

Same old story as Hearts limp out of the Betfred Cup

Rangers 3 Heart of Midlothian 0

Betfred Cup Semi-Final, Sunday 3rd November
2019 – Hampden Park

After

what has been a difficult week, Hearts exited the Betfred Cup after a predictable loss in the semi-final to Rangers at the National Stadium on Sunday afternoon.

With

the sacking of manager Craig Levein on Thursday, assistant Austin MacPhee took charge of the Maroons and there was a major surprise with his team selection.

Forward Craig Wighton made his first start of the season, having not played

this term because of injury. Irishman Glenn Whelan replaced Loic Damour while

Ryotaro Meshino replaced Callumn Morrison. And there was the welcome sight of

long-term injury victim Steven Naismith on the substitutes' bench.

Hearts

dismal form throughout 2019 was reflected in the size of the

support in maroon.

Many had decided not to make the journey to Glasgow on a dreich, dank November afternoon as, even with the departure of Levein 72 hours before the game, many knew what to expect. And it was all-too predictable as Hearts capitulated to a Rangers team that hardly got out of second gear.

Driven

by Jack, Rangers looked the likelier team to score although given Hearts tactics appeared to be damage limitation this isn't saying much. Early on, Jack passed to Tavernier whose cross for Morelos seemed certain to be capitalised by the Colombian striker until Michael Smith cleared the danger.

Hearts

keeper Joel Pereira then saved from Jack and Kamara before their first setback of the afternoon came in the 27th minute when Glenn Whelan pulled up with a hamstring injury. The Irishman hobbled off and was replaced by young Andy Irving.

Steven

MacLean had made little impact up front other than receiving a booking in the 23rd minute for a rash challenge on Goldson. When the veteran striker became involved in another needless clash with Rangers keeper McGregor six minutes before half-time he earned a rebuke from referee John Beaton. Austin MacPhee then hauled off the former St Johnstone player before he got sent off

and the anger on the Hearts bench was clear. MacLean was replaced by Ikpeazu who many believed should have started the game in any case.

When

Kent struck the post, it seemed only a matter of time before Rangers opened the scoring and they did right on the stroke of half-time – thanks to comical defending from their opponents. Hearts failed to clear a corner and the ball fell to Morelos. Rangers top scorer crossed for Helander who was completely alone inside the Hearts penalty box, the maroon rear-guard believing he was offside. He wasn't and he had the easiest of opportunities to bury the ball beyond Pereira to put Rangers a goal up.

The

Hearts support were hoping the second half wouldn't be as bad as the first half, but their hopes were dashed just two minutes after the interval when Rangers doubled their lead. Again, the Hearts defence were AWOL as Tavernier crossed for Morelos who tapped home from six yards.

Hearts

did rally briefly and Craig Wighton and substitute Uche Ikpeazu threatened but it was too little too late. Hearts injuries woes continued when Michael Smith limped off – he was replaced by Steven Naismith.

Rangers

continued to threaten and in the 62nd minute they ended the game as

a contest when Kent skipped past the ineffective Sean Clare before setting up Morelos for his second and Rangers third goal of the afternoon.

The game fizzed out thereafter with many Hearts supporters heading for the exits long before John Beaton's final whistle. Two shots on target in the entire 90 minutes told its own pitiful story.

Whoever takes the Hearts manager's job has one hell of a job on his hands.

Hearts: Pereira, Smith (Naismith, 53'), White, Berra, Bozanic, Clare, Whelan (Irving, 27'), Wighton, MacLean (Ikpeazu, 40'), Hickey, Meshino.

Rangers: McGregor, Tavernier, Helander, Goldson, Jack (Arfield, 77'), Davis, Ojo (Defoe, 80'), Kent (Aribo, 66'), Kamara, Morelos, Barisic.

Referee: John Beaton

Attendance: 49,310

Top man: Michael Smith