

VAR controversy as Shankland strike rescues Hearts

Lawrence Shankland came to the rescue as Hearts clawed their way back from 2-0 down to draw with Ross County at Tynecastle and stay in third place in the cinch Premiership.

His strike with 11 minutes of normal time remaining was his sixth goal in five games and secured a 2-2 draw but controversy raged over two penalty claims rejected by referee Alan Muir.

One involved Nathaniel Atkinson and the other Alan Forrest and Hearts' head coach, Steven Naismith, told BBC Scotland Sport: "VAR is here for a reason and, for me, today it has failed."

Naismith also felt his men conceded two "poor goals" but his opposite number, Derek Adams, was disappointed not to win the game and added: "We played some really good football."

County had their last two games cancelled because of the weather and looked fresh while Hearts lacked zip after a tough recent schedule, but the Tynecastle team enjoyed 63 per cent of the possession overall against 37 per cent from the visitors.

The home side also had seven shots on target against four and nine corners against five but it was County who stung the home side inside the first two minutes when Ben Purrington had a goal ruled out after an offside decision in the build-up.

And Hearts' goalkeeper Zander Clark made two good saves from Simon Murray and Josh Sims before the deadlock was broken after 55 minutes.

A slick move down the right exposed the Hearts' rearguard and resulted in Alex Cochrane, who had a fine game, slotting a cross ball past his own goalkeeper.

Six minutes later Tynecastle was silenced with Yan Dhanda fired a superb free-kick past Clark for a 2-0 lead, but the Jambos battled back and substitute Kenneth Vargas broke free to send a low shot past County stopper Ross Laidlaw after 71 minutes.

Then Shankland was fed by Calem Nieuwenhof on the edge of the penalty box eight minutes later and the in-form Scotland striker calmly slotted home.

Hearts are third with 33 points from 20 starts and are two points ahead of fourth-placed Kilmarnock who have played a game more and four in front of St Mirren who have also played 21 fixtures.

The Gorgie men have until Tuesday to recover and they travel to Livingston (15.00) who continue to prop up the table with 12 points from 20 matches.

PICTURE: Lawrence Shankland levels v Ross County. Picture courtesy of **David Mollison**



Alan Forrest falls and Hearts claim a penalty which is waved away by the referee. Picture by **David Mollison**



Alan Forrest handed yellow card for simulation by referee Alan

Muir. Picture courtesy of **David Mollison**



Lawrence Shankland shoots v Ross County. Picture **David Mollison**



Kenneth Vargas scores v Ross County. Picture courtesy of ***David Mollison***