

Hearts stumble into knock-out stages of Betfred Cup

East Fife 1 Heart of Midlothian 1 (East Fife win 7-6 on penalties)

Scottish League Cup – Group A – Saturday 27th
July 2019 – New Bayview

Hearts

duly qualified for the knock-out stages of the Betfred Scottish League Cup but, as their wont, did it the hard way. After Wednesday evening's late late show against League Two Stenhousemuir at Tynecastle, Craig Levein's side again struggled, this time against League One East Fife. The Fifers held their Premiership opponents to a 1-1 draw at 90 minutes before snatching the bonus point after winning the resultant penalty shoot-out 7-6.

After

the midweek shenanigans, Hearts manager Craig Levein made sweeping changes to his team. Captain Christophe Berra, Andrew Irving, Jake Mulraney, Dario Zanatta and Uche Ikpeazu all came into the side as Hearts sought to win the group comfortably. But this is Hearts we're talking about where doing things the hard way is second nature.

The

visitors began decently enough with Jamie Walker and Christophe Berra having

early chances. Indeed, it was Walker who opened the scoring in the 15th minute, tapping the ball home after fine play from Craig Halkett.

Ikpeazu saw his header saved from home keeper Long before the former Cambridge United player spurned another opportunity when he hit the side netting just before half time.

As has been the case with their other games in Section A, Hearts were struggling to make an impact, and no one was surprised when East Fife equalised ten minutes into the second half. A cross from Wallace was met by Duggan who drilled the ball past Hearts keeper Bobby Zlamal who perhaps should have done better.

And that was the end of the scoring although Hearts Steven MacLean really should have won the game for the visitors when he missed a tantalising cross from Jake Mulraney and a golden chance went abegging.

The point for Hearts was enough to see them qualify for the next round but the afternoon was tainted somewhat when East Fife won the resultant penalty shoot-out 7-6 – Hearts Aaron Hickey missing the Gorgie side's final spot kick – to earn the bonus point. Hearts unconvincing performances will mean

they are unseeded
when the draw for the knock-out stage takes place, meaning
they could face
Celtic, Rangers, Aberdeen or city rivals Hibernian.

The
Hearts support weren't slow in venting their anger towards
Craig Levein. On the
basis of Hearts Betfred Cup displays thus far, one suspects
Hearts supporters
will be displaying such demonstrative behaviour on a regular
basis this season.

It
may be a long campaign ahead for the long-suffering Maroon
Army. Ann Budge
please take note.

East

Fife:

Long, Dunsmore, Higgins, Murdoch, Dunlop, Slattery, Wallace,
Agnew, Hunter (R.
Davidson, 63'), Watt (Dowds, 79'), Duggan.

Hearts: Zlamal, M. Smith, Berra,
Clare, Walker, Mulraney, Ikpeazu (MacLean, 80'), Halkett,
Zanatta (Keena, 63'),
Irving (Bozanic, 68'), Hickey.

Referee: David Munro

Top

man: Craig
Halkett

Att: 1,998