

Lacklustre Hearts Go Down at Ibrox



Rangers 2 Hearts 0

Ladbroke's Premiership, Saturday 24th February 2018 – Ibrox Stadium

It was an all-too familiar story for Hearts on Saturday as they lost to Rangers at Ibrox. Goals from recent signings Jamie Murphy and Russell Martin gave the home side a comfortable victory on yet another afternoon in Glasgow when Hearts didn't perform.

Gorgie Head Coach Craig Levein made three changes to the team that drew at Ross County last weekend. Don Cowie and David Milinkovic missed out along with long-term injury victim Arnaud Djoum. 16-year-old Harry Cochrane returned from injury and he was joined by 17-year-old Euan Henderson. At the other end of the age spectrum, 38-year-old Aaron Hughes returned to the Hearts defence.

With champions Celtic facing a tricky fixture at Aberdeen on Sunday, Rangers sensed an opportunity to close the gap on their rivals at the top of the table. The home side were soon on the attack and Hearts keeper Jon McLaughlin denied Goss before producing a brilliant save to thwart Docherty.

Hearts seemed to be in their defensive shell but in the 17th minute they finally ventured forward, and Kyle Lafferty fired in an effort which Gers keeper Foderingham pushed over the bar.

Harry Cochrane then set up Ross Callachan who tried his luck from 20 yards only to be denied by Foderingham.

Hearts seemed to have some belief now, but Aaron Hughes had to use his considerable experience to deny Morelos inside the Hearts penalty box. Morelos then had a header which went wide.

The home side were beginning to assert their authority again and three minutes before half-time they broke the deadlock. Murphy took the ball round Aaron Hughes and John Souttar before taking it past Jon McLaughlin to slide home the opening goal.

Half-time Rangers 1 Hearts 0

Hearts replaced Joaquim Adao with Prince Buaben at the start of the second half, but the second period began in similar fashion to the first with Rangers in the ascendancy. Windass almost doubled their lead in the 49th minute but his effort on goal was too high.

Jon McLaughlin was having a busy afternoon and he saved well from Docherty and Windass as the hosts looked for a second goal to kill the game. Windass should have done just that when he blazed the ball over the bar from just inside the penalty box.

Bates and Murphy also came close as Hearts faded alarmingly. A second goal duly arrived with just two minutes to go when a cross from the right was missed by the Hearts defence allowing Martin to slot the ball home to wrap up victory.

A hugely disappointing afternoon for the Maroons, a fact not lost on Craig Levein. He told the official Hearts website:

"Probably our best players were our defenders and that tells you about the performance today. We had a spell in the first half of about ten to fifteen minutes when we had opportunities, but it didn't last long enough, and we didn't capitalise on it.

"We were missing a little bit of composure. Any time we did

show composure on the ball and pass it then we looked like we might get something. We also missed a couple of opportunities to score when the ball was bouncing around in the box, but I'm sure Graham Murty would say the same thing. They had more opportunities to score than we did, by far.

"We didn't do enough in the match to warrant winning the game, for certain, or even to get a draw. 2-0 probably flattered us. The good thing is that we've not put many performances in like that this season.

"Harry Cochrane came back to today and I thought he was one of our better players. Steven Naismith has had hamstring trouble and I was worried about playing him today, but he got through the last 20 minutes, so I'm pleased with that. I'm struggling to look for positives but those are the two I can think of just now.

"The thing for me now is that it was unlike us, that performance today, and we've now lost two in 17 games. I'm just really looking forward to Tuesday now and trying to get rid of the bad taste in my mouth."

The Hearts Head Coach has some thinking to do before in-form Kilmarnock come to Gorgie on Tuesday evening.

Rangers: Forderingham, Tavernier, John, Windass, Morelos (Cummings, 75'), Candeias, Bates, Goss, Murphy, Martin, Docherty (Holt, 82').

Hearts: McLaughlin, Smith, Souttar, Berra, Hughes, Mitchell, Adao (Buaben '46), Cochrane (Naismith '74), Callachan, Henderson (McDonald '59), Lafferty.

Referee: John Beaton

Attendance: 49,927

Top man: Jon McLaughlin