

## Football 250

### Chapter 250 Vs HEARTS (3)

The ball slipped past Zlamal's outstretched fingers and nestled into the back of the net. The stadium erupted in a chorus of cheers and applause from the Celtic supporters, celebrating the breakthrough.

"Goal! James Forrest with a clinical finish, finally putting Celtic ahead!" Callum McDonald exclaimed, his voice brimming with excitement. "It's been coming, Roy. The pressure they've been applying was bound to pay off."

"Absolutely, Callum," Roy Townsley responded. "Forrest showed great composure there, and credit to Burke for the perfectly weighted assist. Zlamal's been brilliant, but even he couldn't stop that one."

Celtic players gathered around Forrest, celebrating their hard-earned lead. The momentum was now firmly in their favour, and Lennon's animated gestures from the touchline urged them to keep pushing.

The players returned to their positions, and the match resumed with Hearts determined to find an equalizer. However, Celtic's goal had invigorated the visitors, who pressed even harder to maintain their advantage.

[40] Hearts, determined not to let the game slip away, tried to mount a quick response. A series of passes saw the ball end up with Djoum, who attempted to weave his way through the midfield. However, his progress was halted by a robust challenge from Scott Brown. The referee immediately blew the whistle, showing Scott a yellow card and awarding the Hearts man a free kick.

That wasn't the end of it as a few moments later after a quick restart of the match Scott found himself stealing a sloppy pass. He didn't get far though feeling a pair of feet crudely knocking his shins and sending him tumbling to the ground. Djoum seemed to be trying to get his revenge and managed to achieve his goal but had to face the same consequences from the match official.

"That's a poor challenge from Djoum," Callum McDonald noted. "He's let his frustration get the better of him, and the referee's reaching for his pocket." Sure enough, the referee showed Djoum a yellow card, warning him to keep his temper in check.

The game resumed with Celtic still in control, but Hearts' aggression was beginning to show. A few minutes later Naismith himself was penalized for a late tackle on Scott who found himself with space outside the box. His tackle led to an instant Yellow from card for the attacking midfielder.

As the match continued, Celtic maintained their momentum, keen on extending their lead before the halftime whistle. Hearts, however, were showing signs of increasing frustration, their aggressive play leading to a series of fouls.

[44] With just a few minutes left in the first half, Celtic launched another attack. Jeremy Toljan advanced down the right wing, using his speed to get past Heart's players. Using his speed and a couple of feints he sped past Jamie Brandon, once the defender took the bait of one of his feints. He didn't give up and desperately chased after him, but he couldn't close the distance fast enough.

Seeing that they were approaching the box he risked it all with a slide tackle looking to hook the ball from behind. His tackle would have been so on but in the last moment, Toljan shifted the ball to his other feet. Before he could stop himself he swept Toljan off his feet sending him crashing to the ground. The referee immediately blew his whistle, and there was no hesitation in his decision as he reached for his back pocket.

"That's a reckless challenge from Brandon," Callum exclaimed. "You can't be making those kinds of tackles, especially so close to halftime." Roy Townsley quickly chimed in, "Absolutely, Callum. Toljan had him beat, and that was a desperate and dangerous attempt to stop him. The referee has no choice here."

The referee showed Brandon a straight red card, sending him off for violent conduct. Hearts' players surrounded the official, protesting the decision, but it was to no avail. Brandon slowly walked off the pitch, his head hanging in frustration.

"Jamie Brandon is shown the red card for violent conduct," Callum McDonald reiterated to the listeners. "This is a huge blow for Hearts just before the break." With Hearts down to ten men, Celtic's advantage would become even more pronounced.

None of that matters in the first half since they had to wait a few minutes for Toljan to receive treatment. This meant the setpiece that was about to be taken would be the last attempt of the first half. Burke standing over the ball would be the man to take on this responsibility.

Burke stood over the ball, the atmosphere in the stadium tense. He took a few steps back, his eyes fixed on the Hearts goal. The referee's whistle pierced the air, and Burke started his run-up. He struck the ball cleanly, sending it curling over the wall, but Zlamal was once again up to the task, diving to his left to parry the ball away.

"Another fantastic save from Zlamal!" Callum exclaimed, followed by the loud cheers of the Hearts home fans. "Hearts are truly indebted to their keeper for keeping them in this game." Following his save the ref blew his whistle ending the first half allowing the home team a much-needed break to regroup themselves.

"He's been exceptional, Callum," Roy Townsley agreed. "But with Hearts down to ten men, they're in for a tough second half."

"It'll be a hard uphill battle to which I'm personally hoping they have a response too." Callum intoned as he started talking about how lacklustre the home team had been in the first half. From their inability to maintain possession of the ball enough to mount attacks to their defence being easily beaten.

"Honest if it wasn't for Zlamal between the stick the score would be much more severe for the home side," Roy lamented for a moment before changing the subject. "What changes should we expect both teams to make to improve upon their performance, Callum?"

"Well, that first half was certainly eventful, Roy," Callum began, his voice filled with energy. "Celtic dominated the early stages and will be looking to continue that maybe through the introduction of a more dynamic attacking option to capitalise on their chances."

He paused to think for a second before speaking his verdict on what he thought the home side would do. "Hearts on the other hand took quite a while to get into the game, so they will be looking to hit the ground running. But with Brandon's red card just before halftime, it's going to be an uphill battle for them."

"Absolutely, Callum," Roy responded. "Hearts will need to regroup and come up with a solid plan to counter Celtic's pressure. Their goalkeeper, Zlamal, has been outstanding, but they can't solely rely on him alone for the next 45 minutes."

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As the second half commenced, there were notable changes on both sides. For Celtic, Rakim Rex came on for Scott Sinclair, making his league debut. Hearts made a substitution of their own, bringing on Oliver Bozanic for Steven Naismith, aiming to add some fresh legs and creativity to their midfield.

The anticipation was palpable as Rakim took his position on the left wing. Due to his recent stand-out performance in the late stages of the Europa League, fans were more excited to see him take the field. That added to the fact his celebration had been blowing up on social media helped matters.

Rakim who walked onto the grass of the Tynecastle Park was slightly surprised by the reception but didn't linger on it too long. It wasn't all enthusiastic since he was replacing the team's star winger Sinclair, but at least this time no one Booed him out. He simply took his position on the left flank already anticipating getting the ball under his feet.