

Hearts stutter over the line after jump start

Hearts made it in to the knockout stages of the Betfred Cup as they kept their one hundred per cent start to the season with a 3-2 victory away at East Fife.

The Jambos certainly didn't have it all their own way though, and can thank the two goal head start the Fifiers gifted them after only two minutes before Andy Irving's second half wonder strike saw them secure top spot in the group.

Olly Lee and Craig Wighton were the only survivors in the starting line-up from the [weekend's 2-1 win against Inverness CT at Tynecastle](#) as Robbie Neilson rested a number of first team players and had others, including Scotland keeper Craig Gordon, away on international duty. Christophe Berra notably started the game as captain, making his first appearance since the 2019 Boxing Day defeat at home to Hibs.

It was Olly Lee who showed his senior player status when he shot home after only 20 seconds when the ball finally broke to him at the back post. Straight from restart Hearts were back attacking again and forced a corner kick which was cut back to Lee inside the East Fife box who duly swept it past Hart at his near post.

East Fife had not even entered the Hearts half by this stage, but the visitors certainly took their foot off the gas as the first 45 wore on with the Jam Tarts defence creaking under the pressure of the home side's energy. Jack Hamilton pulled a

goal back on 39 minutes as he followed up as Stewart could only palm away Wallace's drive. Just a minute later the Hearts' keeper, on loan from Livingston, made a great save to deny the equaliser with the Hearts defence looking all at sea in Methil.

Into the second half and the Fifers continued to knock at the Hearts door. It took a stunning 62nd minute long range drive from Andy Irving to give the Jambos some breathing space but it was short lived as Ryan Wallace fired home a simple over the top punt from Murdoch despite Hearts' protestations for offside. With substitute Naismith on the pitch, Hearts were showing more composure in managing the game out but they still past up some opportunities to concede the equaliser, most gallingly when Liam Watt fired wide when through on goal in injury time.

Not a piece of art from the Tynecastle side, but they can be pleased that a second string team saw the win out to make it eight victories from eight games so far and making that winning feeling a habit down Gorgie way.

East Fife: Hart, Murdoch, Dunlop, Higgins, Slattery , Dunsmore (Watt, 82), Davidson, Agnew, Denholm (Collins, 76), Wallace, Hamilton (Smith, 76) **Substitutes:** Long, Watson, Dow, McConville, Newton, Mclaughlin

Hearts: Stewart, Brandon, Popescu, Berra (Kingsley, 71), White, Irving, Lee (Naismith, 49), Henderson, McGill, Frear, Wighton **Substitutes:** Zlamal, Moore, Logan, Darge, Denholm

Referee: Euan Anderson