

# **Hearts slip to second bottom after Dundee United defeat**

**Picture this. It's just before 5pm at Tynecastle. The jubilant Dundee United players strode over to the Roseburn Stand to celebrate with their fans, standing arms aloft and singing "It's a Beautiful Day".**

They were ecstatic after earning three points from a narrow, 1-0 win over Hearts courtesy of a goal after 75 minutes.

Contrast that with the Men in Maroon. Captain Lawrence Shankland lead the downcast team, their faces spoke volumes, around the ground with empty spaces in the stands where fans had retreated swiftly in the final minutes after Ross Graham's goal had gone in.

Such is the fine line between success and failure in William Hill Premiership football.

Some fans, to their credit, stayed to applaud their heroes even in adversity. Steven Naismith's side had dominated possession in the first 45 minutes and enjoyed slices of the play in the second but, critically, they failed to convert them into chances.

The Tannadice team, newly promoted from the tier below, took theirs, albeit a tad scrappy in the final execution, but there was no question that a square ball to the edge of the penalty box from Craig Sibbald found Will Ferry who back-heeled the ball into the path of Graham.

Craig Halkett was between him and goalkeeper Craig Gordon who was, perhaps, unsighted, and the ball slipped home into the empty net leaving the home side 14 minutes plus injury time to salvage something.

They tried but, as happened throughout the match, the quality in the final third was missing. No end product with too many moves petering out at the edge of the box and Dundee United moved onto eight points from their four matches to take over in third spot in the 12-strong table.

Hearts must rue the missed opportunities in the earlier part of the game played before more than 18,000 fans leaving the Jambos, remember they were third by a street at the end of last season, languishing in second bottom spot in the table with one point from their four matches.

Yes, it is early in the season but, worryingly, Hearts a goal difference of minus five and teams at the top are inching away. If Hearts want European football next term then they must address this.

Incidentally, Kilmarnock, who have also recently played in Europe, are bottom also on one point, but the Rugby Park men have a goal difference of minus nine.

Defiant Naismith (pictured), who recently signed an extension to his contract at Gorgie, told BBC Sport Scotland that he had endured adversity in his playing career and added: "I will always fight."

The former Scotland international, who has added substantially to the squad in the summer recess, said: "I will be the first to say I could not turn it around. We have got a good squad. These moments are tough.

"You need to have a grit and determination to get that first result and then you build from there."

He also argued that Hearts need to find a level of consistency and the seasoned professionals in the dressing-room need to pull the younger players with them.

Everybody is going to play a part in turning this disappointing start to the season around, according to the head coach, but the stark fact is that Hearts have lost six games in a row despite earning a point in a no-score draw with Rangers in their opening game which fired optimism after an encouraging display.

That result came on the back of expectation with last season's third place finish.

Those joyful days seem far away now with some noisy fans already calling for a change of leadership. Others back the manager to get it right, eventually.

Brace yourself Hearts fans. Next up after the international break are pace-setting Celtic at Parkhead on Saturday, September 14 (15.00).