

Ayling strikes as Leeds earn narrow win at Tynecastle

Luke Ayling fired low into the net on a slick breakaway after 38 minutes to edge Leeds United into a 1-0 lead and the Elland Road side, recently relegated from the English Premiership, were well worth their narrow victory before nearly 17,000 fans at sun-kissed Tynecastle.

The Lambeth-born defender (pictured leaving the field at Tynecastle by *Nigel Duncan*), who has played nearly 250 games for the Yorkshire club, was just one of a number of individuals in white shirts who stood out in this entertaining pre-season friendly.

Patrick Bamford, who has one England cap, also showed elegant touches, particularly bringing the ball down cleanly and crisply with one foot and lashing it goalwards with another, and he also showed a real turn of pace as the visitors dominated possession.

Another player to catch the eye was English-born, Welsh international, Dan James, who moved to Elland Road after making 50 appearances for Manchester United. His vision and precision passing, plus his awareness on the field, were notable.

When Hearts did break free, they were met with robust

challenges and when Leeds had the ball they were patient in finding a man with Scottish international Liam Cooper a fulcrum in defence and he was always keen to deliver a long ball to either wing or through the middle to force the play.

It was lively James who, from a corner on the left, found Luis Sinisterra and he flashed the ball just wide minutes later and Bamford had another chance when he found some space with half-time looming, but he sent the ball wide.

Sinisterra had buzzed around all afternoon and Hearts' newcomer Frankie Kent did well to block his drive early in the second half, Minutes later James darted in from the left and had the ball in the net after a neat move, but it was ruled off by officials.

It was not all Leeds and Hearts, frustrated by the visitors' aggressive press, found an opening and Yutaro Oda drove from midfield to force United goalkeeper Illan Meslier to save before a Jorge Grant shot was deflected for a corner.

At the other end, Bamford had another chance, this time with his head from an Ayling cross, but the ball flew over and Leeds fashioned another opportunity when substitute Wilfried Gnonto found himself unmarked six yards out from a Jamie Shackleton cross but he headed wide. It seemed, from the stand, easier to score.

Hearts clicked into gear soon after and pressed forward. Substitute Alex Cochrane fired over a corner from the left to the far post and skipper Lawrence Shankland, who had cut a frustrated figure as he was starved of real possession during the game, tried a spectacular volley which flew over the bar.

Bamford was then forced off with an injury who allowed Joseph Mateo, another Leeds substitute – there were nine used by the visitors during the game – the chance to show his skills, but he headed wide when in a good position under pressure in front of the 2,000-plus Leeds fans who had made the trip, including

one branch from Aberdeen.

Hearts used six substitutes during the game, their final warm-up before heading from St Johnstone on Saturday in the cinch Premiership (kick-off 15.00) and Steven Naismith said his men were still developing as a squad, taking on new ideas.

Just after the final whistle, Hearts learned that they had drawn Partick Thistle in the Viaplay Cup, and they have a home tie in the second round, something which was welcomed by technical director Naismith.