

Neilson red card as Hearts consolidate third

The scoreline read Hearts 1, St Mirren 0, courtesy of a strike from midfielder Barry McKay after 29 minutes, but this match also had elements of high drama and farce.

Let's deal with the stats first and the three points earned consolidated Hearts position in third place in the 12-strong table. The Jambos are now on 35 points from their 21 fixtures, six ahead of fourth-placed Aberdeen and 14 behind second-placed Rangers.

But there was so much more to consider from 90 bruising minutes before another packed house at Tynecastle.

The high drama came with a double save from Zander Clark deep into the second-half, leaving St Mirren player Curtis Main holding his head in his hands.

And the farce came when Jambos manager Robbie Neilson was red carded for a second bookable offence. He had been shown a yellow card after 69 minutes by referee David Munro for apparently delaying the game.

Then, eight minutes after that, he picked up the ball on the touchline and put it behind his back before handing it to the fourth official.

Game over for Robbie but not for Hearts who really should have put the outcome beyond doubt in injury time.

Substitute Garang Kuol picked up the ball and spend down the right hand side of the pitch with another substitute, Stephen Hymphrys, to his left and only one St Mirren defender near the play.

Kuol, who came on for McKay after 75 minutes, picked the perfect moment to feed Hymphrys who then fired his right foot shot wide of Trevor Carson's right hand post. A collective sigh of disappointment rang round Tynecastle.

It would have put the icing on the cake for the Egyptian-born debutant, who played in the World Cup for Australia, and who is on loan with Hearts from English cracks Newcastle United.

Hearts had other chances earlier in the game but McKay's right foot shot giving the keeper no chance following a flowing move separated the teams. It was his fourth goal of the season, and now Hearts must prepare for the visit of Aberdeen to Tynecastle on Wednesday (19.45).

They could have injury concerns over Andy Halliday and Alex Cochrane. Halliday, who has just gone through a concussion protocol, was in a defensive wall at a free-kick and was hit on the head by a fierce drive. He was escorted from the field.

Earlier, Cochrane appeared to suffer an ankle injury and Cammy Devlin came on for him after 59 minutes.

To be fair, St Mirren enjoyed spells of possession and pressure and also had opportunities apart from Clark's magnificent double save in a game which also saw England under-21 international James Hill make his debut for the home side.

The loanee from Premiership side Bournemouth from the off looked confident, was eager for the ball, showed a turn of speed, and dug in when he had to and the 21-year-old looked to switch play at every opportunity. He also used his long throw

to ease pressure on Hearts rearguard.

Hearts other newcomer, Japanese forward Yutaro Oda, was on the bench but not used, but Neilson's men have now won three of their last five games and the fans will now look forward to Wednesday with optimism against a side who have lost three of their last five games.

PICTURE: Hill and Kuol leave the field after the match against St Mirren. Picture by ***Nigel Duncan***