

History-Makers Hearts Battle to Draw at Aberdeen



Aberdeen 0 Hearts 0

Ladbrokes Premiership, Saturday 30th December 2017 – Pittodrie

Hearts notched up their third goalless draw in a week after a battling performance in Aberdeen on Saturday afternoon. While the lack of goals remains a concern, the Gorgie club will be delighted to have created history. The result meant Hearts have gone six games in a row without conceding a goal – the first time this has happened in the long history of the club. That a point was gained against the main challengers to Celtic this season despite numerous injuries to key players before and during the game is a testament to the resilience forged by Head Coach Craig Levein.

The Gorgie boss made four changes to the team that came through a bruising encounter with city rivals Hibernian on Wednesday evening. Jamie Walker, kicked throughout the Edinburgh derby, Connor Randall and Prince Buaben were all injured while Kyle Lafferty found himself on the substitutes' bench. With resources stretched, Levein drafted in 16-year-olds Harry Cochrane and Anthony McDonald while the more experienced Northern Irish pair Aaron Hughes and Michael Smith also started on a cold, rainy afternoon in the Granite City.

There were more than a thousand Hearts fans inside Pittodrie as the game kicked off with the home side creating the first chance after five minutes. A corner from O'Connor was met by McLean whose shot was high and not so mighty.

Five minutes later there was another chance for the Dons when Shinnie crossed for Mackay-Steven. The former Celtic forward's shot was well blocked by Hearts John Souttar although the ball

fell kindly to Rooney whose overhead kick was saved by Hearts keeper Jon McLaughlin.

It was all Aberdeen in the opening stages. Rooney's header was collected by McLaughlin as the visitors were forced on the back foot. A long afternoon beckoned for the blue-shirted Hearts players when Michael Smith was forced off the field because of injury after just 16 minutes. He was replaced by yet another teenage Jambo, 18-year-old Daniel Baur.

Hearts, however, weathered the storm and should have taken the lead on the half-hour mark. Anthony McDonald, again giving an assured display in the middle of the park, fed Isma Goncalves who sent David Milinkovic through on goal with just Dons keeper Lewis to beat. Sadly for Hearts, Milinkovic fired the ball straight at the goalie.

Nine minutes before half-time, Hearts saw the injury Gods deal them another blow when the impressive Anthony McDonald limped off and was replaced by Kyle Lafferty.

Minutes later, McLaughlin produced a brilliant save to deny Rooney before Logan had another chance for the home side but pulled his shot wide.

However, despite being under the cosh, it was Hearts who had another chance to open the scoring when Daniel Baur headed the ball to Goncalves, but the former St Mirren striker lost control and the chance was gone.

Half-time Aberdeen 0 Hearts 0

Aberdeen resumed the game on the attack and Stewart came close with a shot that was deflected.

Jon McLaughlin then saved from McKenna as the Dons swarmed forward, but Hearts defence looked solid enough to deal with anything thrown their way.

With twenty minutes to go, Hearts Jamie Brandon raced down the

right and crossed for Milinkovic who set up Harry Cochrane whose shot on goal went just wide.

Isma Goncalves then collected a pass from a surging John Souttar run but, again, the striker disappointed with his finish. He then frustrated the travelling Maroon Army moments later when he had a great opportunity to score just yards out, but he yet again fired his effort wide.

With two minutes left, Kyle Lafferty dived in on Shinnie and it looked like the Northern Irishman would be shown a yellow card. However, referee John Beaton deemed it serious foul play and flashed a red card – meaning Lafferty will now miss Hearts next game, the William Hill Scottish Cup tie with Hibernian at Tynecastle on 21st January.

The game ended minutes later and Hearts had earned a credible point at a place where Hibernian had been crushed just a fortnight earlier.

After the game, Craig Levein was delighted with his history-making team. He told the official Hearts website:

“I said to the lads that’s the first time in the club’s history (six successive clean sheets), and their names are in the record books.

“You saw today, it was a real tough match for them. They deserve great credit, all of them. I thought their work rate was fantastic. We actually had really good chances to win the game.

“I would argue that our chances were better than theirs, mind you. I thought on the counter attack, the game plan was to allow them to have the ball and sit a bit deeper and having the experience of Christophe, Aaron and Jon then we would defend the box when required and then break out when we got the opportunity to, and we got loads of opportunities to do that.

"I'm thrilled for the boys and it made it even more difficult with Kyle leaving the field with two minutes to go.

"It's a really difficult place to come. We knew we were in for a tough shift and we had seven players out injured today, and we got two injured early in the match which left me thinking we'd do well to see this out. But all credit to them, I thought they were fantastic."

As well as six clean sheets in a row, Hearts are now nine games unbeaten in the Ladbrokes Premiership. But one feels the mini winter break has come at just the right time.

Aberdeen: Lewis, Logan, Shinnie, Considine (Stewart, 46'), O'Connor, McLean, Rooney, Mackay-Steven (Wright, 80'), Arnason (Maynard, 80'), McKenna, Christie.

Hearts: McLaughlin, M.Smith (Baur, 16'), Berra, Souttar, Hughes, Brandon, Cowie, Cochrane, Milinkovic, McDonald (Lafferty, 35'), Goncalves.

Referee: John Beaton

Att: 18,371

Top man: John Souttar