

Shankland double helps secure quarter-final spot

Hearts claimed a magnificent seven straight wins with a 4-1 victory over well-organised Airdrie in the fifth round of the Scottish Gas, Scottish Cup, and earn a quarter-final tie against Morton at Cappielow.

It was a thoroughly professional performance topped off by three goals in a devastating ten-minute spell in the first-half, but hard-working Airdrie made this a contest in front of the BBC Television cameras.

Calem Nieuwenhof was one of the marksmen and he told BBC Sport Scotland: "We started well. I am just trying to get consistency in this team and we are in a really good spot just now in the league. The team is gelling and we are starting to play together. I am really happy."

Man of the Match, Lawrence Shankland, commenting on the draw, said: "It will be difficult going there as it is a tight pitch."

Airdrie, fifth in the cinch Championship, and a side who had knocked out St Johnstone in the last round, made it tough for the cinch Premiership outfit, and they made their intentions clear from the first whistle, forcing the play and they earned a corner in first minute. It came to nothing but, Hearts soon threatened.

Alex Cochrane sent in a teasing ball from a free-kick and Lawrence Shankland made contact but failed to test the goalkeeper.

The visitors controlled possession with Beni Banningime picking up loose balls in midfield and Jorge Grant busy, but Airdrie broke and Craig Halkett made a hash of a clearance putting the Jambos defence under threat.

They survived and broke to the other end. Shankland started the flowing move in midfield and the ball was fed to Cochrane on the left wing. He sent an inch-perfect pass square into the penalty box and Shankland stole in to send the ball into the net for his 23rd goal of the season so far. Time: 11 minutes.

It was not all one-way and Airdrie's Arron Lyall chipped the ball towards goal and Craig Gordon had to backpedal as the ball flew inches over. Hearts had another scare after 14 minutes when Nikolay Todorov raced in to prod the ball towards the Hearts goal from close range, but Gordon got down to block.

Airdrie hit the bar after 17 minutes through Mason Hancock following a Charlie Telfer corner which is flicked on, but Hearts pounced seconds later. Kenneth Vargas took off down the right and Halkett found him with an inch-perfect pass. The Costa Rican-born striker took a fine first touch and bundled the ball into the net for 2-0. Time 18mins.

Three minutes later Hearts went further in front. Nieuwenhof picked up the ball just inside the Airdrie half. He advanced then cut inside as he reached the penalty box before losing a defender with a dummy before firing home with his weaker left foot.

Hearts suffered a blow when Halkett had to leave the field after 25 minutes and Kye Rowles, who has been on Asian Cup duty with Australia, came on. Vargas threatened again, lifting the ball over a defender, but he could not find a colleague,

then Forrest forced a great save from Joshua Rae, catching the ball first-time.

Airdrie kept trying to play their way into the game and home captain Adam Frizzell drifted into the box to latch onto a wonderful ball from Mason Hancock on the left wing to head the ball wide of a diving Gordon to signal that the home side were not a spent force. Time 34 minutes.

It was his first goal this season and Shankland became agitated as Airdrie were back in the tie. He urged his men to up the pace and Cochrane and Shankland worked an opening from the left which again threatened the Airdrie goal and minutes later Forrest let fly and Rae palmed the ball over the bar,

The scoreline stayed that way to the break but Hearts introduced Kyoshuke Tagawa, celebrating his 25th birthday, for Vargas at the restart. Airdrie pressed hard and Charlie Telfer tested Gordon from the right.

But, Hearts were always threatening and Shankland fed Forrest in the box with a cute backheel but Forrest blasted over. It should have been No 4. Forrest tested Rae with a shot from the left flank before Steven Naismith, Hearts' head coach, introduced teenager Macaulay Tait.

The home side continued to probe as Hearts brought in former Dundee United player Scott Fraser, on loan from Charlton Athletic, and goal machine Shankland slotted his second after 72 minutes. Fraser fed Shankland and he coolly slotted the ball over Rae for 4-1. Game over.

On-loan Dexter Lembikisa left the field to be replaced by Nathaniel Atkinson as the clock ticked down and Forrest tested Rae with a shot from the left hand side of the box near the final whistle.

PICTURE: Lawrence Shankland scored twice against Airdrie.
Picture by **David Mollison**