

Snodgrass and Shankland inspirational in Derby

Robert Snodgrass did not feature in the Man of the Match nominations by sponsors in Hearts' Derby victory over Capital rivals Hibs, but the 35-year-old and skipper Lawrence Shankland were immense in the 3-0 win in the cinch Scottish Premiership.

Match statistics say Glasgow-born Snodgrass was on the pitch for 90 minutes but did not score and did not provide an assist, but those numbers do not tell the story of the contribution on the day from the player who started his career with Livingston.

Experience oozed out of the player who mopped up danger, initiated attacks and linked well with his team-mates to produce a result which increased Hearts dominance of the fixture. They have not lost a Derby in eight matches, winning five.

Shankland did much the same as Snodgrass further up the pitch. The pair (pictured by *Nigel Duncan* in training, Snodgrass on the left) were a constant menace to Hibs and an inspiration to their team-mates as was Aussie Cameron Devlin who refused to give Hibs players any peace.

Indeed, it was Devlin who hassled Manchester United loanee

Will Fish on the goal-line which led to the opening goal after eight minutes, the ball being sent across the penalty box to Josh Ginnelly whose shot was parried by goalkeeper David Marshall and Shankland was the first to react and did the rest from close in, much to the annoyance of the 3,000 Hibs fans massed behind the goal.

And, it was Shankland who coolly slotted the penalty, just out of the reach of Hibs' goalkeeper Marshall who guessed the right way but just failed to get his fingers to the ball. The penalty was awarded after 38 minutes for handball by Rocky Bushiri after a gap of five minutes while VAR was consulted, first for offside and then for possible handball.

Substitute Stephen Humphries added the third in the fourth minute if the seven minutes of injury time, latching on the ball and sliding it past Marshall into the net. His facial expression summed up perfectly how he felt after a frustrating injury lay-off, the Englishman slipping between two Hibs defenders before keeping his composure to slot home.

Zander Clark, Hearts' goalkeeper, was outstanding, according to manager Robbie Neilson, saving twice from substitute Kyle Magennis to save the shutout and talking to his team-mates and coming for crosses.

Clark appeared to be hit by an object late in the game watched by a full house of over 18,000 and Neilson said that Clark is a Scottish international who has played at the top level for some time. He added: "He has played European football and is a big character."

Neilson argued that the Derby is a key fixture in his book, and one for the fans to savour, and said: "I thought Shankland did what Shankland does best for the first goal, he's predatory, but I also think he leads the line so well, (Josh) Ginnelly has pace and he links so well which is a new dimension (to his game) and is great to see.

“Snodgrass is still a top player, he has never relied on bursting pace but he understands the game so well and, in a central role, he is building the game for us.”

Hibs boss Lee Johnston recognised the contribution of the well-travelled former Scottish international player and put Harry McKirdy on Snodgrass to begin with and then half-time substitute Kyle Magennis, but Snodgrass still found space and he still controlled the game.

Neilson thought Hearts were comfortable for most of the first-half but Hibs were more aggressive in their press in the second and he added: “So, we have had a decent start after the World Cup break, but, for us, it is about winning the next game and that is St Mirren and we need to go down there and win. We need to turn up.”

Hearts were minus Stephen Kingsley and Craig Halkett against their city rivals but Neilson said the players who come in know what they need to do and play the system most weeks so they understand their roles.

He added: “Players are playing for the team so they have to go on there and do it. Yes, we have a number of players out, and we lost our two wing-backs (against Hibs), but we have enough players who are stepping up to the plate.”

Hearts move on to 31 points from their 19 fixtures and are third in the table with Hibs eighth on 23 points from 20 starts and Neilson confirmed Clark was hit “with something” and required attention late in the game, but he added: “I don’t know the details. It was important to win the Derby whether it is here, over there or at Hampden, you have to go and win it. We go there in three or four weeks time and if we do not win it, it is the end of the world.”

Overall, the home side had 51 per cent of possession, however it was 68 per cent in the first-half, an indication of Hearts commend in the game in which the Jambos had 381 passes and

Hibs 366.

Hibs have won only two of their last 11 Premiership matches and their straight-talking manager Lee Johnston, a former Hearts player, did not miss his men in the post-match briefing. He hinted at big changes in a bid to spark his side and said: "We've got to be stronger as a team."

Joe Newell worked hard, Elie Youan showed neat touches and Chris Cadden proved a danger, but Johnston said: "I'm sick to death of mediocrity in the final third. We're brave and bold when we're two goals down, but you've got to be the best player on the pitch at 0-0."

He added: "At key moments in the game they delivered and we didn't."