

# Shankland again centre stage

Another piece of sublime skill from super sniper Lawrence Shankland secured a 1-0 win in the third minute of injury time for Hearts at Easter Road, the second game running in which the much-talked-about striker has shown his class after another sensational strike against St Mirren at Tynecastle on Saturday.

The goal netted on SkySports is bound to excite more interest in the 28-year-old, Glasgow-born player who has already been linked in the media to a big-money move to Rangers when the transfer window opens.

Indeed, former Hearts winger, Neil McCann, declared on BBC Sportscene: "They (Hearts) need to make him the highest-paid player at the club."

Shankland's injury-time goal was pure class. It came out of a long ball from inside Hearts' half. Shankland had two green shirts to deal with and was under pressure but he kept his composure to curl a delightful left-foot shot into the top corner. David Marshall dived but the former Scotland goalkeeper could do nothing to stop the ball bulging the net.

The Scotland international wheeled away with outstretched arms to receive the adulation of his adoring fans and Steven

Naismith, Hearts' head coach, admitted: "When you've got a top-class striker like Shanks, you never rule anything out."

He told BBC Scotland Sport: "He finds calmness in the box, composure, and it is some finish."

Earlier, Shankland had hit Marshall's right-hand post from the penalty spot, his first miss in 15 since moving to Gorgie, before Tynecastle goalkeeper, Zander Clark, dived to his right to save a Martin Bloyle penalty at the other end in a frantic start to the game before sold-out Easter Road.

McCann said that Shankland, who has 18 months left on his contract with Hearts, continues to impress and added: "He scores a goal out of absolutely nothing. He's just a natural born marksman."

Hearts want Shankland to stay but even Naismith admitted: "If you got an outrageous offer, that's something the club would consider."

Naismith's opposite number, Nick Montgomery, conceded: "It was just one mistake and a moment of quality from a top-quality striker, one of the best in the league. In games like this is is about big players, big moments."

That was undoubtedly a big moment which brought Hearts a third straight win and Shankland will again be centre stage when tenth-placed Ross County, who have 17 points from the same number of games, visit Tynecastle on Saturday (15.00).

That's if County can reach Edinburgh from Dingwall after the mid-week snow. Hearts are third with 32 points from 19 games, two clear of Kilmarnock with a game in hand.

PICTURE: Shankland scoring the game-winner at Easter Road. Picture courtesy of **David Mollison**



Shankland shoots for goal at Easter Road. Picture *David Mollison*



Zander Clark saves penalty at Easter Road. Picture *David*



*Mollison*



Calem Nieuwenhof goes to ground against Hibs at Easter Road.  
Picture *David Mollison*



PICTURE: Shankland v Lewis Miller at Easter Road. Picture *David Mollison*