

Hearts Edge Past Motherwell



Hearts 1 Motherwell 0

Ladbroke's Premiership, Saturday 9th December 2017 – Tynecastle Park

Hearts finally recorded their first win in front of the new main stand at Tynecastle on Saturday when a goal from Kyle Lafferty secured a 1-0 win over high-flying Motherwell. On an afternoon when several layers of clothing were required in Ice Station Gorgie, the Maroons just about deserved their first win in seven games to ease some of the pressure on Head Coach Craig Levein.

Levein made four changes to the team that got a point against Motherwell's Lanarkshire rivals Hamilton Academical last Saturday despite being a man short for most of it. There was a welcome return for striker Lafferty while Connor Randall, Don Cowie and youngster Lewis Moore also returned to the side. The suspended Jamie Brandon missed out as did Isma Goncalves, Cole Stockton and David Milinkovic who all dropped to the substitutes' bench.

The visitors were without striker Louis Mout and first-choice goalkeeper Trevor Carson but nonetheless took through a sizeable support from Lanarkshire.

In freezing conditions, Hearts looked eager to make an early breakthrough to calm the rapidly increasing nerves among those fans who had opted to escape Christmas shopping. Jamie Walker, who had been an injury doubt before the game, looked lively and his early shot on goal took a deflection before spinning wide.

However, the attacking midfielder did succumb to injury midway through the first half and was replaced by Milinkovic. When

Motherwell's Cadden also limped off eight minutes before half-time the game was robbed of two of its most influential players.

In truth, the first half saw the ball take more of a battering than a UK government Brexit minister. Hearts seemed to have one tactic in mind – the long punt to the lone striker Lafferty although on the odd occasion when the Maroons did get the ball down and play football they looked threatening with Prince Buaben looking impressive.

Lafferty was certainly posing a threat, but Hearts best chance came when a brilliant cross ball from Connor Randall fell at the feet of Lewis Moore and the youngster's spectacular volley flew just over the bar.

With six minutes to go until the break Hearts did go in front. Don Cowie fed Kyle Lafferty and the Northern Irish striker showed great footwork to cut inside the penalty box before rifling the ball past Griffiths to the delight of the home crowd. The goal took Lafferty's goals tally into double figures for the season.

Half-time Hearts 1 Motherwell 0

The visitors began the second half in determined fashion and Hearts keeper Jon McLaughlin saved well from Tanner on a couple of occasions.

Hearts were on the backfoot as they defended their lead, but they were clearly determined not to let it slip as they had done last week.

The unlikely figure of Michael Smith then tried a shot on goal from outside the Motherwell penalty box, but his effort was high and not so mighty. The defender didn't have the best of afternoons and when a fellow Hearts fan suggested his first touch wasn't particularly good, some wag suggested his second, third and fourth touches weren't that great either...

With Motherwell pressing for an equaliser, Hearts Don Cowie then sprinted off on a counter-attack but was crudely fouled by Tait inside the centre circle.

However, Hearts hung on for a much-needed three points and the relief from the players and fans at the end of the game was palpable.

Gorgie chief Craig Levein admitted as much as he told the official Hearts website:

“It’s amazing what a difference the ball going over the line makes. I said to the players, we can talk as much as we like about deserving to win games, and things going against us, but the only thing that helps is winning. We needed to start winning games, and then we can talk about playing well.

“The past few weeks were an important lesson for us. It was a real test for us today, the last few weeks we’ve lost goals at bad times, but to give up territory and defend as we did today was terrific, and we can take confidence from it.”

Levein admitted Jamie Walker is unlikely to be fit for Tuesday’s Ladbrokes Premiership game against Dundee at Tynecastle.

“Jamie felt his hamstring during the week, and so he only trained on Friday. He’s caught it before it becomes a major problem, although I don’t think he’ll make the game on Tuesday. Arnaud’s taken a kick on his previously injured knee a few times in the past few games, so he’s quite sore, but I’m hopeful he’ll be fit.”

Hearts: McLaughlin, M.Smith, Souttar, Berra, Walker (Milinkovic, 22’ – Stockton, 88’), Buaben, Lafferty, Djoum (Callachan, 64’), Cowie, Randall, Moore.

Motherwell: Griffiths, Tait, Cadden (Bigirimana, 37’), McHugh, Frear, Bowman, Rose (Petravicius, 62’), Fisher (Tanner, 46’),

Dunne, Kipre, Campbell.

Referee: Andrew Dallas

Attendance: 15,984

Top man: Prince Buaben – an assured display in midfield.