

# Maroon Wall triumphs to end 14-year wait

Fans criticised the management team and the style of play at Hearts' annual meeting earlier this week, but the team responded in style with a magnificent 2-0 win at cinch Premiership pace-setters Celtic, snapping a losing streak against The Bhoys and claiming their first away win over the Parkhead side since 2009.

Goals by skipper Lawrence Shankland and a stunning free-kick from Stephen Kingsley (pictured by *Nigel Duncan*) proved the difference between the sides, but the victory was secured by resolute defending with Alex Cochrane and Frankie Kent plus Kye Rowles and Nathaniel Atkinson providing outstanding contributions.

Celtic were restricted to long range shots during the 90 minutes and, admittedly, it was backs-to-the wall for Hearts during long spells of the game, with Shankland reduced to living off scraps.

Indeed, the captain dropped back to help shore up the defence as the home side worked hard to open their account.

Celtic manager Brendan Rodgers rang the changes, including

three at half-time, to claw the deficit back, and one of the men introduced, James Forrest, made a difference, driving down the left hand side of the pitch and really testing Atkinson.

The result could have been different had Kyogo Furuhashi latched onto a diagonal ball to the far post from Luis Palma in the opening minutes of the second-half, but the normally clinical striker failed to connect and the chance slipped away.

And substitute Daizen Maeda was only inches away from connecting with a Matt O'Riley cross from the right in injury time.

Earlier, six minutes before half-time, Kingsley bravely blocked a Palma shot on the goal-line which prevented a certain goal and it seemed that he was injured doing so. He did not appear for the second-half.

Celtic fans voiced their disapproval at the break and many made a sharp exit well before the final whistle as their favourites failed to break through the doggedly determined Maroon Wall.

Earlier, the stadium was stunned when Shankland headed home after 15 minutes. He peeled away from the Celtic defenders and found space at the back post. The Scottish international picked his spot from a corner taken by Jorge Grant on the left of the pitch.

That goal arrived after 15 minutes and Kingsley's came 15 minutes later. Celtic argued about a free-kick award after a foul on Atkinson around 30 yards from goal and Kingsley sent the ball over the wall and into Joe Hart's bottom left corner. The former England goalkeeper dived full-length but could not get a hand to the shot.

So, the fallout means that Hearts move back into third place with 26 points from 17 games. Celtic remain top with 42 points

from 18 fixtures after back-to-back league defeats, but Rangers now have two games in hand and are on 37 points from 16 starts.

St Mirren are fourth also on 26 points but they have played a game more than the Tynecastle team with Kilmarnock fifth with 24 points from 18 fixtures and Hibs also on 24 points in sixth position having played 18 games following their 1-0 defeat at St Johnstone who move into eighth position in the table.

Steven Naismith, Hearts' head coach, told BBC Sport Scotland: "It's a big win. We needed a structure to work from and we needed to be disciplined. We got the result we deserved."

Rodgers apologised to fans and added: "The performance was nowhere near the level of what is expected of a Celtic player and a Celtic team."