

# In All the Excitement, Callachan Rescues a Point For Hearts



## **Partick Thistle 1 Hearts 1**

**Ladbrokes Premiership, Saturday 23rd September 2017 – The Energy Check Stadium (aka Firhill)**

Hearts secured an important point in Glasgow on Saturday as a late Ross Callachan goal – his second in two games – earned an equaliser with ten minutes to go against Partick Thistle in the Ladbrokes Premiership.

It was a deserved point for Craig Levein's men who had plenty of second half pressure as they trailed to an early Thistle goal.

Levein made three changes to the team that won at Hamilton last Saturday. We knew long-term absentee Arnaud Djoum was out but there was a surprise when the teams were announced when it became known striker Kyle Lafferty was also out injured. Ashley Smith-Brown was left on the substitutes' bench as Don Cowie, Aaron Hughes and Connor Randall came into the side.

Hearts made a bright start to the game but it was the home side who created the first decent chance of the afternoon when Spittal fired wide from just inside the penalty box.

The visitors almost went ahead when Michael Smith's low shot was well saved by Thistle keeper Scully.

The late start – the game kicked off at 4.00pm because of the Rangers-Celtic game at Ibrox earlier in the afternoon – didn't seem to have had any adverse effect as both teams probed for

the opening goal. It arrived in the 18th minute and it's not one Hearts keeper Jon McLaughlin will want to recall. Thistle's Spittal – try saying that after a couple of pints of foaming ale – was given far too much space to run in on the Hearts goal. However, his shot on goal didn't appear to carry to much of a threat – until the unfortunate McLaughlin let the ball slip through his hands and into the net. 1-0 to the home side and it was Firhill for spills (the Energy Check Stadium doesn't have the same ring to it)

Spittal had a chance to double Thistle's lead two minutes before half-time when, after a fine piece of skill, he fired goalward but his effort was more likely to trouble air traffic control at Glasgow Airport than the Hearts keeper.

The final chance of an eventful first half came again for the home side when Doolan flicked the ball over McLaughlin and seemed certain to score – only for Hearts John Souttar to rescue the visitors by heading the ball off the goal line.

### **Half-time Partick Thistle 1 Hearts 0**

Craig Levein doubtless had some words to say to his troops during the interval as Hearts almost equalised straight from the re-start when a cross from Rafal Grzelak found the head of Isma Goncalves but the striker's header was wide.

Hearts Jamie Walker then showed what he is capable of when he collected Grzelak's throw-in and drove forward. His rasping effort on goal from 25 yards went narrowly wide.

Hearts were dominating the game now as they chased an equaliser. On the hour mark, Don Cowie's corner fell to Goncalves but the striker's volley was inches wide. Connor Randall then forced a save from Scully as the 2,000 strong Maroon Army roared their encouragement.

They were rewarded with ten minutes to go. Substitute David Manuel Milinkovic delivered a brilliant cross for Ross

Callachan to flick past keeper Scully. The ball was scrambled off the line but the assistant referee decreed the ball had crossed the line first. It was a goal Hearts richly deserved in any case.

If Hearts keeper Job McLaughlin was the villain of the piece in the first half he turned hero with five minutes left when he produced a brilliant close-range save to deny Thistle's Storey.

The game ended all-square, a result which was probably about right.

Afterwards, Craig Levein concurred with this assertion. He told the official Hearts website:

*"I thought it was a tough match," said the Hearts boss. "Neither team was able for dominate for long spells, and as a result, it swung back and forth.*

*"I thought we showed good resilience, and I was hoping we could carry the momentum into nicking another goal, but it was a pretty fair result on the face of it.*

*"We didn't feel under a lot of pressure; however, I didn't feel we were exerting enough pressure on them.*

*"We both had shots on goal, but nothing was really well worked. Their goal was a mistake on our part, which summed up a scrappy match."*

*"I thought John Souttar was terrific today. He got back to playing football. We've worked very hard in the past four weeks on the other side of his game.*

*"We've worked on his defending, heading, sensing danger and basic things, but today he showed how good a player he is. People forget how young he still is.*

*"I'd just like to put a word in for Isma as well today. He ran all day for us, worked hard, and I was really pleased with his*

*efforts."*

It's another important point picked up as the Hearts roadshow continues. That's two draws and a win from Craig Levein's time in charge and with a plethora of home games on the horizon Hearts will look to force their way up the league table in the autumn period.

**Partick Thistle:** Scully, Turnbull, Keown, Spittal, Doolan (Bannigan, 77'), Barton, Elliott (Nitriansky, 66'), Devine, McGinn, Edwards, Storey (Nisbet, 90').

**Hearts:** McLaughlin, M. Smith (Milinkovic, 73'), Souttar, Berra, Hughes, Grzelak (Smith-Brown, 53'), Cowie (Currie, 87'), Randall, Callachan, Walker, Goncalves

**Referee:** Don Robertson

**Att:** 4,671

**Top Man:** John Souttar