

# Hearts stretch lead at top with win at Alloa

## Alloa 1-3 Hearts

Hearts stretched their lead at the top of the Championship to seven points with a straight-forward 3-1 win away at Alloa Athletic.

Playing for the first time in two weeks, and after their [disappointing loss to Dundee](#), the Jambos were looking to get back to winning ways with a full squad to pick from.

In another week of grievance and turmoil in the Scottish game, Robbie Neilson surprised many by naming an unconventional starting XI. This resulted in the Hearts' frontline being led by Jordan Roberts, Elliot Frear and Euan Henderson. Christophe Berra retained his place in defence too, despite questions over his performance at Dens Park in the last league outing.

New signing Gary Mackay-Steven was named on a seriously strong bench alongside Liam Boyce, Steven Naismith and the returning Josh Ginnelly who had recovered from Covid-19.

It was the second time the two sides had met this season with the Jambos having convincingly won [3-0 in the league at Tynecastle](#) back in November but falling foul of a [shock League Cup exit in Clackmannshire](#) just days later.

There was an element of going through the motions in the first half and, whilst not creating many clear cut chances, the away team were doing more of the attacking and showing of their

intent. It took until the 36th minute however for the deadlock to be broken when the ever impressive Andy Irving curled a cracking shot high into the net from just outside the box.

Hearts doubled their advantage just under ten minutes later when a Jamie Walker cross was battered home from an angle by Elliot Frear. The timings of the goals were crucial and allowed the league leaders to head in to the break firmly in command despite a fairly lightweight showing in the first 45 minutes.

Gary Mackay-Steven took to the field at the start of the second period to make his Hearts' debut by replacing the fairly ineffectual Jordan Roberts. Returning striker Liam Boyce was Neilson's second change when he joined the fray for Henderson just eight minutes later. The pacy Ginnelly completed the changes shortly after, swapping on for Frear.

The three subs added much speed, purpose and quality to the Hearts' attack. The zip of Ginnelly caused Alloa all sorts of problems and the Jambos faithful will be delighted to see the on-loan Preston winger back to fitness.

In a game with plenty of feisty challenges and niggles, the home side were reduced to ten men on 86 minutes when Lucas Williamson was given two yellow cards in quick succession for a heavy challenge on Mackay-Steven and some subsequent dissent.

Despite the dismissal, Alloa swiftly got themselves back in the game when Kevin Cawley ghosted in at the back post to nod past Craig Gordon. Something the legendary keeper and Hearts defence will be exceptionally disappointed with. However, whilst Alloa sought to pile on the pressure, they lost a third goal when Ginnelly raced through on goal from his own half after the home side had committed all players, including keeper Neil Parry, to a last minute free-kick.

Not a performance that'll have the Hearts fans shouting for

more but the three points give the JTs a commanding lead at the summit of the Championship. The chat pre-match, with fans having seeing Neilson's selection, was that the clash had banana skin written all over it – perhaps of the Jambos' own making given the presence of underperformers Walker, Frear and Roberts ahead of a bench packed with first-teamers. Job done however and the Gorgie side move on to welcome Raith Rovers at Tynecastle next Saturday – assuming the Kirkcaldy side's recent COVID outbreak is resolved.

**Alloa:** Parry, Robertson, Graham, Jamieson, Williamson, Grant, Hetherington, Cawley, Scougall (Buchanan, 67 mins), Murray (Brown, 63 mins), Thomson (Evans, 82 mins) Subs not used: Connelly, Donnell, Lynch, Evans, Wright

**Hearts:** Gordon, Smith, Halkett, Berra, Kingsley, Walker, Irving, Halliday, Roberts (Mackay-Steven, 46 mins), Henderson (Boyce, 59 mins), Frear (Ginnelly, 65 mins) Subs not used: Haring, Stewart, Naismith, Popescu

Referee: Alan Muir