

Hearts hang on for another home win

With no fans inside Tynecastle it was difficult to know what to expect from this encounter, other than a distinct lack of sound.

After playing all of last season's Championship winning campaign with no supporters in the stadium, their return undoubtedly played a part in Hearts' strong start to the season, especially at home. Hearts manager, Robbie Neilson, could be forgiven for having some concerns with regards to the absence of the demanding Hearts' supporters.

It was an intriguing Hearts XI, with Cammy Devlin suspended and Beni Baningime still side-lined, Michael Smith was brought into midfield alongside Peter Haring. Alex Cochrane slotted in at centre back with Andy Halliday and Taylor Moore at wing-back, Ben Woodburn was through the middle with Barrie McKay and Aaron McEneff out wide.

The opening goal arrived after just four minutes. The visitors lost possession deep inside their own half, Woodburn did well to find McEneff, who himself probably should've scored, but was denied by the feet of Laidlaw. Unfortunately for the ex-Hibernian goalkeeper the rebound fell straight to Michael Smith who slotted the ball home at the near post to give the home side an early lead.

McEneff had another golden chance to double the hosts advantage just five minutes later. The Hearts front three were linking up really well and easily finding pockets in-between

the County backline and midfield in which to operate. Woodburn found McKay, who did well to find McEneff and his attempted lob was blocked by Laidlaw.

It was all Hearts in the opening half hour and after McKay and McEneff went close, Smith should've grabbed his second. McEneff slipped him in, but the Northern Irishman could only toe-poke wide, before Souttar was denied by the crossbar.

A second goal for the Jambos seemed inevitable and it arrived in fortuitous fashion just before the break. Hearts broke with one perfect pass from Peter Haring, the touch to bring it down from Woodburn was exquisite and his deflected effort completely deceived Laidlaw who could only watch as the ball rolled into the opposite corner.

Hearts were forced into a substitution just minutes into the second half. Craig Halkett was unable to continue and was replaced by the returning Stephen Kingsley.

The opening period of the second half felt like a game with no supporters and no real tempo. After such a strong first half, Hearts didn't really come out the traps for the second 45 allowing Ross County to gain a foothold in the match.

It was a surprise that County hadn't really troubled Craig Gordon for 70 minutes considering they came into the game as the fourth highest scorers in the league, and Hearts were punished for their lacklustre second half when Jordan White turned home Joseph Hungbo's cross to halve the deficit.

As the game entered the final ten minutes Hearts were hanging on. Ross County continued huffing and puffing but were really struggling to create anything of note.

After six minutes of stoppage time referee David Munro brought an end to what was at times an eye-bleeding second half from a Hearts' perspective.

Nevertheless, Hearts got the job done and racked up another home win at an eery Tynecastle. Ross County remain in a relegation battle, but based on their second half showing, they should have more than enough to survive.

Nobody knows what lies ahead as the Scottish Premiership winter break commences, but one thing we do know is that third place is Hearts to throw away in the second half of the season.