

Looking back at last night's match – Hearts v Aberdeen

After an hour of dominant Hearts pressure against Aberdeen at Tynecastle on Wednesday night, the home side had only one goal to show for their efforts, until Stephen Kingsley rose highest to power home a header from a Barrie McKay corner.

That goal was the defender's fifth of the season and his first of 2022 and it all but secured another three points for the men in maroon.

During the performance against Aberdeen Hearts played a bit more like the side we saw at the start of the season. They were quick to take the game by the scruff of the neck.

The switch to a back four was something fans had been keen to see for some time, whereas again promising signs were shown in attack with Liam Boyce and Ellis Simms linking well together, with both unlucky not to be on the scoresheet.

The return of Craig Halkett in Paisley on Saturday seemed to relax his teammates on the pitch and supporters in the stand and it was the same on Wednesday. While perhaps the classier defenders of Stephen Kingsley and John Souttar will receive more praise, especially as both were on the scoresheet, there can be no doubt that Halkett's presence is crucial.

When asked about the importance of getting Halkett back in the team, his defensive partner Kingsley explained: "It is massive. I felt a bit for Toby Sibbick who came in. We play a certain way and we have done all season and for a new guy coming in who doesn't know the rotations... we play to a very certain style and we have this whole season and that is why we have been pretty successful, because everyone knows their job, and we are comfortable in that job but then Toby comes into a harsh environment, when we had had a couple of bad results and we maybe came away from that style and that made it tough for him.

"But Craig [Halkett] has come back in and he's been his dominant self. He is so aggressive when the ball is in the air and defensively, and not only that. When he has got the ball he then turns into the calm, composed player who knows his role and knows what passes to look for. He has been underrated this season, in my opinion, when you look at how well he has done and I'm delighted to have him back in the team."

This time last week Hearts had only one league win in their last six matches and were facing a daunting seven days with trips to Paisley and Tannadice either side of a home match against Aberdeen.

A comfortable 2-0 victory against St Mirren on Saturday, was backed up by an even more comfortable victory by the same scoreline against the Dons and now with nine matches remaining Hearts appear to be uncatchable, twelve points clear of nearest challengers Livingston.

Hearts got back to doing what they've done so well this season, especially at home, they pressed the opposition and were comfortable when in possession, with their creative players always dropping into dangerous pockets of space to operate in and the defenders good enough with the ball to find them.

Kingsley added: "It was an excellent start to the game. A high tempo. We knocked the ball about well and didn't really give them much of a chance at all, really. So, I'm really pleased with how well the boys played, second half as well. We started a little bit shaky at the very, very beginning of the second half but then we came back into it, and I was glad to get the second goal. It came at a really good time. Then we had Craig saving the penalty and that killed the game off. It was a really dominant performance.

There was some external noise coming from the stands after recent defeats to St Johnstone and Dundee, but Kingsley explained that the players were experienced enough to know that every team will have dips in form during a long campaign and now the aim is to make sure complacency doesn't creep in.

"During a season everyone knows that you are going to have these moments, these spells when it is not going so good. Obviously, we had that ourselves and we knew that the results hadn't been great before the St Mirren game, and we needed to do something about it.

"We know it is only normal to have these spells throughout the season, but the most important thing is the reaction to it. You can't let it dwell for the rest of the season or allow bad habits to come in.

"It is essential that we don't look too far ahead. We have just been through a dry spell so I don't think the boys will look at this now and think 'aye, we've done our jobs'. I don't think we can. And, knowing the characters we have in that dressing room, I don't think we will allow it to happen. We just need to keep kicking on and ticking off games as they come and try to finish with as many points as we can."