

Humiliated Hearts Crash Out the Betfred Cup



Hearts 2 Dunfermline Athletic 2 (Dunfermline win bonus point after 3-1 win in penalty shoot-out)

Betfred Cup, Saturday 29th July 2017 – Tynecastle

The building of the new main stand at Tynecastle continues apace but the metaphorical roof fell in on Hearts in Gorgie on Saturday afternoon after another abject performance against lower league opposition. After the debacle of the loss to fourth tier side Peterhead on Tuesday evening, the Maroons salvaged a draw against Championship side Dunfermline Athletic before losing the subsequent penalty shoot-out. This mattered not a jot, however, as by the time Hearts managed to balloon a couple of penalties into the Roseburn Stand, they were already out of the Betfred Cup after finishing third in a section that contained two fourth tier clubs, a League One and a Championship side. The humiliation was complete against a backdrop of angry Hearts supporters who made their feelings towards Hearts Head Coach Ian Cathro well and truly heard.

Cathro made three changes to the side embarrassed in the north-east on Tuesday. Arnaud Djoum and John Souttar returned while there was a surprise return for youngster Jamie Brandon. His inclusion was a result of Cathro's decision to drop Jamie Walker from the squad altogether due to a 'drop in performance and his focus' according to the Head Coach. If Cathro was trying to prove a point it backfired in spectacular fashion.

The visitors started brightly and were determined to show they weren't in awe of their higher league opponents. However, Hearts had the game's first real chance in the second minute

when Goncalves tried a long-range shot which was deflected wide.

The Pars were proving dangerous on the counter-attack and the impressive Cardle brought out a fine save from Hearts keeper Jack Hamilton.

In the 20th minute the home side made the breakthrough. Kyle Lafferty found Don Cowie on the corner of the penalty box and the former Scotland man hit a diagonal shot which Pars keeper Murdoch couldn't keep out and Hearts were a goal ahead.

If the Maroon Army thought they would settle back and enjoy a comfortable win they were sadly mistaken. Eight minutes later, Cardle was given far too much time and space to turn – John Souttar being the culprit – and the Pars man struck a fine shot past Hamilton to level the score.

Hearts almost went back in front soon after when Pars keeper Murdoch made amends for his earlier mistake to push a deflected header on to the crossbar.

Half-time Hearts 1 Dunfermline Athletic 1

The boos which followed Hearts up the temporary tunnel in the Wheatfield Stand at half-time intensified seven minutes into the second half when Dunfermline took the lead. Again, it was a defensive calamity and again it was John Souttar who was at fault. He allowed Smith to square the ball to McManus who fired past Hamilton to the joy of the travelling Dunfermline fans in the Roseburn Stand.

Thereafter, Hearts huffed and puffed. Don Cowie had a header saved by Murdoch before Goncalves invoked the wrath of the Hearts support when he had a great chance when through in the Dunfermline penalty box – but his effort on goal was pathetic to say the least.

With the news that Peterhead were 3-0 ahead at Elgin, Hearts

were facing elimination. However, a lifeline was thrown with three minutes to go when Goncalves poked the ball over the line after Berra's header to make it 2-2. But Hearts needed another goal to progress.

Incredibly, they almost got it when Carl Stockton had a glorious chance from three yards – but blasted the ball high and wide.

That was it. The game ended 2-2 and a meaningless penalty shoot-out followed which, inevitably, Hearts lost after woeful spot kicks from Cowie, Buaben and Martin.

Many Hearts fans had left Tynecastle long before the penalty shoot-out although some remained specifically to voice their understandable anger towards Ian Cathro. The Hearts Head Coach appeared to smile at the end of the game which didn't help matters although he did speak of his anger and disappointment to the official Hearts website afterwards.

“We're angry and disappointed, it's just not good enough. To talk about the game, we scored when we were on top, they did well to come back into it. They started the second half better.

“At that point, we fell below our standards expected at a club like Hearts, and then John Souttar is involved in a mistake for the second goal. I will be taking responsibility for that. John probably should have come off at half-time, and that's my error.

“The biggest thing that would get us back into the game was energy and urgency, and it could have been resolved, but across the piece it's far from acceptable.”

It is an utter disgrace that Hearts have failed to qualify from this group. It is embarrassing and is the latest in a list of performances that, under Cathro, have been quite shameful.

Many Hearts fans have been against Cathro since the inept performances against Hibernian in last season's Scottish Cup. It's fair to say, though, that a fair number of continued to back the former Newcastle United assistant coach, citing that this season he would get his own players in and it would be a different Hearts team.

In the Betfred Cup it's patently obvious Hearts are in reverse gear. A struggling performance against Elgin City, a less than convincing one against East Fife followed by two shocking performances against Peterhead and Dunfermline Athletic have led the majority of the Maroon Army to say 'enough's enough'.

Owner Ann Budge made some tough decisions when she took charge at Tynecastle just over three years ago. Another one needs to be made now. The Cathro experiment hasn't worked. Time for change before the league season begins next Saturday.

Hearts: Hamilton, M.Smith, Berra, Souttar (Nowak, 52'), McGhee, Brandon, Buaben (Stockton, 60'), Cowie, Djoum (Martin, 74'), Lafferty, Goncalves.

Dunfermline: Murdoch, Williamson, Martin, Morris, Ashcroft, Higginbotham, Wedderburn, McManus, Cardle, Paton, Smith (Lohead, 66').

Att: 8,404

Referee: Craig Thomson

Top Man: Jamie Brandon – at least the youngster looked like he cared.