

Ten Men Hearts Go Down at Ibrox



Rangers 2 Heart of Midlothian 1

Ladbroke's Premiership, Saturday 13th May 2017 – Ibrox

It's been a long and difficult season for Hearts and the long-suffering Maroon Army. Saturday's trip to Ibrox to face Rangers was one that was a journey too far for many of them and it's fair to say the majority of Hearts supporters just want the season to end.

Yet, despite much criticism in recent weeks, there were glimmers today of what may be possible with a group of players who have failed to impress thus far.

Somewhat inevitably Hearts returned along the M8 with nothing after another loss in Glasgow but a 2-1 defeat didn't tell the whole story. Prince Buaben was sent off just before the half-hour mark but the ten-men of Hearts pushed Rangers all the way, particularly in the second half and could count themselves unlucky not to snatch a point.

Hearts Head Coach Ian Cathro rang the changes from the team that lost to Aberdeen at Tynecastle six days ago. Goalkeeper Viktor Noring made his debut and replaced Jack Hamilton while Liam Smith, Sam Nicholson, Malaury Martin and Bjorn Johnsen came into the side with Lennard Sowah, Andraz Struna and Alex Tziolis dropping out and Jamie Walker being suspended following his ordering off last week.

It wasn't just the Hearts supporters who weren't enthused by this fixture. Judging by the number of empty seats, the Rangers fans weren't fussed either and the fact the game was a

lunch-time kick-off broadcast on Sky Sports didn't help either.

There certainly seemed to be an 'end-of-the-season' feel as the game kicked off but Rangers went ahead in the seventh minute. A cross from Miller found the head of Garner who nodded the ball past Viktor Noring to put the hosts 1-0 ahead.

Three minutes later, Windass had the chance to double the home side's lead when he was put through by McKay and while he took the ball past Noring his shot on goal was cleared by Prince Buaben.

Hearts gradually woke up to the fact they were a goal down and fine play from Arnaud Djoum set up Bjorn Johnsen who fed Don Cowie. The former Scotland player's shot was saved by Rangers keeper Foderingham.

Noring then pulled off a decent save from Garner as play swung to the other end of the field.

A great tackle from Arnaud Djoum saw the Cameroon international set up Isma Goncalves who then set off on a charge towards the Rangers goal. However, the former St Mirren player was thwarted by Hill.

In the 26th minute, Hearts saw red – literally. Prince Buaben challenged Windass just outside the Hearts penalty box and the Rangers man went down. No penalty – but referee Bobby Madden deemed the challenge as denying a goalscoring opportunity and promptly ordered the Hearts man off.

It looked like Goodnight Vienna for Hearts chances although five minutes before half-time a corner from Don Cowie was met by Bjorn Johnsen. His header was just beyond Goncalves.

Viktor Noring was forced into a couple of fine saves from Bates and Hill as Hearts got to the break with just a one goal deficit.

Half-time Rangers 1 Hearts 0

Hearts replaced Malaury Martin with Alex Tziolis at the start of the second half. Within five minutes, the Maroons – or rather, the Yellow and Pink hoops – were unexpectedly level. Fine play from Don Cowie – yet again – set up Bjorn Johnsen who passed to Isma Goncalves to fire past Rangers keeper Foderingham.

Joy for the Hearts fans – but not for long. Two minutes later, a long high ball was fired into the Hearts penalty box. Keeper Noring punched a cross from Tavernier into the air when perhaps he should have caught the ball. It fell to McKay who drilled it home to put the home side ahead.

A great run from Hearts Liam Smith set up Goncalves who crossed the ball back to Smith but the young defender headed wide. It was a golden chance to equalise for a second time.

Seconds later, Johnsen shot straight at Foderingham as ten-men Hearts chased an equaliser.

Viktor Noring may have been at fault for Rangers second goal but he kept his side in the game with fine saves from Toral and Waghorn.

Another defeat for Hearts, then, but encouraging signs. At least Hearts managed to score a goal away from home on Saturday – for the first time since the Scottish Cup defeat at Ladbrokes Championship side Hibernian in February...

The defeat, coupled with St Johnstone's victory over Partick Thistle, means Hearts can no longer qualify for next season's Europa League qualifying stages. Given the rebuilding work required on the team, this is perhaps a blessing.

Afterwards, Ian Cathro was upbeat despite the result. He told the official Hearts website: "We were strong and consistent today, and we didn't let things rock us. Our attitude and work

rate was first class. They had counter attacks, yes, but so did we. We had to try and be bold.

“For me, it’s a bag of mixed feelings today. I’m disappointed to lose, but there are a lot of positives within that.

“Those of us on the inside know how and what we’re building. After today, I’m more convinced than ever that this is going to be a very good team.”

Rangers: Foderingham, Tavernier, Hill, Garner, Toral (Waghorn, 74’), Miller, McKay, Windass (Dodoo, 52’), Hodson, Holt (Barjonas, 67’), Bates.

Hearts: Noring, Buaben, Nowak, Hughes, Smith, Nicholson (Choulay, 84’), Cowie, Djoum, Martin (Tziolis, 46’), Johnsen (Currie, 74’), Isma.

Referee: Bobby Madden

Att: 47,809 (ticket sales as opposed to bums on seats I suspect)

Top man: Don Cowie – for the umpteenth time this season.