

Hearts Denied as Celtic Win at Tynecastle



Hearts 1 Celtic 3

Ladbrokes Premiership, Sunday 6th May – Tynecastle Park

Hearts unbeaten record at the new Tynecastle Park ended on Sunday lunchtime as league champions Celtic exacted revenge for their 4-0 hammering from the Maroons in Gorgie the week before Christmas. Kyle Lafferty gave Hearts the lead in the first half, but the champions hit back immediately through Boyata and added further second half goals from Dembele and Sinclair.

Hearts Head Coach Craig Levein made three changes to the team that performed meekly at Aberdeen a week past Friday. There was a welcome return from injury for on-loan defender Demetri Mitchell while Ross Callachan and Joaquim Adao also returned. Aaron Hughes and Euan Henderson dropped to the substitutes' bench while Connor Randall was injured.

A gloriously sunny May afternoon greeted the two teams with Hearts forming a guard of honour to welcome the champions on to the field, the Hoops having clinched their seventh

successive league title after hammering Rangers last weekend. It wasn't a gesture the home support appreciated but it is the done thing these days.

In the usual raucous Tynecastle atmosphere, Michael Smith took a long throw-in for which he is renowned. The ball reached Steven Naismith before bouncing off Don Cowie and into the side netting and an early chance was gone.

The game had begun in the same manner as it had the last time Celtic visited Gorgie with Hearts pressing the champions at every opportunity and Brendan Rodgers' men were looking distinctly uncomfortable. Steven Naismith lunged in on Brown and the Hearts man was fortunate to escape punishment from referee Bobby Madden. If that incident was deemed controversial it was nothing compared to the furore minutes later.

In the 15th minute, Hearts Don Cowie took a corner kick from the left. Celtic keeper Bain flapped at the cross and the unlikely figure of John Souttar prodded the ball home to give the home side the lead. Or so we thought. Ref Madden – a controversial figure on his previous visits to Tynecastle – ruled there had been a foul on the Celtic keeper and chalked the goal off. It was a shocking decision and the home support vented their fury towards the hapless official.

Joaquim Adao was making his presence felt in the Hearts midfield and he fired in a half-volley which brought out a save from Bain.

In the 17th minute Hearts went ahead. Fine build up play saw Lewis Moore – on his 19th birthday – feed Kyle Lafferty with a fine pass and the Northern Ireland striker, a scorer against Celtic in December, repeated that feat when he blasted the ball past Bain.

The Maroon Army sensed another memorable victory, but their joy was short-lived when, just four minutes later, Celtic drew

parity. A free-kick from McGregor found the head of Boyata who headed home for the equaliser despite home pleas for offside.

Celtic then began to take control of the game and Hearts keeper Jon McLaughlin denied Dembele with a fine stop.

At the other end, another Don Cowie corner caused the Celtic defence problems and Christophe Berra's header drifted wide of the post.

Celtic should have gone in front when a mistake from John Souttar let Dembele through on goal but the striker's lob over McLaughlin was too high and the ball bounced off the crossbar before going behind. It was a let-off for the home side.

Half-time Hearts 1 Celtic 1

The second half began in the worst possible fashion for Hearts. Young Lewis Moore was caught on the left allowing Rogic to hit a pass with the outside of his foot to find Dembele who had all the time in the world to stroke the ball past McLaughlin to put the champions in front.

They nearly added another when McGregor set off on a lung-bursting run down the left before his effort on goal hit the side net, the attention of Hearts Michael Smith perhaps putting the Celtic man off.

After their admirable effort in the first half Hearts appeared to run out of steam – and ideas – in the second half. Forrest had a chance to increase Celtic's lead before Armstrong chose the wrong option after running into the Hearts penalty box as he was thwarted by McLaughlin when squaring the ball to the unmarked Sinclair who would have surely proved fruitful.

Celtic duly added a third goal in injury time when Armstrong made up for his earlier wrong option by cutting the ball back to Sinclair who fired home despite the best effort of Michael Smith to keep the ball out.

Hearts unbeaten run at Tynecastle Park was, therefore, at an end.

Hearts will be disappointed they couldn't maintain their first half performance and they faded in the second period.

Celtic manager Brendan Rodgers was critical of the Tynecastle pitch prior to kick-off accusing Hearts of deliberately not maintaining the pitch to a high standard. BT Sport pundit Ally McCoist said Rodger's assertion was 'embarrassing' – and it was. Equally embarrassing were the inevitable sectarian songs emanating from the away end. But, Scottish football being what it is, nothing will be done about this and you can expect the media – The Edinburgh Reporter excepted – to yet again ignore this issue.

Hearts: McLaughlin, Smith, Souttar, Berra, Mitchell, Cowie, Adao (Cochrane, 70'), Callachan, Moore (Amankwaa, 56'), Naismith, Lafferty (Henderson, 83').

Celtic: Bain, Brown, Dembele (Armstrong, 61'), Rogic (Roberts, 81'), Boyata, Ntcham, Edouard (Sinclair, 54'), Lustig, Ajer, McGregor, Forrest.

Referee: Bobby Madden

Attendance: 19,031

Top man: Joaquim Adao