

Grant penalty key as Hearts go ten clear in third

Jorge Grant stood in the penalty box at the Gorgie End with the ball cradled in his arm. He appeared ice cool and as the fans chanted and the clock ticked while VAR officials reviewed an alleged hand ball incident involving former Livingston defender, Nicholas Devlin.

Ironically, it was former Livingston player, Alan Forrest, who had chipped the ball towards the Aberdeen goal which led to the infringement. Referee Kevin Clancy eventually pointed to the spot and Grant took centre stage.

The 30-year-old from Banbury cut a lonely figure as more than 18,000 Jambos waited anxiously for Clancy to blow his whistle. Grant had taken over penalty spot duties from captain Lawrence Shankland who had missed the last three and the former Nottingham Forest, Notts County, Luton Town , Lincoln City and Mansfield Town midfielder stood up to the task.

He calmly dipped his left shoulder. Aberdeen goalkeeper, Kelle Roos, went the wrong way and Grant fired the ball high into the net. How the home fans loved it and the 57th minute penalty was pivotal in the game.

Aberdeen had bossed the first-half with their skipper Graeme

Shinnie and Leighton Clarkson playing key roles. Indeed, the Dons also started the second-half on the front foot, forcing Hearts to defend deep.

Looking back, the visitors created the majority of the chances in the first 45 minutes, Hearts were, frankly, punchless, and North Macedonia striker Bojan Miovski silenced home fans when he slotted high into the Hearts net with his left instep despite a despairing dive from Zander Clark after 24 minutes.

The small contingent of Dons fans in the Roseburn Stand cut short their celebrations when VAR's involvement was confirmed. Referee Clancy moved to the pitchside screen and ruled the Aberdeen striker had fouled Hearts' midfielder, Beni Baningime, as he advanced on goal. His strike was, however, sublime.

Steven Naismith's men got out of jail and capitalised after Grant's goal. Shankland, the regular penalty taker until his recent lapse, was not to be cut out of the action and he scored Hearts' second after 77 minutes.

The striker, who has been the subject of transfer speculation for months, latched onto a ball on the edge of the Aberdeen box. Grant was involved in the move and Shankland calmly sized up the situation and without fuss stroked the ball into the net with the outside of his right boot. Roos had no chance. Game over.

It was the Scotland striker's 19th goal of the season and his eighth in the last eight games and it underlined the Jambos' superiority over Aberdeen, extending the Capital combine's unbeaten home run against the men from the Granite City to 12 games.

Hearts statistics men say you have to cast your mind back to 2017 to find the last time Aberdeen returned up the A90 with three points.

It would, however, be wrong not to mention other contributions to the victory which consolidates Hearts in third position in the 12-strong table with 42 points from 23 games, that's ten points ahead of fourth-placed Kilmarnock and 13 in front of St Mirren who are fifth.

Stephen Kingsley mopped up superbly at the back, Frankie Kent made some telling challenges and under-pressure headers and newcomer, Dexter Lembikisa's all round play and willingness to break forward, has quickly endeared him to home fans.

Hearts had 55 per cent of possession against 45 per cent from the opposition and five shots on target against one from the Dons. Both teams had seven corners and Shankland, Forrest and Vargas all came close to adding to the home side's lead. Roos made several quality saves.

All in all, a good day for Hearts who travel to Dundee next Saturday (15.00). Aberdeen host Dundee on Tuesday and their manager, Barry Robson, said: "We were the best team in the first half and for the first ten or 15 minutes of the second-half we were the team doing the attacking. Then you get a penalty against you. The bit I'm angry about is us as a team after that."

Naismith (pictured) said: "We played well in the second half. It was two but it could have been more."