

Motherwell double sinks Hearts

Robbie Neilson warned Hearts fans that his men would find it tough at Fir Park and so it proved as the Jambos skidded to a disappointing defeat in the cinch Premiership.

The 2-0 victory was the Lanarkshire side's second in four days having edged St Mirren in midweek and it claimed back-to-back wins for interim manager Stuart Kettlewell whose men are now five points clear of the bottom two.

As for Neilson, he has much to ponder until Saturday, March 4 when they face St Johnstone at Tynecastle.

The relegation-threatened Fife Park side dominated most of the game and they went ahead six minutes from the break when on-loan signing Jonathan Obika bundled the ball home at Zander Clark's left hand post after the ball had been fired into the danger area by Sean Goss.

It was his first goal for the club and worse was to come just 17 seconds after the break when a long ball from Kevin van Veen from the left was nodded goalwards by Blair Spittal and the eventual rebound was sent into the net from close range by the same player.

And it could have been three if Max Johnston's left foot shot had found the target instead of flying inches wide of Clark's post.

Earlier, Hearts looked in the mood and dominated possession and territory, but that soon changed as Motherwell introduced width to their game and they also pressed the visitors hard in all areas.

Robert Snodgrass was unable to exert his usual authority and Hearts were hemmed in for spells, but they did break out and Stephen Humphrys picked up a ball following a galloping run by Michael Smith down the right before sending his left foot shot wide of the target.

And Snodgrass broke free to send a left foot cross into the danger area for skipper Lawrence Shankland to head goalwards only to see the ball bounce off the upright.

That, and a Stephen Kingsley free-kick just before the break which clipped the crossbar, proved to be Hearts' best chances of a disappointing match in which the terrier-like Motherwell team gave them little room.

Every one of their hard-working players contributed with Calum Butcher, Paul McGinn and Dean Cornelius among the outstanding men on view.

And the physical presence of big Dutch striker Kevin van Veen and 32-year-old Obika, on loan from English League One club, Morecambe, caused real problems for the Edinburgh side.

The Steelmen provided secure cover for Well goalkeeper Liam Kelly who had little to do during a game played in a gusty wind.

Hearts enjoyed 68 per cent of possession against 32 from the home side and, what's more, Hearts had 594 passes against 284 by the opposition.

Neilson (pictured) rang the changes in a bid to inject a spark to Hearts but the substitutes failed to ignite the men in maroon and the fans vented their frustration at the final

whistle.

Kettlewell asked his players to produce the same aggression and energy which won them three points against St Mirren, and they did.

Hearts remain on 42 points from 26 matches and are third but Capital rivals Hibs are now only five points adrift having moved up to fourth and have 37 points from the same number of fixtures.