

Smith injury mars Hearts Scottish Cup win

Heart of Midlothian 4 Auchinleck Talbot 0

William Hill Scottish Cup Fifth Round – Sunday 10th
February 2019 – Tynecastle Park

Hearts strolled past Auchinleck Talbot in the William Hill Scottish Cup with a comprehensive 4-0 victory at Tynecastle on Sunday. Hearts were three goals to the good in the first half and while the junior team from Ayrshire fought hard they were no match for their Premiership opponents.

An early goal from captain Christophe Berra settled home nerves before Demetri Mitchell and Steven MacLean increased Hearts lead. Teenage striker Aidan Keena added a fourth late on.

The one sour note of the afternoon for Hearts was another addition to the long-term injury list. Defender Michael Smith, who has been in outstanding form this season, limped off

towards the end of the game. The initial diagnosis is the Northern Irish international has a thigh injury which may keep him out for between six and twelve weeks – a huge blow for Hearts.

Hearts manager Craig Levein

made three changes to the team that struggled to break down Livingston last Wednesday.

Striker Uche Ikpeazu made a welcome start while veteran striker Steven MacLean

was alongside him. Demetri Mitchell also returned as Levein opted for an

attack-minded set-up. Conor Shaughnessy, Oliver Bozanic and Jake Mulraney made

way.

Auchinleck Talbot had caused

the biggest cup sensation in years when they knocked out Championship

high-flyers Ayr United in the last round and it was a testament to that

achievement that Levein opted to field a near full-strength team. The giants of

the junior game in Scotland took through nearly 2,000 supporters and they made

plenty of noise from the Roseburn Stand. They were silenced early on, however,

when Hearts went in front after just ten minutes.

Uche Ikpeazu was causing havoc in the visitors defence and he

was fouled just outside the Talbot penalty box. Olly Lee

delivered a pinpoint cross from the free-kick to the head of

Christophe Berra and the captain headed over keeper Leishman to put the Maroons ahead.

Hearts were camped in the

Talbot half, but the Ayrshire team did manage a sporadic counter-attack. Wilson

did just this in the 20th minute but he couldn't connect properly with the ball as Hearts screamed at the assistant referee on the Wheatfield Stand for offside.

Hearts continued to dominate and doubled their lead after half an hour. Demetri Mitchell collected the ball on the left and skipped into the Talbot penalty box. His rather tame shot on goal took a deflection off a Talbot defender and trundled past Leishman. 2-0 to Hearts and the game was running away from the junior side.

It disappeared out of sight eight minutes later when Hearts went 3-0 up. Mitchell switched wings and crossed from the right for Steven MacLean to have the easiest of tap ins.

Talbot's best chance came shortly after when a long ball forward caught out the Hearts defence. Glasgow pounced and lobbed the ball over Hearts keeper Colin Doyle – largely a spectator up to this point – but the ball drifted wide to the anguish of the visiting players and supporters alike.

Hearts replaced the injured Sean Clare with Callumn Morrison at the start of the second half and the home side thought they had increased their lead when MacLean scooped the ball home, but he was offside.

The game continued in the

same pattern with Hearts dominant and the visitors hitting on the break when they could. Glasgow had another chance for Talbot midway through the second half but his shot on goal was a tired one and it went well wide.

There was a real setback for Hearts with ten minutes left when Michael Smith hobbled off with a thigh injury. As the Maroons had already used all three substitutes they played out the remainder of the game with ten men.

As happened on Auchinleck Talbot's last visit to Tynecastle on Scottish Cup business seven years ago, the juniors had a goal disallowed for offside. However, unlike the decision in 2012 this one *was* offside.

Hearts completed the rout four minutes from the end when substitute Aidan Keena danced into the Talbot penalty box before firing past Leishman to make the final score 4-0 to Hearts.

After the game Craig Levein was content with his team's performance and the result but concerned about Michael Smith's injury.

"It's sort of a no-win match, we just had to get through and I'm glad that we are," Levein told the official Hearts website. *"I was reasonably pleased with the first half, we didn't play at the same intensity and tempo second half."*

"We also chose not to play the easy passes and tried to be too clever but that can happen."

"Auchinleck were well organised but we started in the right manner and got on top.

"Teams who aren't used to losing are dangerous and we didn't want to give them any hope at all so to get in at 3-0 at half time killed the game.

"The one downside is Michael Smith who's torn his thigh muscle. He'll go for a scan tomorrow and we'll find out how bad it is.

"It could be six weeks, it could be longer."

What could have been a difficult afternoon for Hearts ended up being a comfortable one, Smith's injury aside. They'll now take their place in the draw for the quarter finals which will be made after the Ross County-Inverness Caledonian Thistle tie on Monday evening.

The last word, though, should go to Auchinleck Talbot. Their players, manager and huge travelling support were a huge credit to the junior game. It was no surprise to see many Hearts supporters – this one included – give the Ayrshire men a standing ovation at the end of the game.

Hearts: Doyle, Smith, Souttar, Berra, Lee, Clare (Morrison, 46'), Djoum, Mitchell, Naismith (Keena, 75'), MacLean, Ikpeazu (Vanecek, 72').

Auchinleck

Talbot:

Leishman, Lyle, Pope, McPherson, McCracken, White (Samson, 73'), Armstrong, Hyslop, G. Wilson (McIlroy, 81'), Glasgow (Shankland, 81'), S. Wilson.

Attendance: 14,946

Referee: Kevin Clancy

Top man: Arnaud Djoum