

Hearts suffer cup humiliation at Brora

Brora Rangers 2-1 Hearts

Hearts exited this season's Scottish Cup in just the second round after an embarrassing defeat in the northern reaches of Scotland against a Brora Rangers side who had not played a game since January.

Robbie Neilson made six changes to the weekend side that laboured to a [0-0 draw away at Arbroath](#) in the Championship with Ross Stewart, Christophe Berra, Peter Haring, Aidy White, Jamie Walker and Gervane Kastaneer all coming in. Notably there was a spot on the bench for long-term absentee John Souttar. Haring's return to the side came at an unfamiliar right back berth in place of Michael Smith – away on international duty – and the injured Jamie Brandon. Walker started his first game in four matches having made some interventions off the bench in recent games.

Brora were completing their Edinburgh double this season having lost 3-1 away at Easter Road against Hibs in the early rounds of the League Cup. It's been 71 days since the Cattachs last played however, their last competitive game being the previous Scottish Cup round when they dispatched Camelon Juniors on 11th January to setup this second round clash with the Jambos.

Despite the expected lack of sharpness, and Hearts laying early siege to the Highland League champion's goal, it was Brora who took the lead after just 12 minutes with the game's first real chance. Jordan MacRae's left footed effort neatly found its way past Ross Stewart.

Worryingly Hearts looked devoid of ideas in the first 45 minutes with only really Gary Mackay-Steven making any positive contribution meaning the lower league side went into the break meriting their 1-0 lead.

The visitors did emerge from the break looking a touch more threatening but alarmingly it took to around 65 minutes for any real concerted period of pressure which eventually resulted in a goal for stand-in skipper Berra on 70 minutes after a string of corners.

Woefully for Hearts, the Highlanders were back in front five minutes later when Stewart failed to handle a deep free-kick and Martin MacLean was able to finish high into the net from a tight angle.

The bare facts of an early cup exit to a Highland League side are galling. However, with Hearts having reached the last two Scottish cup finals, and with the style and energy of this season's league campaign struggling to inspire much confidence, the knock-out tournament was seen by many JT supporters as a priority and an outlet for some joy. The result will now make for a tricky few weeks for Neilson and his men as they seek to build momentum for the Premiership.

Brora Rangers: Malin, Kelly, Nicolson, Williamson, MacDonald, Wagenaar (MacDonald, 80 mins), Gillespie, MacLean, Gamble (Morrison, 65 mins), MacRae (Brindle, 65 mins), MacRae Sub not used: Stephen

Hearts: Stewart, Haring, Berra, Halkett, White, McEneff (Henderson, 58 mins), Irving, Kastaneer (Boyce, 45 mins), Mackay-Steven, Gnanouillet, Walker Subs not used: Souttar, Zlamal, Frear, Popescu, McGill

Referee: Peter Stuart