

Hearts Hammer Rangers at Tynecastle



Heart of Midlothian 4 Rangers 1

Ladbrokes Premiership, Wednesday 1st February 2017 – Tynecastle

The first day of February starts a month traditionally associated with new love and people getting to know each other. It's fair to say many of the Hearts team that reported to Tynecastle for the Ladbrokes Premiership clash with Rangers on Wednesday evening may have benefited with the services of an introduction agency, given nine new players had arrived in Gorgie since the last time they played a league game at Tynecastle.

Two months ago, Hearts defeated Rangers 2-0 on a Wednesday evening in what was to be Robbie Neilson's last game as Head Coach. Times and personnel have changed remarkably at Tynecastle in this relatively short period of time and 'pleased to meet you' may well have been the conversation among many of the Hearts team.

But, if some of the Maroon Army were having doubts about the new era, particularly after last Sunday's performance at Celtic Park, they were surely reassured by a marauding Hearts performance on Wednesday night. Quite simply, Hearts destroyed Rangers with a display of skill, passion and guts.

The present Hearts Head Coach, Ian Cathro, made three changes from the team that succumbed rather meekly to Celtic on Sunday. Liam Smith, the injured John Souttar and Sam Nicholson made way for debutant Esmael Goncalves, Andraz Struna and Krystian Nowak.

As it was when Rangers visited on St Andrews Night, Tynecastle was packed and a cauldron of noise as the game kicked off. And it took Ian Cathro's side just four minutes to grab the opening goal. Don Cowie fed Andraz Struna who delivered a superb cross from the right and Krystian Novak headed home brilliantly from eight yards with the Rangers defence standing in admiration.

Hearts were rampant in the opening stages. New boy Esmael Goncalves set the tone with his running at the Rangers defence and his power and strength was a godsend for Bjorn Johnsen who has been crying out for support up front.

Malauray Martin was showing his class in midfield and with captain Perry Kitchen scrapping for every ball, Hearts dominated proceedings for the opening 25 minutes. It was a similar display to the last time Hearts entertained Rangers and the home support lapped it up. But the intensity of that opening period began to take its toll on some of the Hearts players, some of whom haven't played a lot of football recently.

Rangers came more and more into the game and ten minutes before half-time they equalised. A cross from the right was flapped at by Hearts keeper Jack Hamilton. The ball broke to Hyndman who blasted a shot high into the net.

It was tough on Hearts but they were happy to reach half-time on level terms.

Half-time Hearts 1 Rangers 1

The second half began in almost identical fashion to the first – with Hearts taking the lead within four minutes. Careless play from Halliday saw Jamie Walker dispossess the Rangers man and rasp in a low shot from 25 yards which flew past Foderingham to put Hearts back in front.

Tynecastle erupted once more and there was soon more to

follow. Just five minutes later, Martin took a quick free kick inside the Rangers half and with the visiting defence switching off the ball was played to Bjorn Johnsen. The big man strode into the Rangers penalty area before crossing along the six-yard line for Don Cowie to tap home. Hearts 3-1 ahead and the home fans were in full voice again.

It was one-way traffic towards the Rangers goal now with the frustrations of recent weeks being released as Hearts tormented their opponents. In the 63rd minute Hearts, incredibly, scored a fourth goal. More fine build up play saw a high ball delivered into the Rangers penalty box for Johnsen. The striker was challenged by Foderingham and the ball dropped for Jamie Walker who kept his cool and swept a low shot into an unguarded net. 4-1 for Hearts and the home support very nearly lifted the roof off the old main stand – due for redevelopment in the weeks ahead – without the need for demolition.

Much has been made of Hearts new signings but it was the established players who played their part tonight. Jamie Walker was at the heart of nearly every Hearts attack and his performance makes one wonder why no one made an offer for the player during the January transfer window. Hearts will be glad no one did.

Perry Kitchen and Don Cowie dominated the midfield and Bjorn Johnsen looked like he had a new lease of life now he has the impressive Goncalves alongside him.

The game ended at 4-1 for Hearts. It could and perhaps should have been even more.

It was a night which makes Tynecastle one of the most atmospheric in the country. And for all the criticism aimed at Head Coach Ian Cathro, this was a night he most definitely got it right.

Hearts: Hamilton, Struna, Nowak, Hughes, Sowah, Walker, Cowie, Kitchen, Martin, Johnsen, Goncalves. Subs: Noring, Tziolis, Avlonitis, El Ouriachi, Beith, Smith

Rangers: Foderingham, Tavernier, Kiernan, Hill, Wallace, Toral, Halliday, Hyndman, Waghorn, Miller, McKay. Subs: Windass, Dadoo, Forrester, Hodson, Holt, Senderos, Alnwick.

Referee: Kevin Clancy

Att: 16,570

Top man: On a momentous night for Hearts, Jamie Walker was quite brilliant.