

# Hearts Cruise Through in Betfred Cup Romp



Photo: SPFL

## **Heart of Midlothian 5 Inverness Caledonian Thistle 0 Betfred Cup Section C – Sunday 29th July 2018 – Tynecastle Park**

Hearts progressed to the last 16 of the Betfred Cup in some style this afternoon after hammering Championship side Inverness Caledonian Thistle 5-0 at a driech Tynecastle Park.

Uche Ikpeazu and Steven Naismith grabbed two goals apiece and this added to Ben Garuccio's sublime free-kick saw the Jambos cruise through to the knock-out stages of the competition.

John Robertson's Caley Thistle team arrived in their manager's home city on the back of a 15 game unbeaten run and needed just a point to win the group, qualify for the next round and in doing so eliminate Hearts.

Hearts Head Coach Craig Levein made three changes from the side that eventually wore down Cowdenbeath five days ago. Kyle Lafferty – the subject of a transfer bid from Rangers – Andrew Irving and the injured Michael Smith missed out and were replaced by Uche Ikpeazu, Olly Lee and Aaron Hughes.

After the recent heatwave conditions it was almost a pleasant surprise to find Tynecastle Park being rained on with a much

fresher day than of late. Hearts began the game in determined fashion and captain Christophe Berra had a chance with a header from eight yards out but it was deflected for a corner.

Former Hearts defender Brad McKay appeared to handle the ball inside his own penalty box but referee Willie Collum – for it was he – waved away Hearts appeals for a penalty kick.

Uche Ikpeazu was proving to be a handful for the visiting defence and he had a chance to open the scoring but couldn't control the ball and the opportunity was gone.

The 13th minute almost proved to be an unlucky one for Hearts. Caley Thistle broke forward through Polworth who fed Walsh who teed up Chalmers who had a clear sight of goal inside the Hearts penalty box – but he could only drag his shot wide. It was an undoubted let-off for the home team.

The Highlanders were beginning to settle after an uncertain start but around the half hour mark the roof began to fall in on their Betfred Cup hopes.

In the 28th minute, Hearts went in front. Ikpeazu carried on where he left off against Cowdenbeath on Tuesday. From Olly Lee's corner, the former Cambridge striker volleyed an unstoppable shot beyond former Hearts keeper Ridgers before bounding away to celebrate with the Hearts support.

After 31 minutes Hearts doubled their lead. Steven Naismith was fouled on the edge of the ICT penalty box and from the subsequent free-kick Ben Garuccio swept home a brilliant free-kick. Tynecastle acclaimed a fantastic goal.

Two minutes later Hearts were three goals ahead. The impressive Garuccio delivered a fine cross from the left for the equally impressive Ikpeazu to bullet home a header and Hearts appeared to be in easy street.

Caley Thistle began the afternoon knowing a point would be

enough to win Section C but results elsewhere yesterday meant a heavy defeat – by four goals or more – would mean they would drop out of the Betfred Cup altogether. The realisation this was now a very real possibility spurred on John Robertson's men as half-time approached. Hearts keeper Zlamal produced fine saves to deny Walsh and McKay but Hearts could have added a fourth when Olly Lee's long-range effort clipped the post.

### **Half-time: Hearts 3 Inverness Caledonian Thistle 0**

Hearts had left the field at the break to a standing ovation and they were soon back on the offensive at the beginning of the second half. After Polworth put an effort wide for the visitors, Olly Lee had another chance to make it four for Hearts but his effort was saved by Ridgers.

Polworth was proving to be the main danger for the visitors and he forced Zlamal into another fine save just after the hour mark.

Caley Thistle knew that as long as they didn't concede a fourth goal they would join Hearts in the next round. However, they did concede a fourth in the 64th minute. Youngster Callum Morrison raced down the right before delivering a superb cross which Steven Naismith required little effort to nod past Ridgers. 4-0 and ICT boss John Robertson cut a frustrated figure.

Kyle Lafferty, complete with blue boots, came on as a substitute and he almost scored within seconds when he ran on to Naismith's pass but the former Norwich City striker's effort on goal hit the post when he really ought to have scored.

A fifth goal did arrive with nine minutes left. Lee's free-kick found the head of Naismith who nonchalantly headed home.

Job done, then for Hearts who now face another Championship team – Dunfermline Athletic – at East End Park in the next

round in three weeks' time.

Afterwards, Craig Levein expressed his delight at the performance but was less than pleased with Rangers reported interest in Kyle Lafferty.

*"We've spoken to Kyle and his head has been turned a little bit," Levein told BT Sport. "But, to his credit, he has been very professional and I was pleased with his performance when he went on."*

Hearts have now scored ten goals and conceded none in their last two games and their new team is looking like it is beginning to gel. Uche Ikpeazu looks like he could become something of a cult player while Ben Garuccio also looks to be a player of some ability. Steven Naismith, though, could well be the key to Hearts having a successful season this term. Yet again, the former Kilmarnock, Everton and Norwich player was immense.

**Hearts:** Zlamal, Souttar, Haring, Berra, Lee, Naismith, Hughes, Garuccio (McDonald, 82'), MacLean (Lafferty, 66'), Ikpeazu (Burns, 79'), Morrison.

**Inverness CT:** Ridgers, Rooney, Tremarco (Calder, 56'), Chalmers, Donaldson, Polworth, Doran (Austin, 60'), Walsh (Mackay, 72'), White, McKay, Trafford.

**Referee:** Willie Collum

**Attendance:** 10,030

**Top man:** Uche Ikpeazu – what strength this boy has!