

Hearts Record Fine Win at Ross County



Ross County 1 Hearts 2

Ladbrokes Premiership, Saturday 14th October 2017 – Global Energy Stadium

Hearts returned from their trip to Dingwall on Saturday a happy band as they defeated Ross County 2-1 at the Global Energy Stadium (or Victoria Park as I remember it) Jamie Walker was the match-winning hero, his goal coming on the hour mark as the Jambos secured all three Ladbrokes Premiership points.

Hearts Head Coach Craig Levein made a couple of changes to the team that disappointed in Dundee a fortnight ago. Don Cowie and Prince Buaben returned to the side at the expense of the injured pair of Ross Callachan and Aaron Hughes.

Ross County were playing their first home game since they appointed Owen Coyle as manager and the opening stages of the game were cagey with precious little chances being created.

It wasn't until the 18th minutes that the first decent opening arrived when Don Cowie crossed for Isma Goncalves but the former St Mirren striker headed wide.

Then Jamie Walker drifted past Davies but his shot on goal went just over the crossbar.

Hearts created another chance when John Souttar's long pass forward was left by Cowie for Kyle Lafferty. The Northern Irish international then sent the ball back to Cowie but the former Inverness Caledonian Thistle man's effort was inches wide.

Eleven minutes before half-time, Hearts took a deserved lead. The splendidly-named Michael Smith sent Jamie Walker through and the attacking midfielder found Goncalves who fired a low shot past County keeper Fox.

This being Hearts, of course, the inevitable happened. Sixty seconds later, Ross County equalised when Keillor-Dunn took advantage of slack Hearts defending to prod home the leveller.

County should then have gone in front when Gardyne's free-kick was headed goalwards by Curran but he was denied by a fine save from Hearts keeper Jon McLaughlin.

Half-time Ross County 1 Hearts 1

Hearts went on the offensive at the start of the second half and got their noses back in front on the hour mark when Connor Randall found Kyle Lafferty who showed neat footwork before returning the ball to Randall. The Englishman found Jamie Walker who fired past Fox from around eight yards.

Again, this being Hearts, things are never easy. Five minutes later, Randall was shown a second yellow card from referee Willie Collum and the visitors were down to ten men. Willie Collum flashing a red card? How unlike him...

Unsurprisingly, it was mostly County after this as they sought an equaliser. However, it was Hearts who nearly added to their lead when Lafferty forced keeper Fox into a great save from a free-kick before, minutes later, firing an effort wide of the goal.

Hearts then had a free-kick to defend when John Souttar brought down a County player on the edge of the penalty box. Schalk came mighty close to netting the equaliser but his free-kick was just wide.

Keillor-Dunn almost grabbed his own and County's second but Jon McLaughlin turned his fierce effort away.

County threw everything to try and draw parity but, despite an astonishing seven minutes of stoppage time played, ten-man Hearts hung on for an important victory.

After the game Craig Levein was a happy man. He told the official Hearts website:

"It was good, coming up here's never easy, but overall I was really pleased with how we played," said Levein. "We've not quite got major momentum yet, but for long spells we did things I hope we end up doing week in, week out."

"I told them at half-time if they wanted to win the game, they'd need to pass the ball properly and respond to the challenge, and they gave me a pretty good answer."

"Christophe Berra proved again what a massive signing he was today, and when games develop into long balls like they did towards the end, he deals with everything, but I was really thrilled with John Souttar today."

"He passed the ball around as well as we've come to expect, but he also won four or five big headers towards the end of the match to clear the danger, and he's turning into a really top centre-half."

It was an excellent three points for Hearts who now face a period of fixtures in Edinburgh. Their next game outside the capital city is two days before Christmas at St Johnstone – even their one scheduled away league fixture in the next two months is at Easter Road in ten days time.

Ross County: Fox, Fraser, Naismith, Gardyne (McKay, 77'), Curran (Mikkelsen, 62'), Davies, Drape (Schalk, 69'), Lindsay, O'Brien, Van Der Wag, Keillor-Dunn.

Hearts: McLaughlin, Souttar, Berra, Buaben, M. Smith, Cowie (Henderson, 46'), Cochrane (Brandon, 46'), Walker, Randall, Lafferty, Isma (Grzelak, 67').

Referee: Willie Collum

Attendance: 4,892

Top man: Jamie Walker