

Cochrane Off as Hearts Draw a Blank



St Johnstone 0 Hearts 0

Ladbrokes Premiership, Saturday 23rd December 2017 – McDiarmid Park

The fickle nature of football was perfectly illustrated in Perth on Saturday afternoon when Hearts scrambled a point with a goalless draw against St Johnstone in the Ladbrokes Premiership.

Six days ago, 16-year-old Harry Cochrane was the hero of Hearts astonishing demolition of previously unbeaten league champions Celtic, opening the scoring and lifting the man-of-the match award after a pulsating ninety minutes.

This weekend, young Harry saw the other side of the game when he received two yellow cards and was therefore ordered off in a lacklustre Hearts performance in Perth.

Gorgie Head Coach Craig Levein made a couple of changes from the team that astounded the football world last weekend. John Souttar, suspended last week, took his place in the centre of defence with Jamie Brandon stepping down while another 16-year-old, Anthony McDonald, replaced Ross Callachan.

After the frenetic nature of last week's rout of Celtic, there was an altogether more subdued atmosphere in the rural setting of McDiarmid Park. Two days before Christmas there was little in the way of festive cheer as both teams struggled to make an impact.

It took Hearts twenty minutes to create their first real chance when Don Cowie's cross found the head of John Souttar

but the former Dundee United defender's header was cleared off the line by Clark.

Alston then fired in an effort from just outside the Hearts penalty box but visiting keeper Jon McLaughlin saved without too much trouble.

However, the Hearts goalie kept his team on level terms minutes later when he pushed a header from Shaughnessy over the bar.

Half-time: St Johnstone 0 Hearts 0

The second half began much the same way as the first. Again, it was John Souttar who threatened to open the scoring when he hit a long-range effort which flew over the crossbar.

Twelve minutes into the second half, Hearts almost went in front in bizarre fashion when the splendidly named Michael Smith crossed and Saints Anderson turned the ball towards his own goal. However, home keeper Clark managed to scramble the ball away.

Hearts were beginning to dominate the game now and Kyle Lafferty almost had the Maroon Army chanting his name again when he had a chance but couldn't direct his shot on target.

Jon McLaughlin then saved well from Wotherspoon before Hearts chances of taking all three points ebbed with twelve minutes to go.

Having already been booked, Harry Cochrane's inexperience showed when he slid in on Saints Alston. Although there was no contact, referee Kevin Clancy flashed a second yellow card of the afternoon to the youngster and it was the end of Harry's game.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, was that. It's been some time since Hearts tasted victory at McDiarmid Park and, given they were a man short for the final part of the game, a point can

be deemed acceptable in the circumstances.

Craig Levein was philosophical afterwards. He told the official Hearts website:

"It was a typical game against St Johnstone. It was very competitive, but I didn't feel under any pressure, even with ten men.

"It never felt like we'd lose a goal, we were defensively sound, but I'm just a bit disappointed with how the match ended with the red card.

"Historically, this is a hard place for us to get a win, but it wasn't to be today. Even though we didn't get the win, we were never struggling at any point."

On Cochrane's two yellow cards, Levein said "Harry hasn't touched the St Johnstone player. He's not tried to make a tackle, he's trying to block a clearance, and I'm not convinced the referee even saw it.

"There's no point asking any more about it, we can't appeal it so we have to move on. He's absolutely gutted that he's been sent off.

"I've had one look at it, and I'm a little bit annoyed, but Harry can learn from this. He learns new things in every match, and today he has learned not to give a referee an opportunity to make a decision like that in future."

His dismissal, of course, means Cochrane will miss Wednesday evening's visit of Hibernian. However, it's now seven games unbeaten for Hearts and a fourth clean sheet in succession.

St Johnstone: Clark, Tanser, Alston, Shaughnessy, Anderson, Millar (O'Halloran, 74'), Johnstone, Paton, Foster, Scougall (Wotherspoon, 63'), Craig (MacLean, 80').

Hearts: McLaughlin, M. Smith (Grzelak, 90'), Souttar, Berra,

Randall, Buaben, Cowie, Cochrane, McDonald (Walker, 74'),
Milinkovic, Lafferty(Goncalves, 87').

Referee: Kevin Clancy

Attendance: 4,975

Top man: John Souttar