

Thistle Thwart Hearts Homecoming Party



Hearts 1 Partick Thistle 1

Ladbrokes Premiership, Sunday 19th November 2017 – Tynecastle Park

Hearts highly-anticipated return to Tynecastle Park on Sunday had been in doubt until as late as Saturday evening but when the controversy subsided over the lateness of the issuing of the safety certificate for Tynecastle's new stand– Partick Thistle issued a statement on their official website condemning the lateness of the decision – it was much ado about nothing. Hearts went in front through Isma Goncalves, but the Maryhill Jags spoiled the homecoming when they grabbed a late equaliser to deny Hearts a much-needed win.

One short of 17,000 people headed to the new-look Tynecastle Park. The new main stand looks mightily impressive and after the rather soulless atmosphere at the home of Scottish rugby it was good to hear the Hearts support in full voice once again. There was understandable pride among the home crowd as they surveyed their new-look surroundings. All that was needed to complete an historic day was a win for the Maroons. And that was where the grand plan came unstuck.

BBC Radio Five Live presenter and Hearts fan Nicky Campbell interviewed club owner Ann Budge on the pitch before kick-off but that was as exciting as things got in the opening stages of a game which kicked off 15 minutes late due to the crowd queuing to get in.

Hearts Head Coach Craig Levein made three changes, one of which was enforced, to the side that went down to Kilmarnock across Edinburgh's Western Approach road a couple of weeks

ago. Young players Daniel Baur and Lewis Moore made way for Arnaud Djoum – back from a six-week spell on the sidelines due to injury – and David Milinkovic. There was also a welcome return for Northern Ireland defender Aaron Hughes who replaced the injured John Souttar.

After the fiery pyrotechnics which greeted the teams entrance to the field, the first half was something of a damp squib with neither goalkeeper being really tested.

Isma Goncalves saw his free-kick saved by Thistle keeper Cerny – who took an eternity to take his goal kicks – while Kyle Lafferty shot wide after he was set up by Jamie Brandon.

David Milinkovic looked like he could cause a few problems down the left wing, but the on-loan wide player lacked an assured first touch and the belief he could actually go past his man with the result that, too often, he opted to pass the ball inside when Hearts were crying out for width.

For all Hearts huffing and puffing it was Thistle who should have gone ahead right on half-time. Defensive lapses from the home side let Storey through in goal but, in keeping with the afternoon, the former Aberdeen player pulled his effort on goal wide.

Still, at least there was the spanking new stand to ogle at during the half-time interval.

Hearts 0 Partick Thistle 0

The second half began in the same manner as the first and the afternoon was beginning to take on the look of 'one of those days'. However, nine minutes into the second period Hearts unexpectedly took the lead. Arnaud Djoum found Isma Goncalves who cut inside a Thistle defender before curling a fine shot past Cerny and into the net. Tynecastle Park erupted.

Hearts striker Kyle Lafferty looked out of sorts all afternoon

and his attempt on goal soon after was deflected as Hearts went for the second goal that would surely seal the game.

A second goal did arrive five minutes from the end – but it came in the form of an equaliser for Thistle. A dubious free-kick awarded by referee Andrew Dallas – son of former whistler Hugh – allowed Spittal to fire in a cross for the visitors. Christophe Berra headed away but the clearance was deflected into the path of Doolan who fired home from close range.

Thistle had spent much of the game wasting as much time as they could, and the irony was they looked the likelier team to grab the winner in time added on by referee Dallas.

However, the game ended 1-1 and a big disappointment for the huge Hearts support. One of several so far, this season.

Craig Levein shared the disappointment of the Hearts support after the game. He told the official Hearts website:

“I’m frustrated with the manner in which the goal was scored, because the goal was clearly offside and aided by a handball,” he said. “We restricted them to one shot on target, the goal, and it shouldn’t count.

“We weren’t great today, but I was pleased with certain aspects and I thought the forwards worked really hard. We got a good goal from Isma today, and he’s making a habit of scoring good goals.”

Levein also alluded to the uncertainty over the game going ahead. “It’s not been an ideal build up to the game,” the Head Coach continued. “There’s been a bit of extra activity this week, and the fireworks did nearly deafen me, but it was great to play here again.

“I would have loved to get a victory, but I can’t criticise the players for their effort, because I thought we had enough to see out the win.

"I also thought the supporters were great today, they really were. The atmosphere was tremendous, and the new stand will keep all the noise inside the stadium.

Hearts: McLaughlin, M. Smith, Hughes, Berra, Brandon, Cowie (Keena, 88'), Djoum, Callachan, Milinkovic, Lafferty (Stockton, 81'), Isma (Walker, 81').

Partick Thistle: Cerny, Turnbull, Keown, Spittal, Erskine (Fraser, 81'), Lawless (Nisbet, 84'), Barton, Devine, McGinn, Edwards, Storey (Doolan, 58').

Referee: Andrew Dallas

Attendance: 16,999

Top man: Jamie Brandon shone like a beacon on a gloomy afternoon