

# Hearts Fans Spooked By Another Loss



**Hearts 1 Rangers 3**

**Ladbroke's Premiership, Saturday 28th October 2017 – BT Murrayfield Stadium**

Three days before Hallowe'en Hearts produced another performance to spook their long-suffering supporters. Following their feeble showing in the Edinburgh derby at Easter Road on Tuesday evening, the Maroons squandered a lead against Rangers at BT Murrayfield on Saturday afternoon and surrendered all too meekly to a side whose supporters all-too readily claim there should be no surrender.

Former Ranger Kyle Lafferty produced the game's only moment of real quality when he fired home a brilliant free-kick in the first half, but the home side gave away a cheap goal just before half-time before Rangers grabbed two more in the second half. It was another performance and result to forget for Hearts.

Head Coach Craig Levein made three changes from the side that barely managed a whimper in the 1-0 defeat from Hibernian. Euan Henderson, Jamie Brandon and Connor Randall made way for Isma Goncalves and teenagers Harry Cochrane and Lewis Moore.

Buoyed by more than 14,000 Rangers fans, the attendance was just short of 33,000, Hearts highest for a home league game since 1975. The atmosphere was crackling as the game kicked off, but it was soon apparent here were two sides badly lacking in confidence as misplaced passes and tackles were aplenty.

Rangers, having sacked manager Pedro Caixinha on Thursday,

were keen to make an early impression for interim Head Coach Graeme Murty. Windass fired in a couple of early efforts which didn't trouble Hearts keeper Jon McLaughlin although the Hearts custodian had to be wary of former Hibs striker Kenny Miller on more than one occasion.

It was a fairly scrappy affair with flowing football notable by its absence. However, in the 24th minute and out of the blue (if you'll pardon the pun) Hearts took the lead in sensational style.

Isma Goncalves was fouled 25 yards from goal and from the subsequent free-kick former Rangers striker Kyle Lafferty struck a superb shot which curled over the defensive wall and into the top corner of the net to put Hearts 1-0 ahead.

This brought the home support to life and they very nearly celebrated a second moments later when Ross Callachan was denied by a brilliant save from Gers keeper Foderingham.

Jamie Walker when dispossessed Tavernier and fed Lewis Moore. The 19-year-old ran at the backtracking Rangers defence before returning the ball to Walker, but the attacking midfielder's shot was wide.

Just as it seemed Hearts were gaining the upper hand, Rangers equalised three minutes before half-time. Morelos set up Miller whose shot on goal took a deflection and the ball spun over Hearts keeper McLaughlin to level the score.

Hearts had a chance to regain their lead right on half-time when Harry Cochrane's shot was saved well by Foderingham.

### **Half-time Hearts 1 Rangers 1**

The second half began in similar fashion to the first with the play scrappy. However, just five minutes in and Hearts suffered a major blow when Jamie Walker appeared to suffer a hamstring injury. He was replaced by David Milinkovic, but the

loss of another influential player was obvious.

Midway through the second half Hearts afternoon began to crumble when Rangers went in front. Miller got in between John Souttar and Christophe Berra to head past McLaughlin in front of the 14,000 plus Rangers fans who roared their delight before resorting to the usual sectarian nonsense that emanates from their end of the stadium.

Eight minutes later it was game over. Hearts Rafal Grzelak lost Windass who fired a low shot past McLaughlin to make it 3-1 to the visitors.

There was little of note to write about thereafter and the game ended in a 3-1 win to Rangers. It was far too easy for an Ibrox side that has struggled itself in recent weeks.

Granted, Hearts were without two of their best players in the injured Don Cowie and Arnaud Djoum and lost another in Jamie Walker. Walker could be out for several weeks while Djoum and Cowie could be out for some time yet.

Craig Levein blamed the defeat on the injury to Walker. He told the official Hearts website:

*"I'm happy at a lot of the things we did in the first half, and for the first hour in general. The tail end of the game wasn't good at all. I thought Kyle's free kick was excellent, and we should have another goal or two to go along with it."*

*"Once Jamie Walker went off, the whole system just fell apart and I put it solely down to that. We need Jamie to make that particular system work, and as we were already short in midfield, it made it even more difficult for us."*

*"Jamie has a hamstring injury, the damage of which I don't yet know the extent. He'll definitely be out for the next couple of weeks, at least. I haven't considered looking at the free agent market, though."*

*"In a few weeks we'll have all the players back, so there's no point signing an out of contract player that will take a month to gain match fitness. We'll just have to play players out of position in the meantime, and try to make us difficult to beat."*

The youngsters who have come into the Hearts team have done well enough but the Maroons clearly lack a presence in midfield and the left back position continues to be a problem.

John Souttar seemed to typify Hearts performances of late. The former Dundee United defender seems confident and assured one minute but has the dithering manner of a stunned wasp the next.

As for Rafal Grzelak, many wondered why a player Craig Levein admitted he shouldn't have played against Hibernian on Tuesday evening retained his place in the team four days later.

**Hearts:** McLaughlin, M.Smith, Berra, Souttar, Grzelak, Moore (Stockton 69'), Cochrane (Nowak 69'), Callachan, Walker (Milinkovic 52'), Isma, Lafferty. Subs: Hamilton, Brandon, McDonald, Henderson.

**Rangers:** Foderingham, Tavernier, McCrorie, Wilson, John, Jack, Holt, Candeias, Windass, Miller, Morelos. Subs: Kelly, Hodson, Bates, Barjonas, Herrera, Hardie, Kranjcar.

**Referee:** Craig Thomson

**Att:** 32,852

**Top man:** Harry Cochrane. The 16-year-old is still very raw but showed enough to suggest he can be a big part of this Hearts team – not only in the future but in the here and now.