

Abject Hearts Go Down in Aberdeen



Aberdeen 2 Heart of Midlothian 0

Ladbrokes Premiership, Saturday 18th March 2017 – Pittodrie

In a week when many people had a flutter or three on the horses at the Cheltenham Festival, it's fair to say not many punters, outside the die-hard Hearts supporters, would have been keen to part with their hard-earned cash wagering on a Hearts victory at Pittodrie on Saturday. After all, Aberdeen had won 12 of their previous 14 games in all competitions and had lost at home just once this season.

Hearts had won just a quarter of their games since new Head Coach Ian Cathro arrived in Gorgie in December. This was reflected in the odds given by some overworked bookmakers this week who were giving odds of 4/1 for a Hearts victory – despite just two places separating the teams in the Ladbrokes Premiership.

And the statistics didn't lie. An abject Hearts team never looked like winning in the Granite City on Saturday lunchtime.

Cathro went with the same starting eleven that defeated Hamilton Academical 4-0 at Tynecastle last Saturday although experienced defender Aaron Hughes was on the substitute's bench having recovered from injury.

The home side were going for nine Pittodrie victories in a row and they signalled their intent from the start. However, the first decent chance of the game fell to Hearts. Arnaud Djoum linked up with Sam Nicholson whose long-range effort forced Dons keeper Lewis to push the ball over the crossbar.

In the 15th minute, Hearts passed up a glorious chance to take the lead. Again, Djoum was the provider as he laid the ball off to Nicholson but, unmarked inside the penalty box, young Sam scooped the ball over the bar. It was a missed opportunity Hearts would rue.

The home side had the bulk of the possession and, understandably, adapted better to a difficult pitch. McGinn, linked with Hearts during the transfer window, was causing an uncertain visiting defence all sort of problems as was Hayes.

In the 20th minute the goal which had been threatening from the Dons duly arrived. McGinn was given far too much time and space to cross from the left wing. Even worse was when the Irishman's cross came into the box, Hearts Lennard Sowah was too busy admiring it to notice Logan who headed the ball past Jack Hamilton. 1-0 to the home side and, it must be said, deservedly so.

McGinn had another chance ten minutes before the break but his effort was straight at Hamilton.

The Dons ended the first half well on top as Hearts struggled to find any rhythm.

Half-time Aberdeen 1 Hearts 0

The second half began the way the first had ended. The Dons thought they had scored a second goal just two minutes into the second half when Jack Hamilton's save from Shinnie was turned into the net by Rooney but his effort was disallowed for offside.

McLean then had a chance as the Dons went for the kill but his effort went just wide.

Aberdeen were looking ever more likely to score again but, on the hour mark, Hearts generously decided to assist them by handing them their second goal on a plate. Casual play by the

visitors – an all-too frequent occurrence – saw Tasos Avlonitis ridiculously short with a pass back to Jack Hamilton. The eager Haynes pounced, took the ball round the Hearts keeper and gleefully stabbed the ball into an empty net. The look of despair on the face of Ian Cathro said it all.

The Dons were going for the kill now and Jack Hamilton had to be at his best to deny McLean and Hayes again.

Hearts eventually threatened a goal of their own 17 minutes from the end when Andraz Struna's cross was headed on by substitute Bjorn Johnsen. Isma Goncalves had time and space to make his chance count – but the former St Mirren striker blasted the ball straight at Dons keeper Lewis.

The home side went back on the attack and McGinn and Taylor both spurned decent opportunities to extend the Dons lead.

The game was petering out but there was still time for one final piece of drama when Aberdeen's Stockley was shown a red card for elbowing Hearts Krystian Nowak.

The final whistle sounded moments later – a blessed relief to the Maroon Army who yet again travelled in large numbers and were rewarded with nothing for their efforts.

Afterwards, Ian Cathro told BBC Sport: "It's a situation where Aberdeen have shown they're in a position where they're stronger, more routined, and managed to take the victory.

"There were some positive parts to our play, we had some opportunities, and it comes down to clinical finishing, sometimes clinical defending, the ruthlessness, the quickness in dealing with things, and we suffered from that today."

Cathro's assertion that 'there were some positive parts to our play' is difficult for many Hearts fans to accept. The Maroons were poor from start to finish. They were disorganised,

defensively all over the place and it seemed to me there was a real lack of passion and commitment from some of the players which is wholly unacceptable. Perhaps the players should learn from the Hearts supporters what passion and commitment is all about.

Finally, some of the media are getting themselves into a frenzy about Hearts Director of Football Craig Levein clearly giving assistant coach Jon Daly information to pass to Ian Cathro and Austin McPhee. 'Who's in charge of the team?' some hacks are screaming. Cathro will be the first to admit he needs any assistance going and he is grateful for any contribution. It would surely be much more of a concern if Levein had spotted something amiss and *didn't* pass his thoughts on.

Aberdeen: Lewis, Logan, Shinnie, Considine, Taylor, McLean, Rooney (Stockley, 75'), McGinn, Hayes (Christie, 83'), O'Connor, Jack.

Hearts: Hamilton, Struna, Avlonitis, Nowak, Sowah, Tziolis (Kitchen, 73'), Cowie, Djoum (Johnsen, 65'), Nicholson, Walker, Isma.

Ref: Steven McLean

Att: 12,178

Top man: No one in the Hearts team played well so the top people were those Hearts fans who travelled to the Granite City at a ridiculously early hour – only to be let down yet again.