

# Devlin impresses on home debut as Hearts ease past Livingston

After a rare defensive blip last weekend in Dingwall, Hearts were back to their best, both defensively and offensively at Tynecastle against Livingston.

With Hearts changing shape last weekend, it was unclear what team Robbie Neilson would field against a Livingston side who defeated Celtic last weekend.

John Souttar picked up a minor knock in training so was left out of the matchday squad for the visit of The Lions, but Hearts' impressive summer window meant they had a ready-made replacement in Taylor Moore to slot in to their tried and trusted three-man defence.

The opening ten minutes were reminiscent to the majority of Hearts' Championship home games last season. The hosts dominating the ball against a side very organised and well drilled when out of possession, but a threat from cross balls.

In these types of matches especially, the importance of an early goal for the dominant side is crucial. Hearts were penning Livingston in and moving the ball quickly from side to side, another vital aspect when playing a side sitting deep.

Despite a bright start from the hosts, both this afternoon and

in their Premiership return in general, the odd boo could be heard from inside Tynecastle when the occasional Hearts pass went backwards rather than forwards.

The deserved breakthrough arrived for the home side after 24 minutes and it was a rocket from the unlikely source of Michael Smith. Barrie McKay skipped away from Adam Lewis, who had committed himself to an interception on the right touchline. This immediately brought David Martindale's hands to his head with fears of what might happen next.

The Livi boss was right to worry. McKay's deep cross was cut back from Cochrane to his opposite wing back Smith, who lashed the ball past Max Stryjek to give Hearts the early goal they craved.

The hosts were playing with real confidence following the goal and nearly had a second when Ben Woodburn's free kick from the left almost caught out Stryjek at his near post.

On the half hour mark Hearts were given the perfect opportunity to double their lead. Ben Williamson was adjudged to have tripped Beni Banningime in the box and referee Gavin Duncan pointed to the penalty spot.

Hearts' top goalscorer Liam Boyce stepped up and sent Stryjek the wrong way to grab his ninth goal of the season and put Hearts on easy street.

It was looking like a long afternoon for the visitors, who if truth be told had barely been out their half in the final 15 minutes of the first half.

Smith almost grabbed his second in first half stoppage time, but was denied by Stryjek, as Hearts coasted to a comfortable, but fully deserved 2-0 half time lead.

Stephen Kingsley's freekick in Dingwall secured a point for the Jambos last weekend and Max Stryjek was alert to prevent

the defender scoring an almost identical free-kick just five minutes into the second half.

Barrie McKay should've put the result beyond any doubt when latching on to a stray pass, but Stryjek smartly denied him, before pouncing on the rebound that nearly found its way to Boyce.

The lively McKay made amends just minutes later though, his low cross found Alex Cochrane charging in at the back post and the full back slotted home to grab his first goal in maroon and get Hearts back to winning ways.

A 3-0 scoreline was a fair one and highlighted the contrasting ambitions for both sides, on one side, Hearts look well up for a third-place battle, meanwhile Livingston look destined for a relegation dogfight.