

Brave Hearts come so close to Scottish Cup glory

Heart of Midlothian 1 Celtic 2

William Hill Scottish Cup Final, Saturday 25th
May 2019 – Hampden Park

They say it's the hope that kills you. Given their team's recent abysmal form in the league it's fair to say the majority of the 21,000 Hearts fans who headed to the National Stadium for Saturday's William Scottish Cup Final with champions Celtic did so more in hope than expectation.

But they were given expectation with an unexpectedly gallant performance from their side who took the lead early in the second half. But this expectation was snatched away from them within minutes as they lost a penalty and then a late winner to ensure Celtic won the treble treble. Such is the life of a Jambo...

It was no surprise that

Hearts manager Craig Levein made five changes from the team that lost 2-1 to Celtic in the league six days ago. There was a welcome return to the starting line up for midfielder Peter Haring while Levein sprang a surprise – as he tends to do on occasion – by handing a starting place to 16-year-old Aaron Hickey at left back.

It certainly wasn't cup final weather with persistent drizzle in Glasgow making for dreich conditions. Celtic were clear favourites, yet Hearts began the game brightly and pressurised the Celtic players at will. The boys in maroon certainly didn't appear fazed by the occasion and young Hickey was certainly showing no fear with some impressive touches. Indeed, the teenager fired in the game's first shot on target, but it didn't trouble Celtic keeper Bain.

Hearts John Souttar rescued his team when he brilliantly tackled Edouard following Arnaud Djoum losing possession but, other than that, Hearts looked comfortable as the game reached half-time still goalless.

If the Maroon Army had been pleased with their side's first half showing they were ecstatic seven minutes into the second half when their team took a sensational lead. The impressive Hickey fed Djoum whose cross was met by Sean Clare. Clare's deft back heel found Ryan Edwards who fired past Bain to put Hearts ahead and their

support in raptures.



Hearts fans at Hampden Park for the 2019 Scottish Cup Final

The Hearts support now dared to dream of glory, but those dreams were soon subsiding when Celtic equalised ten minutes later. Hearts keeper Bobby Zlamal brought down Edouard inside the Hearts penalty box. It looked a very soft award by referee Willie Collum, but the Celtic striker took the kick himself and fired past Zlamal to equalise.

Peter Haring then headed over the bar from a Michael Smith cross as Hearts sought to regain the advantage. But the roof fell in on Hearts cup hopes with just eight minutes left when

Christophe Berra was caught by the run of Edouard whose deft chip beyond Zlamal put Celtic in front. It was a lead they would not relinquish although the standing ovation afforded the Hearts players by the supporters – both towards the end of the game and after the final whistle – told its own story.

Craig Levein spoke of his pride of his players after the game. He told the official Hearts website:

“I’m terribly disappointed to end up on the losing side. I’m very proud of the way the players performed today. I feel the pain that they feel, and the supporters feel as well.”

“It’s very difficult for me to be critical of anybody. I thought they all tried ever so hard to implement the game plan.

“I said to them before the game, ‘don’t have any regrets, don’t wake up tomorrow morning and think and I wish there’s something I could have done better in the game, and I want it to be replayed so I can change that’.

“I can honestly say I don’t think any of them can go to bed and feel they let Hearts down.”

A day which started with little expectation for Hearts ended with pride restored after another difficult season.

Hearts: Zlamal, M. Smith,

Souttar, Haring (Bozanic, 80'), Berra, Clare (Wighton, 75'),
Djoum, MacLean
(Ikpeazu, 78'), Edwards, Mulraney, Hickey.

Celtic: Bain, Simunovic, Brown,
Hayes, Rogic (Ntcham, 70'), Edouard, Lustig, Ajer, McGregor,
Forrest, Johnston
(Sinclair, 71').

Referee: Willie Collum

Attendance: 49,000