

Young Hearts Go Down at Rugby Park



Kilmarnock 1 Hearts 0

Ladbrokes Premiership, Sunday 13th May 2018 – Rugby Park

It's fair to say Hearts supporters won't be sorry to see the end of season 2017/18, a campaign which began disastrously with a Betfred Cup exit and ended with a sixth-place finish in the Ladbrokes Premiership and a team consisting mainly of youngsters on the final day of the season at Rugby Park.

With injuries and suspensions mounting to an astonishing toll, Hearts Head Coach Craig Levein had little choice but to make seven changes from the team that defeated Hibernian at Tynecastle on Wednesday evening.

Hearts have been one of the most progressive clubs in Scotland when it comes to giving youngsters their opportunity in the first team but, on this occasion, Levein had no option but to give debuts to 16-year-old Chris Hamilton and Cameron Logan while relative veterans 17-year-olds Harry Cochrane and Anthony McDonald lined up alongside 19-year-old Lewis Moore. There was also a return for goalkeeper Jack Hamilton.

Killie have had an excellent second half of the season under manager Steve Clarke and it was no surprise to see the home side make the early running. Just three minutes in and O'Donnell cut back for Kiltie but the Killie player's effort on goal was saved by Jack Hamilton.

The visitors did create an opening a couple of minutes later when David Milinkovic set up Kyle Lafferty but the Northern Irish striker was denied by the on-rushing former Hearts keeper Jamie MacDonald.

Jack Hamilton was called into action again when he saved from Tshibola before the home side took the lead in the 11th minute. Fine play from Erwin saw him run at the Hearts defence before firing past Hamilton to put Killie in front.

The Ayrshire team sensed blood against Hearts youngsters and veteran striker Kris Boyd almost made it 2-0 with a long-range effort in the 17th minute.

However, it was Hearts who should have equalised five minutes later. Again, it was Milinkovic who set up Lafferty but the striker, on 19 goals for the season, couldn't find a way past the legs of MacDonald.

Mulumbu then came close for Killie with a 35-yard screamer which whistled over the crossbar before Hearts injury woes continued unabated when Harry Cochrane went off to be replaced by yet another 16-year-old, Connor Smith.

Half-time Kilmarnock 1 Hearts 0

The second half took on the look of an 'end-of-season' affair. Chances for either team were few and far between although the best chance fell to Boyd with eight minutes left but he was thwarted by a fantastic save from Jack Hamilton.

It was Hamilton to Hearts rescue again with three minutes left when he saved twice from Erwin and then from Brophy.

The game ended in defeat for one of the youngest Hearts teams ever to pull on the first team shirts but the 400 plus travelling Maroon Army voiced their approval of their efforts at the end of the game.

Kilmarnock: MacDonald, O'Donnell, S.Boyd, Findlay, Taylor, Wilson (Burke, 77'), Mulumbu, Tshibola, Kiltie (Brophy, 55'), K.Boyd (Cameron, 90'), Erwin.

Hearts: J.Hamilton, Logan (Makovora, 64'), C.Hamilton, Hughes, Moore, Callachan, Cochrane (C. Smith, 43'), Cowie, McDonald

(Henderson, 72'), Milinkovic, Lafferty.

Referee: Stephen Finnie

Attendance: 6,273

Top Man: Jack Hamilton