

Same Old Story for Hearts as Celtic Clinch League Title at Tynecastle



Heart of Midlothian 0 Celtic 5

Ladbrokes Premiership, Sunday 2nd April 2017 – Tynecastle

Have you ever switched on the television and began watching a film only to realise, after a few minutes, that you've seen it before? That was the feeling I had on Sunday lunchtime at Tynecastle as Hearts, after a promising start, inevitably succumbed to a powerful Celtic side who romped to victory to clinch their sixth Ladbrokes Premiership title in a row.

As has been the case too often this season individual errors from the men in maroon contributed to their downfall and while the final score of 5-0 to the visitors may seem a tad harsh, there was no denying Celtic won comfortably. The Hoops are unbeaten in Scottish football this season and there was never any real prospect of that happening on a sunny afternoon in Gorgie.

Hearts much-maligned Head Coach Ian Cathro made a couple of changes to the team that performed poorly in the 2-0 loss at Aberdeen a fortnight ago. One change was enforced as influential midfielder Arnaud Djoum was injured. He was replaced by Bjorn Johnsen. Sam Nicholson also made way for Perry Kitchen – the American was also handed the captain's armband. Nicholson dropped to the substitute's bench.

Given Hearts recent form, some of the home support may have feared the worst given Celtic needed a win to clinch yet another league title. And the Maroon Army may have been

covering their eyes after only two minutes when the visitors had the ball in the net. However, McGregor was offside and Hearts breathed again.

Hearts began to move forward and fine play from Isma Goncalves in the sixth minute fed Bjorn Johnsen who set up Jamie Walker but the attacking midfielder's effort on goal was wide.

Goncalves was involved again four minutes later when he collected a fine pass from Alex Tziolis and raced forward. The former St Mirren player fired in a shot which was saved by Celtic's former Hearts goalie Craig Gordon.

The Celtic number one saved from Goncalves again in the 18th minute as Hearts gradually began to believe they could trouble the champions-elect. However, Celtic were proving dangerous on the counter-attack and McGregor really should have opened the scoring when he was set up by Sinclair but the young Celt fired wide.

Back to the other end and midway through the first half a corner from Don Cowie was met by Tasos Avlonitis but his header was pushed away by Gordon. Hearts were beginning to get on top now and we sensed a breakthrough was imminent. A goal duly arrived in the 24th minute – but at the wrong end as far as the Hearts support were concerned.

The dangerous Sinclair was given far too much time and space on the edge of the Hearts penalty box and he played a one-two with Roberts before blasting the ball high past keeper Jack Hamilton and into the net. 1-0 to Celtic and one could feel the weight of inevitably.

Three minutes later and it was double-trouble for Hearts. Roberts fed Sinclair again with a fine pass and the former Man City player raced through to fire the ball past Hamilton. 2-0 to Celtic and the metaphorical white towel was already being thrown on to the pitch by Hearts.

Hearts had a claim for a penalty kick just before half-time when the hard-working Don Cowie appeared to be fouled by Simunovic inside the penalty box but referee Kevin Clancy ignored Hearts feverish claims for a spot kick. What was I saying about the weight of inevitably?

Half-time Hearts 0 Celtic 2

It was difficult to see how Hearts could recover from two goals down against a team that appeared to be in second gear but still had the ability to step up when required. That said, Hearts really should have grabbed a goal back five minutes into the second half. Bjorn Johnsen dispossessed Brown and raced in on goal. With Don Cowie in acres of space to his right and screaming for the ball, the American dithered and eventually opted to shoot for goal himself. His effort sailed into the Gorgie Stand and the groans from the home support said it all.

There then followed a sequence which seemed to sum up Hearts season. Keeper Jack Hamilton was wayward with a clearance which went straight to a Celtic player. Armstrong's cross was turned by Avlonitis towards his own goal. Thankfully for the Hearts defender – whose howler at Pittodrie two weeks ago gave Aberdeen their second goal – Sinclair tried to stab the ball over the line from an offside position and Hearts breathed again. But not for long.

After 55 minutes, Hamilton repeated his wayward kicking and allowed Celtic possession. Tierney's cross was left by McGregor to allow Armstrong to fire past the unfortunate Hearts keeper to end the game as a contest at 3-0. Hamilton had clearly not learned from his first mistake and it's this failure to learn from errors which is resulting in increased frustration from Hearts supporters, many of who exited Tynecastle at this stage.

As if to underline this point, in the 62nd minute Krystian

Nowak gave the ball away to Celtic's McGregor who set up Roberts to fire home for goal number four.

The home stands emptied rapidly now but there was still time for Celtic to put the icing on their league title cake when Nowak fouled Sinclair inside the penalty box with seven minutes left. The Celtic man duly struck home the penalty kick for his hat-trick as Celtic made it 5-0.

The Edinburgh Reporter congratulates Celtic on winning the Ladbrokes Premiership. Clearly, they are streets ahead of anyone else in Scotland and are worthy league champions. Once they went two goals ahead at Tynecastle on Sunday their victory was never in doubt.

Ian Cathro was at least dignified in defeat, something other managers could learn from. He told the Hearts website:

"Whenever we play at home our attitude is to go out and attack, irrespective of who the opponent is. Our plan was to go toe-to-toe with Celtic and I think in the first half we did that.

"We've probably had more chances in the first half but what they've got is some individual players who are of a very high level.

"We continued to fight and push and I don't think the scoreline in any way reflects that game of football.

"It was a competitive and balanced game in the first half but we need to take our opportunities.

"There's some individual mistakes in our game which, when you come up against opponents of that level, you will be punished for."

His last sentence didn't need to be said as this was painfully obvious for the frustrated Hearts support. True, no other team in Scotland can live with this Celtic team. But, as was the

case in the Granite City a fortnight ago, Hearts shot themselves in the foot once again. The club may well have to pay gift tax on goals conceded.

Hearts now head to Perth on Wednesday evening for what is now a vitally important Ladbrokes Premiership game with St Johnstone. If Hearts can lick their wounds and defeat the Perth Saints then not only will they have secured a top six place in the league but they will put themselves back into fourth place – a place which, at the season's end and providing Hibernian don't win the Scottish Cup – will mean a place in next season's Europa League qualifiers.

Hearts: Hamilton, Struna, Avlonitis, Nowak, Sowah, Tziolis (Buaben, 65'), Kitchen, Cowie, Walker (Martin, 65'), Johnsen, Isma (Beith, 71').

Celtic: Gordon, Lustig (Gamboa, 79'), Simunovic, Boyata, Tierney, Forrest, Brown, Armstrong, Roberts (Mackay-Steven, 79'), McGregor, Sinclair.

Ref: Kevin Clancy

Att: 16,539

Top man: Don Cowie