

It's now six in a row for razor-sharp Shankland

Lawrence Shankland netted for the sixth time in the same number of matches for Hearts to earn the Tynecastle team a narrow 1-0 victory over St Johnstone.

The strike after 61 minutes came from a deflection following a Liam Boyce shot, but the three points secured a third straight league win and confirmed Hearts in fourth place in the 12-strong cinch Premiership.

The Jambos move on to 20 points from 13 starts and remain two points behind St Mirren who beat Livingston 1-0 at Paisley thanks to a Kelly own goal after 37 minutes, but the reverse was a jolt for St Johnstone and their new manager Craig Levein, a former Hearts player, manager and director of football.

The Perth side slip to 11th place having accumulated 11 points, one more than bottom club, Livingston, who have played a game more, with their first defeat in four and the first reverse since Levein took over.

Earlier, Hearts opened brightly, playing high tempo football, and Saints goalkeeper Dimitar Motiv saved twice to deny the eager Jambos, but Saints weathered the storm and Hearts goalkeeper Zander Clark, a former St Johnstone player, was forced into two saves. One, in particular, from Luke Robinson close range, was worthy of mention.

But Hearts were dangerous on the break with Boyce and on-loan Alex Lowry both having opportunities but they failed to make them count.

Overall, Hearts had 60 per cent of possession and registered four shots on target with their rivals having three.

Next for Hearts is a trip to Kilmarnock next Saturday (15.00) while St Johnstone host Celtic on Sunday week (12.00).

Hearts' head coach, Steven Naismith, told BBC Scotland Sport: "We could and should have scored more goals but overall it was really good."

PICTURE: Lawrence Shankland in training by ***Nigel Duncan***