

Oda unlocks Saints with clinical finish

Hearts staged a late surge to edge struggling St Johnstone and open their cinch Premiership campaign with a confidence-boosting road win at Perth.

Yutaro Oda unlocked the Saints defence to break the deadlock after 75 minutes and skipper Lawrence Shankland added the second in the sixth minute of injury time.

The 21-year-old Japanese striker, who joined the club earlier this year, spun to finish clinically on the turn to deflate the Saints and Shankland's goal, set up by the returning Liam Boyce (pictured), was icing on the cake.

The defeat, coupled with St Johnstone's poor showing in the League Cup, increases the pressure on their manager, Steven MacLean.

The game kicked-off late due to communication problems with VAR and both sides struggled to find any real fluidity in their play, not surprising as this is the opening competitive fixture of the season.

Frank McAvoy, Hearts' head coach, will however take satisfaction from this result and he made one change from the side which started the club's final pre-season challenge against English side Leeds United last Sunday.

Combative Cammy Devlin was drafted into midfield in place of Jorge Grant and Hearts named Friday's surprise loan signing

from Scottish rivals, Rangers, 20-year-old midfielder Alex Lowry, on the bench.

And highly-rated Lowry made his mark as he was involved in the killer final goal, lifting a pass to Boyce who then fed Shankland who did the rest.

Boyce had actually come close to doubling the visitors lead, the Belfast-born striker, back from a lengthy spell on the sidelines through injury, latched onto the ball and drove to the left-hand side of the box before firing the ball towards goal. St Johnstone's Bulgarian goalkeeper, Dimitar Midov, saved.

And the 26-year-old stopper was also switched on to save from a shot from Hearts' defender, Frankie Kent, another of the Jambos newcomers on parade at Perth.