

Last gasp Hearts climb off the foot of the table

St Johnstone 3 Heart of Midlothian 3

**Ladbrokes Premiership – Saturday 1st
February 2020 – McDiarmid Park**

**A
last gasp goal from Sean Clare
earned Hearts a 3-3 draw in Perth
on Saturday
afternoon and was enough to lift
the Gorgie club off the foot of the
Ladbrokes
Premiership table.**

Hearts

went behind early in the game but came back through goals from Liam Boyce – his second in two games – and captain Steven Naismith to lead at half time. However, Daniel Stendel's men were forced back in the second half as St Johnstone scored twice and were poised for three vital points – until Clare's dramatic late goal.

Hearts

manager Daniel Stendel strives for consistency for his team and he made just one change to the team that defeated Rangers at Tynecastle

last Sunday – Ryotaro
Meshino replacing Lewis Moore.

Backed

by a huge travelling support, daring to be optimistic once
more, Hearts began

the game positively and were on top in the early stages.
Naturally then, the

home side took the lead in the 17th minute. McCann set up May
and

the former Aberdeen striker fired past Hearts keeper Joel
Pereira to make it

1-0.

The

goal was against the run of play, but Hearts didn't feel sorry
for themselves for

long. Nine minutes later Andy Irving played a delightful pass
for Toby Sibbick

who crossed for Liam Boyce to stab the ball home and draw
parity.

Five

minutes later and Hearts were in front. Saints keeper Clark
didn't deal with a

Hearts corner. John Souttar hooked the ball towards goal and
Steven Naismith

nodded the ball home to put the Jambos ahead.

Hearts

could have added a third goal when Sibbick tried a long-range
effort which went

inches wide.



Action from McDiarmid Park as Hearts clashed with St Johnstone. Photo: Ian Bell

Whatever

Saints manager Tommy Wright said to his players during the half-time interval

had the desired affect as the home team came out with all guns blazing. After

Wotherspoon came close, St Johnstone deservedly equalised when May set up

McCann who blasted home although Joel Pereira may feel he could have done better.

It

was all Saints now as the Maroon Army began to wonder what had happened to

their team. Slack play from John Souttar almost allowed the home side to take

the lead when May saw his shot trickle wide.

In

the 62nd minute the goal St Johnstone had threatened arrived. Hearts

Craig Halkett pulled back Kerr inside the Hearts penalty box. Penalty said referee Greg Aitken before booking Halkett for his trouble. May buried the penalty kick and from being 2-1 up, Hearts were now trailing 3-2 and looking in serious danger of losing the game and remaining bottom of the league.

The home side almost clinched all three points in the 87th minute in spectacular fashion. Hearts keeper Pereira was caught up the park and Saints striker May tried his luck from around 45 yards. To his anguish, the Hearts keeper recovered sufficiently to stop the ball crossing the line. It was to prove to be a defining moment.

With three minutes of stoppage time played Hearts had one last chance. Steven Naismith fired a long ball towards substitute Uche Ikpeazu and Liam Boyce. The ball fell into the path of Sean Clare who blasted a glorious shot from 25 yards which flew into the net for Hearts equalising goal.

It secured a 3-3 draw and meant Hearts moved off the bottom of the league table on goal difference from Hamilton Academical – who play Celtic on Sunday. It's a point that may yet prove crucial at the end of the season.

Daniel Stenger had mixed emotions after the game. He told BBC Sport Scotland:

“First-half, we

played very well and controlled the game. At 2-1 at half-time, I said to my players to play the same and we would win. But I have no explanation for the second half.

“We can be happy we got one point in the end. Our defending was so bad in the second half. I need some time to understand what happened.”

St Johnstone: Clark, Kerr, Gordon (O'Halloran, 42'), McCart, Ralston, Tanser (Booth, 46'), Craig, McCann, Wotherspoon, Kane, May (Butcher, 90').

Hearts: Pereira, White, Souttar, Clare, Naismith, Halkett, Boyce, Sibbick (Washington, 71'), Irving, Henderson (Avdijaj, 80'), Meshino (Ikpeazu, 60').

Referee: Greg Aitken

Attendance: 6,002

Top man: Sean Clare

Thanks to Ian Bell of Aberdeen for the action shots.