

Kingsley's free kick on target for another home win for Hearts

After last weekend's disappointing defeat to Motherwell, it was crucial that Hearts would bounce back with three points against St Mirren, particularly with a daunting trip to Celtic Park looming on Thursday.

During the week manager Robbie Neilson insisted Hearts wouldn't change from their much discussed 3-4-3 system which has generally served them well this season, however, they did come unstuck at both Fir Park and Pittodrie.

Nevertheless, Neilson did react to the below-par performance in Lanarkshire by making four like-for-like changes for the visit of the Buddies.

Andy Halliday, who scored at St Mirren Park earlier in the season, replaced Alex Cochrane at left-wing-back and there was a return for Craig Halkett who replaced the suspended Taylor Moore. Meanwhile, in the front three, Liam Boyce returned to lead the line replacing Josh Ginnelly and Gary Mackay-Steven replaced Ben Woodburn out wide.

An uneventful opening 15 minutes saw both sides struggling to create clear-cut chances, St Mirren's front three of Eamonn Brophy, Jamie McGrath and Connor Ronan were causing Hearts

problems with their runs in behind and high pressing.

The game's first flashpoint saw St Mirren skipper Joe Shaughnessy booked for a late tackle on Liam Boyce and there was a collective sigh of relief around Tynecastle when the Northern Irishman got back to his feet.

The visitors had started well and while there was much talk in the build-up to this game about the absence of St Mirren defender Conor McCarthy, however it was his replacement, Charles Dunne who nearly opened the scoring. A corner from the left dropped to the defender, who's effort was denied by the legs of Craig Gordon.

Scotland's number one was alert again when denying a deflected effort from Shaughnessy three minutes before the break, as the home fans grew increasingly frustrated with their sides struggles to create anything of note.

In first half stoppage time, Jak Alnwick was finally called into action, when denying Liam Boyce, before Richard Tait's goal was disallowed for offside in the last action of what was a rather dull 45 minutes.

St Mirren should have taken the lead in the opening ten minutes of the second half after a flurry of chances. Gordon denied McGrath and from the resulting corner Marcus Fraser was denied on the line by Boyce and then again by Gordon, before the stopper tipped substitute Kyle McAllister's effort over the bar.

Up the other end, Gary Mackay-Steven failed to convert after being set up by McKay before Michael Smith was denied expertly by Alnwick with again McKay the creator.

Finally, the deadlock was broken, and it was the home side who went in front against the run of play. McKay's deflected cross fell perfectly into the path of Mackay-Steven (who appeared as if he was about to be substituted), made no mistake, side-

footing the ball into the bottom corner.

Prior to the opening goal it felt like a game that was going to be settled by a mistake or a moment of magic and although it wasn't the opening goal, a moment of magic appeared to settle this contest on 75 minutes.

Charles Dunne got too tight to Liam Boyce, who cleverly won a freekick 30 yards from goal and not for the first time this season it was despatched by Stephen Kingsley. The defender's effort curled away from Jak Alnwick and nestled perfectly in the top corner.

Hearts saw out the final 15 minutes with ease, however Beni Baniyine was stretchered off five minutes from the end and was replaced by Peter Haring, which will be of serious concern to Robbie Neilson and the Hearts support.

Shaughnessy was sent off for a foul on Devlin in stoppage time to cap off an afternoon in which the visitors were punished for missing their chances and are now six games without a win.

The result moves the Jambos up to the second in the league, ahead of Celtic's match with Aberdeen tomorrow.



Premier Sports Cup – Heart of Midlothian v Inverness Caledonian Thistle

25/7/2021.

Hearts play host to Inverness Caledonian Thistle in the Premier Sports Cup at tynecastle Park, Edinburgh, Midlothian. Pic shows: Hearts' winger, Josh Ginnelly, gets away from Caley's Robbie Deas.

Credit: Ian Jacobs