

# Goal in each half enough for Hearts to see off Stirling

**A first half strike from Liam Boyce and a first senior goal for Finlay Pollock led to a Hearts 2-0 win at Forthbank and make it three wins out of three in Group A.**

Hearts arrived at Forthbank knowing a win was likely allowing the team to qualify for the last 16 of the Premier Sports Cup.

Having arguably named the strongest team at his disposal for the match, Robbie Neilson would have expected a fast start from his side, but it was the Binos who were gifted the first pop at goal. Halliday presented the ball to Dylan Bikey, who showed quick feet to create an angle and get away from John Souttar, but Gordon got down to low to thwart the former Hearts man.

The visitors had struggled to create any real opportunities of note in the opening half hour, but when Boyce held the ball up and found Mackay-Steven, the midfielder skilfully back-heeled the ball through the defender's legs to send the striker through on goal. Boyce was his usual clinical self, slotting the ball low into the far corner to give the Jambos the lead.

Jack Leitch went close from a free-kick as the Binos looked for an instant response, but his free-kick curled just wide of the top corner.

Michael Smith should've doubled the visitor's advantage five

minutes before half time, after intercepting a Stirling clearance the full back found Boyce, who slipped in the onrushing Mackay-Steven, who instead of pulling the trigger cut the ball back for Smith, who produced a fine save from Blair Currie.

From the resulting corner Hearts came even closer. Haring won the header and knocked it down for Boyce, with his back to goal, he spun and volleyed low only to see his effort cleared off the Albion goal-line by Sean Heaver.

The Binos clearly have goals in their team having scored five goals in their previous two group stage matches and Dale Carrick looked to be about to level the scores for the hosts after getting away from Craig Halkett, but the Hearts centre half did well to make a last-ditch block just seconds into the second half.

Perhaps the most bizarre moment in this encounter was the referee asking for the floodlights to be switched on just after the hour mark, with clear skies still remaining as far as the eye could see. The Stirling member of staff in charge of the floodlights was as baffled as the next person, responding to the request in comical fashion: "What for?! Is he blind?!"

Back to action on the pitch, Armand Ganduillet made a welcome return to the action for the final 25 minutes coming on alongside Finlay Pollock in place of Peter Haring and Josh Ginnelly.

Hearts were on top in the second period and had another glorious chance to double their lead after 72 minutes, Mackay-Steven's deflected cross was fumbled by Currie and Souttar saw his effort cleared off the line from no more than a couple of yards as the visitors pressed for a second goal.

The second goal did arrive just a minute later, and it was a first senior goal for Finlay Pollock, who tapped in a cross

from the left, after Mackay-Steven saw an earlier effort blocked.

Gnandillet came close to a third, as Stirling became increasingly fatigued, both sides made changes in the closing stages and the game petered out to a comfortable 0-2 scoreline in favour of the Edinburgh side.

Hearts host Inverness on Sunday in their final game of the group stage having already topped the group, meanwhile Stirling host Peterhead in a match they may need to win to ensure progression to the last 16.