

Halkett spares Hearts blushes

Heart of Midlothian 2 Stenhousemuir 1

Scottish League Cup – Group A – Wednesday 23rd

July 2019 – Tynecastle Park

Summertime

and the living is easy. Except if you're a Hearts supporter.

Glorious

sunshine baked the capital city for most of Wednesday and Hearts fans headed to

Gorgie ready to sit back in the evening sun and soak up a goals feast against

League Two side Stenhousemuir.

After

Dundee United's surprise defeat from East Fife on Tuesday evening, Hearts had

the opportunity to return to the top of Group A of the Betfred Scottish League

Cup by beating the Ochilview side, but the Maroons naturally did it the hard

way – the very hard way.

Stenny

made their intentions clear from kick off and camped themselves inside their

own half, content to absorb their Premiership opponents attack after attack.

Hearts inability to score goals was a concern last season and nothing has

changed during the six-week close season.

In the

first half Steven MacLean hit the post, John Souttar set up Conor Washington

and Jamie Walker but chance after chance went abegging.

Anthony

McDonald was providing width, but Hearts play was all-too predictable. After a goalless first half the second period took on the pattern of the first with Jake Mulraney replacing McDonald and Uche Ikpeazu taking over from the ineffective MacLean.

There

was an astonishing array of misses from Hearts early in the second half when Ollie Bozanic, Jamie Walker and Conor Washington missed consecutive chances as groans of despair emanated from the home support.

Those

groans turned to anger when, with just 13 minutes left, the deadlock was finally broken – and Stenhousemuir took a sensational lead. The visitors broke swiftly on the counterattack and Cook's cross was stabbed home by McGuigan to the delight of the small band of Stenny fans in the Roseburn Stand.

At

this point some of the Hearts supporters turned on manager Craig Levein and, indeed, some fans headed for the exits.

But

with eight minutes to go Hearts finally scored when Sean Clare's corner fell kindly for Craig Halkett and the centre half buried the ball past Stenny keeper Smith.

Relief from the home support which amplified five minutes later Halkett grabbed his second goal of the evening – and his third of the season – when he headed home Jake Mulraney's cross.

It was tough luck on a gallant Stenhousemuir but there's no doubt Hearts deserved the win which sees them top Group A. The Jambos conclude the group fixtures with a trip to East Fife on Saturday.

Hearts: Zlamal, M. Smith, Souttar, Bozanic, Clare, Washington (Keena, 59'), Walker, MacLean (Ikpeazu, 55'), McDonald (Mulraney, 55'), Halkett, Hickey.

Stenhousemuir: Smith, McIlduff, McKernon (Watters, 83'), Marsh, McGuigan, Hopkirk, Cook, McLaughlin, M. Munro (Halleran, 63'), Scullion (Anderson, 90'), A. Munro.

Referee: Alan Newlands

Attendance: 7,299

Top man: Aaron Hickey