

Killie test for fourth-placed Hearts

Hearts travel to Rugby Park on Saturday looking to extend their recent winning run to four matches against a Kilmarnock side who are two places below the Tynecastle team in the cinch Premiership.

The Gorgie club's nine-point haul has lifted them to fourth in the 12-strong table with 20 points from 13 starts while Kilmarnock have 17 points from 14 games. They have won two of their last five games but drew last time out and lost in the game before that.

Hearts have scored 13 goals and conceded 12 while Killie have scored 15 and let in the same number and the Jambos would love a road win to put pressure on fourth-placed St Mirren who visit Rangers on Sunday (15.00). Remember, Rangers visit Hearts on Wednesday, December 6 (20.00) in the cinch Premiership.

Saturday's narrow success over St Johnstone was the first time in two years that the Jambos have won three in a row and Steven Naismith, Hearts' head coach, felt his men could have scored more goals.

He conceded that there were aspects of the play that required further work on the training pitch but added: "Overall, it was really good."

Naismith will look to continue that good work at Kilmarnock

who have only won one of the last five games against Saturday's opponents. Hearts have won two and there have been two draws, the last coming at Tynecastle on August 13 when the scoreline was blank.

Hearts enjoyed 64 per cent of the possession that day and accumulated 491 passes during the game against 271 from Killie who had four shots on goal against one from the Men in Maroon.

The sides have also met in the Scottish League Cup this term and on-loan midfielder Alex Lowry was the toast of Tynecastle with his late winner in a 2-1 success. He netted two minutes into injury time.

In-form Lawrence Shankland has scored in his last six outings for Hearts and is sure to be a marked man in the clash which kicks off at 15.00. His 61st minute counter at Tynecastle last Saturday was the difference between Hearts and St Johnstone. It came via a deflection from a Liam Boyce shot.

The captain admitted there was a "bit of luck" involved but added: "St Johnstone have a settled team and they are more robust. They defended well and it was tough."

Killie, under Derek McInnes, will make it tough for Hearts and they were held 0-0 at Ross County last Saturday, the day Derek Adams began his third spell as manager of the Dingwall-based team.

McInnes admitted to BBC Sport Scotland: "There was no quarter given, very committed performances from both sets of lads."

The game is special for Kilmarnock who host a Bring a Gift Day in partnership with the Kilmarnock FC Supporters Association and East Ayrshire Churches Homelessness Action.

The initiative is designed to ease pressure on families by helping put presents under trees this year. A collection point will be open outside The Moffat Stand at turnstiles across

from The Park Hotel from 1pm to 3pm and gifts for youngsters of all ages, ranging from toddlers to teenagers, are welcomed.

Meanwhile, away from the field of play, Shankland was one of the first team squad along with Alex Cochrane and Finlay Pollock who helped a young patient, 11-year-old Poppy Porteous, turn on the Christmas lights outside the Royal Hospital for Children and Young People.

And Hearts' hospitality team recently won two accolades in the Best Bar None Edinburgh awards. They won Speciality Entertainment Venue and the Local Award categories.

PICTURE: Lawrence Shankland pictured by ***Ian Jacobs*** against St Johnstone and all other images from the match also by Ian









