

Impressive Hearts back to winning ways

Heart of Midlothian 2 St Johnstone 0

Ladbrokes Premiership – Saturday 26th January
2019 – Tynecastle

Like a boxer refusing to give in, Hearts bounced back off the ropes following their defeat from bottom club

Dundee on Wednesday evening to produce a much-improved performance against in-form

St Johnstone at Tynecastle on Saturday.

Marcus Godinho and Callumn

Morrison – both scoring their maiden first team goals in maroon – secured a 2-0

win over a team who had the best away record in the Ladbrokes Premiership.

Hearts manager Craig Levein

was, like the majority of the Hearts support, less than impressed with his

charges during the week and he made five changes. Conor Shaughnessy paid the

price for his costly error on Wednesday and he joined Demetri Mitchell, Callumn

Morrison and the man criticised by Levein after the game, David Vanecek on the substitutes' bench. Aidan Keena dropped out completely. In came Oliver Bozanic, Jake Mulraney, Marcus Godinho, John Souttar and Steven Naismith, now free from suspension.

I criticised Hearts on Wednesday for their long ball approach. Now, I don't know if Craig Levein reads the Edinburgh Reporter, but Hearts played a different style against the Perth Saints, much more of a passing style. And it worked.

Hearts almost opened the scoring early in the match when Godinho won a joust with Saints keeper Clark, but the Canadian's header hit the crossbar.

As he did against Dundee, Arnaud Djoum was controlling midfield and just before the half-hour mark, the Cameroonian dinked the ball forward to Steven Naismith who then fed Olly Lee. The Englishman backheeled the ball back into the path of Djoum who set up Oliver Bozanic whose cross just eluded Naismith. It was a fine move, the likes of which was sorely absent against Dundee.

Another brilliant pass from Djoum found Jake Mulraney but the former Inverness Caley Thistle man's shot on goal was deflected against the post and the chance was gone.



Hearts v St Johnstone at Tynecastle

Hearts performance was much

more pleasing on the eye and two minutes into the second half

Sean Clare fired

the ball past keeper Clark only to see it smack off the post and spin back into

play.

It was no surprise when

Hearts finally did go ahead in the 52nd minute and it was a goal to

savour. A cheeky lob into the Saints penalty box from John Souttar was controlled

brilliantly by Marcus Godhino and he fired past Clark for his first Hearts

goal.

It was all Hearts now and

Clare had a couple of decent chances but couldn't take them.

Olly Lee then fired

in a free-kick from the edge of the penalty box which produced a fine save from

Clark.

St Johnstone tried to salvage
a draw and threw men forward as well as introducing substitute
Danny Swanson –
a former Jambo but also a former Hibee and his public
allegiance to the Easter
Road club was acknowledged by the Hearts support...

Just as Saints threatened,
Hearts sealed all three points in stoppage time when they hit
the visitors with
a counter-attack. Olly Lee set up Callumn Morrison and the
winger blasted the
ball past Clark from the right. Like Godinho, it was his first
goal for Hearts
first team.

The difference in Hearts
performance from Wednesday was like night and day. They're
attractive to watch when
they elect to pass the ball rather than lump it forward. The
returning Steven
Naismith – he never gives his own team mates peace never mind
the opposition –
helped as did John Souttar who strolled through the game to
the extent I
thought at one point he was going to light up a cigar.

Craig Levein was naturally delighted after the game. He told
the official Hearts website:

*"I was thrilled to
bits with them today for their controlled performance. I
really can't remember
St Johnstone having a shot at goal – and they have a great
record away from
home."*

"There's a lot of players who were very, very, good today and I'm pleased that on Foundation of Hearts Day the supporters got to see a victory to thank them for all the help they've given the club in recent years."

"The first goal was an unbelievable pass from John Souttar, but Marcus showed great composure to bring the ball down – and then he panicked and just hit it, and it went in" Levein went on. "Callumn has been promising to score from those kinds of positions and it was great for him as well."

Levein
was full of admiration for the returning John Souttar.

"I'm always impressed with John but the fact he has been out injured for a long period of time and played about 30 minutes the other night, it looks like he hasn't been away. He's worked really hard to get himself back to a position to get back on the field and I thought it was an imperious performance by him when you consider how long he's been out. It looks like he's just picked up where he left off."

Hearts: Doyle, Smith, Souttar, Berra, Bozanic, Lee, Clare (Vanecek, 86'), Djoum, Naismith, Mulraney (Morrison, 81'), Godinho (Mitchell, 79').

St Johnstone: Clark, Tanser, Shaughnessy, Davidson, Kerr, Foster, Gordon (O'Halloran, 59'), Craig, Callachan (Swanson, 57'), Watt (Hendry, 69'), Kennedy.

Referee: Craig Thomson

Attendance: 16,672

Top man: John Souttar