

Goal Happy Hearts Shoot to the Top of the League



Hamilton Academical 1 Heart of Midlothian 4

Ladbrokes Premiership – Saturday 4th August 2018 – Hope Stadium

A year ago, Hearts were in the depths of despair. An embarrassing exit from the Betfred Cup which included defeat from bottom tier Peterhead led to the sacking of Head Coach Ian Cathro and Hearts opening game in their 2017/18 league campaign saw them on the wrong end of a 4-1 hammering from champions Celtic.

Twelve months on Hearts have qualified for the knock-out stages of the Betfred Cup and were again involved in a 4-1 scoreline in their opening league game of the season. However, this time it was a resounding 4-1 victory at Hamilton Academical as the Gorgie Boys raced to the top of the table on the opening day of the league season.

Current Head Coach Craig Levein decided to go with the same team that hammered Inverness Caledonian Thistle in impressive fashion six days ago. This itself was an unusual occurrence – Levein is well-known for his ‘horses for courses’ approach.

It was an auspicious start for Hearts, wearing their navy-blue away strip. Hamilton had the Gorgie men pinned in their own half in the early stages although Hearts keeper ‘Bobby’ Zlamal wasn’t troubled unduly. In fact, it was Hearts who created the first real scoring opportunity when Steven Naismith set up Steven MacLean but the former St Johnstone player’s effort on goal hit the side net.

In the 17th minute Hearts gifted Accies the opening goal.

Defender Aaron Hughes was indecisive in dealing with the ball inside his own penalty box and Miller took advantage to prod the ball past Zlamal to put the home side in front.

Given Hearts dismal away record last season there may have been a horrible feeling of déjà vu among the 2,500 travelling Maroon Army but their fears were dispelled three minutes later. Steven Naismith delivered a fine cross for Peter Haring to head past Accies keeper Woods to level the score.

One could sense this was a game changer and Hearts pressed forward more and more. The impressive Naismith played Callumn Morrison through but the teenager's shot on goal posed more of a threat to those watching in the stand.

As half-time neared the home side nearly went in front again when Bingham had an opportunity but was thwarted by a brilliant block from John Souttar.

Half-time: Hamilton 1 Hearts 1

Hearts looked in determined mood after the break and Peter Haring nearly grabbed a second goal, but his half-volley was well saved by Woods.

Shortly afterwards, Naismith was brought down inside the Accies penalty box. The on-loan Norwich City player duly despatched the resultant penalty kick and Hearts were ahead within four minutes of the second half.

It was all Hearts now and they added a third goal just before the hour mark. Olly Lee's free-kick was headed on by captain Christophe Berra allowing Naismith to set up Peter Haring to slot home his second goal and put Hearts 3-1 ahead.

Just four minutes later and it was game over. Great play from Uche Ikpeazu set up Steven MacLean who drilled home a fine goal to seal the points for the visitors.

Indeed, it could have been five moments later when Aaron

Hughes, of all people, found Ikpeazu but the former Cambridge United striker's diving header was saved by Woods.

Afterwards, Hearts two-goal hero Peter Haring told BBC Sport Scotland:

"It feels like a little bit of a dream to be come here to play my first league game and score two goals. I can't remember when I've scored two goals the last time.

"The first 20 minutes were not good – Hamilton were strong and were quicker and picked up more second balls.

"After they scored, I don't know why, we did better and we played well in the second half.

"Our gaffer said after the game that he feels that we can score at any time and that makes us confident.

"Even when we are behind, we know we can score and I am pretty sure we can still do better."

Hearts have now scored 14 goals in three games and had ten shots on target at Hamilton. Craig Levein is often criticised for being too negative but Hearts impressive start to the season suggests change is in the air.

The test of this comes next Saturday lunchtime when league champions Celtic come to Gorgie.

Hamilton Accies: Woods, McMann, Gordon, Imrie (Cunningham, 70'), Bingham (Bloomfield, 79'), Miller, Penny, MacKinnon, Want, Lyon (Taiwo, 62'), Kelly.

Hearts: Zlamal, Souttar, Haring, Berra, Lee, Naismith, Hughes, Garuccio (Burns, 70'), MacLean, Ikpeazu (Lafferty, 77'), Morrison (Mulraney, 70')

Referee: Andrew Dallas

Attendance: 3,764

Top man: Peter Haring