

The Gorgie Boys are going to Europe after all

It was an unusual position that Hearts found themselves in heading into their Europa League Playoff second leg at Tynecastle against FC Zurich.

Trailing 2-1 on aggregate from the first leg in Switzerland, Hearts knew they would need to overturn that slender deficit if they wanted to continue competing in the Europa League.

Failure to do so would not result in them eliminated from Europe altogether, as is often the case with Scottish sides, especially those outwith the Old Firm. Instead, Hearts would drop into the newly formed, Europa Conference League.

In the first leg, Hearts took the lead through a Lawrence Shankland penalty, but afterwards were guilty of being a little naive in their play, dropping too deep and inviting pressure from the Swiss champions.

The match finished 2-1 to the home side in the St Gallen rain and the reaction was fairly positive from the travelling fans.



Europa League Play-Off – Heart of Midlothian FC v Fc Zurich
25/08/2022.

Hearts play host to FC Zurich in the Europa League Play-Offs

at Tynecastle Park, Edinburgh, Midlothian, UK.

Pic shows: Hearts out of the Europa League after going down 1-0 on the night and 3-1 on aggregate to FC Zurich.

Credit: Ian Jacobs

Hearts had been poor, but they remained in the tie and taking Zurich back to Tynecastle they gave themselves every chance of turning over their opponents.

Robbie Neilson named a much more attacking line-up for the second leg and despite battering Zurich in the opening 45 minutes, Hearts could not find the goal that would level the scores on aggregate.

Nine minutes into the second half, Hearts' task got harder as Jorge Grant was shown a second yellow card for simulation in the penalty box and the Jambos were reduced to ten men.

Replays showed it was the correct decision and Hearts struggled from that point onwards. Fabian Rohner wrapped up the tie ten minutes from time in front of the impressive Zurich faithful, sending Hearts into the Europa Conference League.

Although after the match, the immediate feeling was one of frustration, the reality is it is not the end of the world by any stretch. Yes, the trips in the Europa League are better, but financially, Hearts might benefit from competing in the Conference League, where they will have a better chance of picking up more points and therefore more revenue.

The following day, Hearts fans were glued to TV's and computers to watch that Europa Conference League Draw with passports and Skyscanner at the ready.

The draw means that Hearts will be paired with Istanbul Basaksehir of Turkey, Fiorentina of Italy and RFS of Latvia. The first matchday is scheduled for 8 September. Let the good times roll.



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