

Controversy as Celtic clinch back-to-back titles

Celtic beat Hearts 2-0 at Tynecastle to win their second straight Premiership title under Ange Postecoglou, but this game turned on a red card handed out to Hearts' defender Alex Cochrane in the 45th minute.

The Brighton-born defender fouled Daizen Maeda on the right hand side of the Tynecastle side's penalty box as he chased a lofted ball from defender Anthony Ralston, but outside the area. Cochrane was initially given a yellow card but it was upgraded to red after referee Nick Walsh went to the VAR monitor.

The upgrade sparked fury among home fans, but Hearts' interim manager, Steven Naismith, said: "I am disappointed at the end of the game not having some points on the board. Until the first goal we were in the game, we played well, we caused them (Celtic) problems."

Asked specifically about the red card after the VAR referral. He said: "I don't agree with it. Maeda still had work to do when as he goes into the box, he is travelling at speed and the ball is moving and you have got some recovering players. I think the referee made the right call. He is the closest to it, he sees it and our players were a bit in disbelief when the decision gets checked to be overturned because he (Maeda)

still has a lot of work to do.”

Naismith said: “That was really disappointing as, up to that moment we had the best chances, game was nearly played in the Celtic half and we had a real belief that we could get something from the game.

“It then becomes harder and I think as soon as the red card happens the game hinges on the first goal.”

He added: “Credit to Celtic, the goal was very good. Loads of their goals come from the same movement, but we worked really hard and after we look back there will probably be a lot of positives for us.”

The next three games are the biggest of the season, he said, and they will define where Hearts finish in the cinch Premiership table.

The red card forced Naismith into a change, withdrawing quicksilver Japanese forward, Yutaro Oda, and the interim boss said that the switch was tactical but added: “He’s probably not had a fair chance since he has come to the club.

“He needs to get used to the surroundings, set-up, the city, and he has done that really well and I have built up a good relationship with him and what he is showing on the pitch is all down to him, his intelligence, his football knowledge is really good.

“Unfortunately, today he comes off because of circumstances. On top of that, Shanks (Lawrence Shankland) needs a mention as Shanks led the line brilliantly. When I first played with him for Scotland he was a raw goalscorer, he’s now an all-round forward and is a real asset for us.”

Looking back at the game, Kyogo Furuhashi made the breakthrough after 67 minutes, sliding in to score his 50th goal for The Hoops, and his 30th this season, and substitute

Hyeongyu Oh added a second after 80 minutes, 11 minutes after coming on for Furuhashi, to clinch Celtic's 11th title in 12 years.

That sparked a mass walkout by the Hearts faithful who later also vented their fury on the media taking pictures of the Celtic celebrations, but overall, the Parkhead side have now won the league on 53 occasions.

Postecoglou's men can complete a fifth treble in seven seasons if they dispose of Inverness Caledonian Thistle of the Scottish Championship in the Scottish Cup Final on June 3 while Hearts remain five points adrift of third-placed Aberdeen.

The Dons were edged 1-0 at Rangers thanks to a volley from Todd Cantwell after 64 minutes.

Back at Tynecastle, the party began and Celtic boss Postecoglou heaped praise on his players, telling media: "I'm proud of this group of players and staff. They have maintained a ridiculous standard and are relentless in their approach.

"From the first day (of training), they have not let up and we're a better side this year than we were last. It is very easy not to have the same hunger and desire as we did last year."

PICTURE: Celtic celebrate title win at Tynecastle, picture by ***Nigel Duncan***