

Hearts Get Lucky to Beat St Johnstone



Hearts 1 St Johnstone 0

**Ladbroke's Premiership – Saturday 3rd February 2018 –
Tynecastle Park**

The first of Hearts double-header with St Johnstone ended with a far from convincing win for the Maroons in the Ladbroke's Premiership game at Tynecastle Park on Saturday. A goal at the start of the second half from David Milinkovic was all that separated the sides, but the Perth Saints can count themselves unfortunate not to leave Edinburgh with all three points.

Hearts Head Coach Craig Levein freshened up his team following their first defeat in thirteen games at Celtic Park on Tuesday evening. New signing Joaquim Adao was given a starting place as were recent signings Steven Naismith and Danny Amankwaa. The injured Harry Cochrane and Don Cowie missed out as did Ross Callachan.

A driech day in the capital city lent itself to a subdued atmosphere at Tynecastle and the visitors took the early initiative. Just seven minutes had passed when a curling free-kick 25 yards out from former Hibernian player Wotherspoon produced a splendid save from Hearts history-making goalkeeper Jon McLaughlin.

The goalie had to be at his best again four minutes later when he rushed from his penalty area to thwart Kane as the Perth Saints looked the far likelier team to score.

It was McLaughlin to Hearts rescue again when he denied Kane for a second time as the home support became increasingly restless.

Hearts new boy Joaquim Adao had the home side's first real chance after 18 minutes but his effort on goal trundled through to Saints keeper Mannus.

St Johnstone should have opened the scoring soon after. A mistake from Hearts Connor Randall saw Tanser fire in an effort on goal which was well blocked by McLaughlin. When the ball fell to Kane the Saints man could only hit the side netting.

Soon after Saints came forward again through Tanser once again. His deep cross found Kane who set up Wotherspoon but the ex-Hibee's shot on goal flew just over the bar.

By now the home support were venting their displeasure towards a lacklustre Hearts team although David Milinkovic did fire in an effort which didn't overly trouble Mannus.

After half an hour, the visitors must have begun to sense this wasn't going to be their day. A cross from Willock found Kane whose superb first time shot smacked off the crossbar with Jon McLaughlin helpless.

At last Hearts began to threaten and a fine pass from new boy Adao found Kyle Lafferty, who had been pretty much anonymous up to that point. The former Rangers striker beat the visitors' offside trap but his shot on goal was easily dealt with by Mannus.

Half-time arrived with understandable boos from the home support. It had been a shoddy display and St Johnstone could easily have been 3-0 up at the interval.

Half-time Hearts 0 St Johnstone 0

Inevitably, when a team dominates a game but doesn't score, they fall behind. Hearts took just 38 seconds of the second half to open the scoring. Fine play from Demetri Mitchell set up Danny Amankwaa who crossed to Lafferty. The big striker

teed up David Milinkovic who fended off the close attention of a Saints defender to fire past keeper Mannus and Hearts were ahead.

Just when St Johnstone thought their afternoon couldn't get any worse, they were reduced to ten men when Wotherspoon received a second yellow card after fouling Adao.

They kept battling, though and Alston forced Jon McLaughlin into a brilliant save to deny an equaliser.

With three minutes left, Hearts should have settled the game when Milinkovic set up Kyle Lafferty, but his close-range effort failed to hit the target.

Hearts held on for the narrowest of wins, but it was scarcely a victory they deserved.

A relieved Craig Levein told BBC Sport Scotland after the game:

"St Johnstone were slightly better than us in the first half and then I think we were better than them in the second. They ask questions of your centre-backs. They turned us, they put the ball in high, they threw long throws into the box. These are all legitimate ways of winning matches and you've got to deal with them.

"John Souttar, Christophe Berra and Jon McLaughlin stood up in that particular area.

"McLaughlin has had a lot of decent offers from down south, which is much more money than we can afford to pay but you never know.

"We're trying our best. The door is still open for him to stay."

These two sides meet again at Tynecastle Park next Saturday in the William Hill Scottish Cup. Despite winning this week

Hearts will need to do a lot better next weekend if they are to progress in the cup.

Hearts: McLaughlin, Souttar, Berra, Amankwaa (McDonald, 71'), Lafferty, Djoum, Milinkovic, Naismith, Randall (Smith, 46'), Mitchell, Adao (Buaben, 65').

St Johnstone: Mannus, Tanser, Shaughnessy, Anderson (Alston, 66'), Davidson, Wotherspoon, Kerr, Johnstone (MacLean, 77'), Foster, Kane, Willock (Craig, 74').

Referee: Andrew Dallas

Attendance: 16,197

Top man: Hearts goalkeeper Jon McLaughlin earned his team all three points