his fine delivery into the Thistle penalty box was met by Bjorn Johnsen who headed home. Joy for the Hearts support who settled down in expectant mood.

More fine play from Paterson set up Johnsen again but the big striker blazed his effort over the bar.

It's unclear if many of the Hearts support in the crowd of 16,418 had been out at the countless Christmas parties in Edinburgh on Friday evening, but Tynecastle was strangely subdued to the extent you could hear the players shouting to each other.

Hearts almost created some noise a minute before half-time when Don Cowie's cross was collected by Arnaud Djoum whose shot on goal was brilliantly saved by Cerny. From the subsequent corner, Igor Rossi saw his header bounce off the crossbar – and Thistle survived.

Half-time Hearts 1 Partick Thistle 0



Stadium announcer supreme Scott Wilson urged the Hearts supporters to get behind their team as the second half kicked off – with Conor Sammon replacing the injured Prince Buaben – but the Maroon Army weren't put in the right frame of mind for this just three minutes after the interval. Thistle broke forward and from Edwards cross from the right wing, Welsh had all the space he needed to head past Hearts keeper Jack Hamilton to draw parity.

Things could have been worse for Hearts minutes later. Poor defensive play from the hosts was seized upon by Doolan who set up Azeez and his shot on goal was superbly saved by Jack Hamilton.

It was all Thistle now and Edwards came close to giving the Maryhill side the lead when he fired in a long-range effort. Hearts tried desperately to stem the flow of the tide that had turned against them and Arnaud Djoum fired in an effort from just inside the Thistle penalty box but it was straight at keeper Cerny.

The mood of the Hearts support then turned from frustration to anger when Ian Cathro made a double substitution 15 minutes from time. He replaced the ineffectual Jamie Walker with Tony Watt but also made the somewhat baffling decision to replace the one Hearts player who looked a scoring threat – Bjorn Johnsen – with Robbie Muirhead. The loud boos that rang out from the Hearts support towards Cathro made uncomfortable listening – particularly when you consider this was the new Head Coach's first game at Tynecastle!

Thistle then spurned three opportunities to clinch the victory their second half showing probably deserved. A shot from Booth came back off the crossbar before Erskine forced Jack Hamilton into a brilliant save. Lindsay then headed over the bar when it looked easier to score.

By now, the Hearts support were venting their anger at just about any player in a maroon shirt and Jack Hamilton was again the home hero when he denied Doolan.

The final whistle sounded soon after and there was a cacophony of boos from the disillusioned Maroon Army who witnessed their side drop two points in yet another draw. If truth be told, however, Hearts actually gained a point from a game they deserved nothing from.

If it were two points dropped, it's worth making a couple of points.

Firstly, the performance of referee Don Robertson left a lot to be desired. Some of his decisions were baffling – for both sides – and he incurred the wrath of both sets of supporters. This merely added to the frustration of the afternoon.

Secondly, the Hearts support have been magnificent this season, as they have been from the time Hearts entered administration and the Foundation of Hearts saved the club. However, this afternoon, the Maroon Army's support seemed suppressed and the raucous atmosphere which makes Tynecastle

one of the best arenas in the country was posted missing. Of even more concern, though, was the 'treatment' dished out to some of the players in maroon – Conor Sammon, in particular. Hearts supporters can make Tynecastle one of the most intimidating stadia in the land – but when it makes it intimidating for the home players then something is wrong.

Hearts are a team in transition. Players and coaches will make mistakes. But while fans have the right to express their views, a little more encouragement wouldn't go amiss.

Hearts: Hamilton, Paterson, Souttar, Rossi, L.Smith, Walker (Watt, 74'), Kitchen, Cowie, Buaben (Sammon, 46'), Djoum, Johnsen (Muirhead, 74').

Partick Thistle: Cerny, Booth, Welsh, Lindsay, Osman, Doolan, Barton, Elliott, Devine, Azeez (Erskine, 67'), Edwards.

Referee: Don Robertson

Att: 16,418

Top man: Jack Hamilton. Ironically, the keeper had a shaky first half when his team were on top but a fine second period when Hearts were under the cosh.