

Victory for Hearts at Rugby Park

Kilmarnock 1 Heart of Midlothian 2

Ladbroke's Premiership – Friday 1st February
2019 – Rugby Park

Hearts recorded their second win of the season at Rugby Park on a night when husky dogs were staying at home in deepest Ayrshire. First half goals from Sean Clare and Steven Naismith gave the visitors a two-goal cushion before Killie pulled a goal back with a penalty.

Hearts manager Craig Levein made two changes from the side that defeated St Johnstone last Saturday. Conor Shaughnessy and Callum Morrison came in at the expense of Marcus Godinho and Olly Lee.

There was a heavy snowfall in Ayrshire prior to kick-off but the artificial surface at Rugby Park meant such an inconvenience was literally

brushed aside. Nearly
800 Hearts fans headed through on a freezing cold first
evening of February and
they deserve enormous credit for their magnificent support.

Kilmarnock
have been mightily impressive under Steve Clarke and Rangers
were the latest
team to succumb when they lost 2-1 nine days ago. However,
Hearts made a bright
start and Michael Smith had the ball in the Killie net in the
11th
minute only for his 'goal' to be rightly disallowed for
offside.

Hearts
took the lead seven minutes from half-time and it was a superb
goal from Sean
Clare. The Englishman collected the ball in midfield, strode
forward, shrugged
off a couple of challenges before drilling home a sweet shot
with his right
foot which went into the net off the post. It was a brilliant
finish from the
22-year-old.

Remarkably,
just five minutes later, Hearts were two goals ahead with a
move straight from
the training ground. The visitors were awarded a free-kick
just outside the
Killie penalty box. It was taken quickly by Clare who passed
to Jake Mulraney.
The winger raced down the left before cutting the ball back
for Steven Naismith
who steered it past Killie keeper Bachmann to score against
the team for where

it all started for the on-loan Norwich City forward.

Hearts

looked in easy street at a ground where few teams have won in recent months,
but it isn't the Gorgie way to do things easily. A minute before half-time, captain
Christophe Berra fouled Power in the Hearts penalty box. There was little
protest from the Maroons at the award of a penalty and Jones duly converted the
spot kick.

Levein

made a tactical switch at half-time, taking off Callumn Morrison and replacing
him with Olly Lee. It stiffened up the midfield and made Hearts harder to break
down.

As

you might expect Killie dominated possession in the second half as they chased
the equaliser but other than a cross which had Hearts keeper Colin Doyle
flapping somewhat, they never seriously threatened to draw parity.

A

brilliant result for Hearts, if not perhaps the most stylish of performances.
But the team did something they failed to do in defeats from Livingston, St
Mirren and Dundee this season – they dug out a result. And now Hearts are just
three points off second place.

Something

that will warm those Hearts supporters travelling back from darkest frozen Ayrshire.

Kilmarnock: Bachmann, O'Donnell, S.

Boyd, Findlay, Taylor (McKenzie, 78'), Power, Dicker, Tshibola, Jones, Burke (Millar, 78'), Ndjoli.

Hearts: Doyle, Smith (Dikamona,

85'), Shaughnessy, Souttar, Berra, Bozanic, Clare, Djoum, Naismith, Mulraney (Mitchell, 68'), Morrison (Lee, 46').

Referee: Steven McLean

Attendance: 5,552

Top man: Sean Clare – a fine goal and he's beginning to look more confident with every game that passes.