

Young Hearts Run Free as Jambos Win Again



Hearts 2 Dundee 0

Ladbrokes Premiership, Tuesday 12th December 2017 – Tynecastle Park

After a barren spell of six games without a win, Hearts made it two wins in a row on Tuesday evening after brushing aside the challenge of Dundee in the Ladbrokes Premiership at Tynecastle Park.

On an evening when young hearts ran free for the home side it was two more experienced players – Isma Goncalves and captain Christophe Berra – who got the goals which secured victory and lifted Hearts into fifth place in the league.

Hearts Head Coach Craig Levein had hinted at changes from the side that defeated Motherwell at Tynecastle on Saturday and he was true to his word. There was a surprise return for defender Rafal Grzelak while Cole Stockton and Isma Goncalves came back into the side. However, the name on the starting sheet which raised most eyebrows among the Gorgie faithful was Anthony McDonald. The 16-year-old midfield player was given a starting berth following some impressive displays for the Under 20s.

The players replaced were the injured Jamie Walker and Michael Smith, Kyle Lafferty and Don Cowie who were on the substitutes' bench.

Hearts made a bright start, but it was the visitors who were first to settle without seriously troubling Hearts keeper Jon McLaughlin.

That said, the game's first real chance fell to the home side

after ten minutes. Fine play from young Lewis Moore set up Arnaud Djoum and the Cameroon international fired an effort from just outside the penalty box which went just over the crossbar.

Hearts Connor Randall then tried an effort from 25 yards, but this troubled the small huddle of home fans in the Roseburn Stand more than the Dundee goalkeeper.

Christophe Berra displayed an impressive if somewhat unexpected piece of ball control before crossing for Djoum who set up Cole Stockton, but the big striker saw his shot saved by Parish.

It wasn't all one-way traffic, however. Dundee were proving dangerous on the counter-attack and a free-kick from Allan forced Jon McLaughlin into a decent save.

Fifteen minutes before half-time, Hearts went ahead. The creator of the goal was young McDonald who set off on an impressive run from midfield that left the Dundee defenders trailing in his wake. The teenager then chipped a superb pass towards Isma Goncalves who fended off a Dundee defender to fire the ball past Parish and into the net.

The joy among the home support subsided a little, however, when Arnaud Djoum limped off after a hefty challenge and was replaced by another 16-year-old, Harry Cochrane. Two sixteen-year-olds and a nineteen-year-old – Lewis Moore – in Hearts midfield is clear evidence that Hearts are a team who give youngsters their chance. McDonald, in particular, was showing an awareness and skill which belied his tender years and had the home support purring with pride.

The Dees nearly equalised when Deacon's wayward shot took a deflection before landing at the feet of Moussa inside the six-yard box. It seemed he had to score but McLaughlin came to Hearts rescue with a fine save.

Half-time Hearts 1 Dundee 0

Dundee manager Neil McCann – a member of Hearts Scottish Cup winning team of 1998 – may well have had words to say to his team during the interval as the visitors came out with all guns blazing at the start of the second half. Deacon had an effort which went inches wide, but Hearts were defending well with captain Christophe Berra and John Souttar a commanding presence at the back.

Seven minutes into the second half and fine play from Randall saw Cole Stockton slot home from cross range but the striker's joy at what he thought was his first goal for Hearts turned to dismay when the assistant referee flagged for offside.

Twenty minutes into the second half, Hearts had an even better chance to double their lead when fine play from Stockton sent substitute Ross Callachan through on goal. The former Raith Rovers player was one-on-one with Dees keeper Parish, but the Hearts man's shot on goal was straight at the goalie who made a decent save.

Dundee were awarded a free-kick when Harry Cochrane fouled O'Hara but Aurtenetxe's free-kick went wide. It was an opportunity Dundee were to rue when Hearts grabbed a second goal thirteen minutes from the end.

A corner for the home side fell to Berra at the far post. The Scotland defender had all the time in the world to control the ball before rifling it beyond keeper Parish to all but seal the points for Hearts.

Kyle Lafferty then had a chance to make it three when he raced past the Dundee defence before forcing Parish into another fine save.

The outcome was never in doubt, though, and thus Hearts recorded back-to-back victories.

Craig Levein was a contented man afterwards. He told the official Hearts website:

“It was a good performance, but I didn’t feel comfortable until the last ten minutes. The game was still in the balance up until the second goal, and Dundee did look dangerous on occasion, but it was a better performance than Saturday’s match.

“I’m sure the confidence from Saturday was apparent tonight, because we played some really good football at times and I’m hopeful we can take that into Sunday’s match.”

“It wasn’t a big decision to play Anthony McDonald – if you watch him every day,” Levein continued. “With Jamie Walker out, there’s no other player like him other than Anthony. He’s been the stand-out player in his age group with Harry and three or four others.

“I’m surprised they’re involved at such a young age, but they’re just good players. I believe in them, but the thing is, the other players believe in them too. They’ve not been parachuted in from nowhere.

“They’ve been training with the first team since the summer when they came in from school, so the players know their strengths. They can give them the ball in tight areas, and expect them to deal with it”

A fine win for Hearts and one can see the confidence returning to some of the players, particularly the young ones. Anthony McDonald received a standing ovation from the Hearts support as the players came off the pitch at the end of the game and it was thoroughly deserved. Whether he plays against Celtic on Sunday at Tynecastle is another matter but as Harry Cochrane, Jamie Brandon and Lewis Moore have already proved this season, if they’re good enough they’re old enough.

Hearts: McLaughlin, Randall, Berra, Souttar, Grzelak, Buaben,

Djoum (Cochrane, 32'), McDonald, Moore (Lafferty, 73'), Isma (Callachan, 58'), Stockton.

Dundee: Parish, Kamara, Moussa, Allan, O'Hara, Aurtenetxe, McGowan (Leitch-Smith, 75'), Deacon (El Bakhtaoui, 64'), Hendry (Kerr, 46'), Meekings, Waddell.

Referee: Craig Thomson

Attendance: 15,566

Top man: Anthony McDonald will grab the headlines but, for me, **Connor Randall** gave his best performance in a maroon shirt this season.