

Hearts Held at Tynecastle in Familiar Story



Heart of Midlothian 2 Partick Thistle 2

Ladbrokes Premiership, Saturday 29th April 2017 – Tynecastle

The so-called 'business end' of the season saw Hearts entertain Partick Thistle in a top six clash in the Ladbrokes Premiership on Saturday afternoon. Both sides still harbour hopes of clinching fourth place in the league which would mean participation in the qualifying stages of next season's Europa League – in little over eight weeks from now. But by the end of the afternoon a 2-2 draw added to current fourth place incumbents St Johnstone's surprise 2-0 victory at Aberdeen meant hopes of finishing in fourth place diminished somewhat.

It was a strangely subdued afternoon at Tynecastle. We didn't have the dulcet tones of Scotland's best stadium announcer Scott Wilson who was elsewhere and the Maroon Army were unusually quiet for most of the ninety minutes. Granted, Hearts performance, in keeping with recent weeks, didn't inspire any outpouring of excitement but the atmosphere for which Tynecastle is renowned was distinctly lacking on Saturday afternoon.

Hearts Head Coach Ian Cathro, under fire from many Hearts supporters, made one change from the equally uninspiring display at Kilmarnock a fortnight ago. It was a surprising one – skipper Perry Kitchen dropped to the substitute's bench as Choulay took his place. Don Cowie was captain for the day and Perry Kitchen, who has flitted in and out of the team in recent weeks, must wonder what he has to do to remain in the team.

The aforementioned game against Kilmarnock was a deadly dull affair and the first half against Partick Thistle bore (if you'll pardon the pun) similar hallmarks.

Hearts were again guilty of passing the ball to death when more incisive movement up front would have been more productive. It took ten minutes before Hearts even had an attempt on goal when a cross from Andraz Struna fell to Arnaud Djoum but the Cameroon internationalist's shot on goal from just outside the penalty box was too high.

Jamie Walker then had an effort on goal but this was way too wide before fine play from Don Cowie – again an impressive force in midfield – found Isma Goncalves but the striker couldn't control the ball and Thistle keeper Cerny collected. Sadly, this was to be a feature of Goncalves' afternoon.

At this stage, Hearts keeper Jack Hamilton could have sat next to me in the Gorgie Stand although a free-kick from Booth in the 26th minute was met by Keown but the son of former Arsenal star Martin found his cross into the Hearts penalty box spurned by his colleagues.

Hearts almost went in front when fine play from Choulay set up Goncalves whose attempt on goal was cleared only as far as Struna whose shot hit the crossbar.

Jamie Walker then went close with a deflected shot which went agonisingly wide.

Half-time Hearts 0 Partick Thistle 0

Hearts made a positive start to the second half when a fine pass from Walker sent Goncalves through down the left wing but after thrusting his way into the Thistle penalty box, the former St Mirren man blasted his effort into the side netting.

It was a missed opportunity the hosts rued immediately as Thistle went ahead in the 50th minute. The impressive Lawless

delivered a fine cross towards Doolan who had the freedom of Gorgie Road to head past Jack Hamilton. Howls of frustration from the home support ensued.

This turned into howls of anger seconds later when a superb cross from Don Cowie was met by Isma Goncalves. With a free header from eight yards, the big striker headed over the crossbar, incurring the wrath of the home support.

Hearts at last upped the ante in an effort to get back into the game. Thistle had keeper Cerny to thank for keeping them in front as he pulled off a fine save from Arnaud Djoum.

However, Thistle should have doubled their lead when Erskine was straight through on Jack Hamilton but the Hearts keeper managed to deflect the Thistle player's effort away from goal. It was a huge let-off for Ian Cathro's side.

With 20 minutes left Hearts equalised in controversial circumstances. Don Cowie's shot on goal hit the hand of Thistle's Devine inside the penalty box. Penalty decreed referee Andrew Dallas. If the Thistle players were unhappy with that decision they were downright furious when Mr Dallas promptly booked Devine for the second time that afternoon and therefore ordered him off. It was a harsh decision as it was difficult to see how it could have been judged as deliberate hand ball.

Isma Goncalves didn't worry, however, and he fired home the penalty kick to draw parity.

My grandson Jack opined it would be typical of Hearts to then go behind to the ten men. Moments later, I was asking Jack for tonight's national lottery numbers as more fine play from Lawless saw the Thistle man skip past the Hearts defence and fire the ball beyond Hamilton to put the visitors back in front.

The jeers from the home support suddenly became louder but

Hearts tried manfully for another equaliser. Thistle keeper Cerny saved well from Djoum and Liam Smith as Hearts went all out for another equaliser.

They got it with just two minutes left. Substitute Sam Nicholson saw his cross blocked on the goal line but the unlikely figure of Andraz Struna fired home to bring the scores level again at 2-2.

In stoppage time, Hearts should have taken all three points when Goncalves was through on goal. Sadly, the out-of-sorts striker fired a tame effort straight at keeper Cerny.

The match ended seconds later and the boos from the home support told its own story.

Afterwards, Hearts Head Coach Ian Cathro painted a familiar picture.

“We feel disappointment, frustration, maybe a tiny bit of shock at not winning that match,” he told the official Hearts website. “We feel we did more than enough to win the match, with the chances created, but we make it difficult for ourselves. We shouldn’t need to score 3 goals to win a match here.

“We found ourselves in a position where we had to, because of defensive errors, but that’s a game where we win more often than not. Our attacking was much better today, but we were missing more goals.

“Isma would get a hat-trick 9 times out of 10 in a game like this, and he knows that. This is a game we should have won, and as the main striker he obviously feels it more than any of us.”

Hearts: Hamilton, Smith, Buaben, Nowak, Struna, Tziolis (Johnsen, 79’), Djoum, Choulay (Nicholson, 79’), Cowie, Isma, Walker.

Partick Thistle: Cerny, Booth, Doolan, Erskine (Azeez, 79'), Lawless, Barton, Elliott, Devine, Keown, Edwards, McCarthy.

Referee: Andrew Dallas

Att: 15,930

Top Man: Not for the first time, it had to be Don Cowie.