

Hearts – Smith believes the best is yet to come

Michael Smith wouldn't have been on many Jambos betting slips for the first goalscorer in the Jambos 3-0 victory over Livingston on Saturday and a left-footed thunderbolt would have come as even more of a surprise to the Jambos faithful.

Nevertheless, the right back, having missed last weekend's match in Dingwall, returned with a bang to get the Jambos up and running, before Liam Boyce and Alex Cochrane added some gloss to a scoreline, that certainly didn't flatter Hearts.

It was another Hearts display where the new boys impressed and the Northern Irishman was full of praise for the new arrivals, as well as the team as a whole and played down the goal which opened the scoring.

"I thought today it was a real dominant performance from us," said Smith.

"It was enjoyable to play in, I can't remember many games like that, where we've dominated so much, it was enjoyable, we created a lot of chances, scored goals, clean sheet, so it was a good day all round for all of us.

"Taylor Moore was brilliant today, Soapy Souttar picked up a wee niggle and Taylor just stepped in, and I thought he was brilliant. Cammy Devlin in the middle of the park, I think he

must have done 14k, so yeah he brings energy, they're great players and him and Beni I thought controlled the game for us today, so it was a brilliant day for all of us."

"I can't really remember much about his goal," Smith laughed.

"I think I just swung my left foot at it, and it went in, I don't really know how far out it was, but I'll take it, it's, my first of the season and hopefully I'll get a few more," he added.

Most Hearts fans left Tynecastle speaking about their new Aussie sensation, Cameron Devlin, however Barrie McKay was impressive on the right wing and Smith expects the Scot's performances to improve, as he progresses towards full fitness, highlighting the strength in depth Hearts now have at their disposal.

"He McKay is sharp, he's quick, he's going to be a great player for us when he gets 100% fit, he didn't have a pre-season under his belt, so it'll take time for him to get fully fit, but we'll reap the rewards of that soon enough, but you can see already in flashes he's going to be a fantastic player for us.

"You look at the way the gaffer wants to play, he's got real options in that front three area, you have to leave starters in most teams on the bench in our squad, but that's a nice problem for the gaffer to have.

"He didn't have to leave him out, but he didn't have to play Gino today, so he could rest his ankle and that's what we've got now, a real great squad, anyone can play, and anyone can play well."

With a few more performances like Saturday's, Hearts boss Robbie Neilson will continue to answer his critics from last season, but like his manager, Smith admitted last season wasn't an enjoyable one to be a part of at times.

"At stages last season, it was a bit of a slog. Teams paid us a lot of respect last season and sat in, and it was hard to break them down, but in this league teams will come out and try to win the game, so you find little pockets of space and we're managing to do that now, so hopefully that run continues for us.

"It was a lot harder to break team's down last season. Thinking back to Dundee on the first day of the season, they came out and tried to attack us and we battered them six, so after that other teams sat in, with ten behind the ball and it was harder to break them down.

"I wouldn't say easier, but when you get it right, it's a lot more enjoyable."

Hearts fans have probably felt that in previous seasons, some of the players pulling on the famous maroon jersey haven't appreciated the size of club they were playing for, and Smith insisted that the current crop of players don't fall into that category.

"There's real pressure playing for Hearts," he said.

"That's what you've got to deal with when you come to this club. You've got to realise that it's a huge club and the fans are so passionate, so when you do come in, you relish it, you do succeed, and the fans will love you for it. Fair play to the new boys, they've come in and taken it on board and realised what it means to all of us. We're all pulling in the same direction," Smith explained.

Saturday's win allowed the Jambos to stretch their unbeaten start in the cinch Premiership to seven games, but Smith admitted it's just a start and highlighted the important games that lie ahead for Hearts.

"We've started well, but we won't rest on it. We've got massive games coming up, starting with Motherwell next week,

they're on a good run, so they'll fancy coming here, but we've got to play our game and see where it takes us next week. It's international break and then Rangers, so it's a big couple of games coming up for us," he added.

Despite all the new arrivals, Smith revealed that the players have immediately gelled, which is central to Hearts' positive start to the campaign.

"I think everyone's getting on well, the boys that have come in have slotted in well without a problem and obviously it's massive if you get on well with your teammates outside the pitch and it's showing on the pitch.

"There's stuff we do in training, we have competitive days where we play small-sided games and everyone's at it, everyone wants to impress and that's the way it should be.

"You never know when the gaffer is going to change it and you get your chance and you might stay in the team. Everybody realises that we've got a good squad and you might not play every week, but it is a team game and we're together in that."