

Late Vargas strike sends Hearts to Hampden

Kenneth Vargas buried a shot low into the net to deny battling Greenock Morton and set up a Scottish Gas Scottish Cup semi-final tie with Rangers on the weekend of April 20 and 21 at Hampden. Celtic play managerless Aberdeen.

The strike came four minutes from the end of regulation time and a run from inside the Hearts half from midfielder Beni Baniangime cut through the Morton defence.

He fed Lawrence Shankland who held off two defenders to allow Vargas the opportunity and he made no mistake with his right foot.

Earlier, the Costa Rica-born forward had missed a golden chance, sending the ball just over the bar with the outside of his right foot as the home side tired and appeared to be hanging on the later stages.

Dougie Imrie, Morton's manager, promised a "horrible" evening for the Jambos and he was true to his word, bearing down on Hearts and the West of Scotland club had their chances.

Craig Gordon, now 41-years-of age but still keen to play for Scotland in the Euros, did his prospects no harm with several big saves, one in each half, with Scotland manager, Steve

Clarke, in the stands watching.

The first came in the opening five minutes when the keeper spread himself to deny Darragh O'Connor following a free-kick and then in the second, as Morton enjoyed a good spell of possession, he stuck out a foot to stop a John Baird header.

Morton were tough to break down and when the Jamos broke through goalkeeper Ryan Mullen did his job well, but Hearts continued to play possession football and their patience and resilience was rewarded with that late goal.

Steven Naismith, Hearts' head coach, told BBC Sport Scotland that his men produced a professional performance against a side which tried to cause them problems.

He conceded that the Men in Maroon should have scored earlier but praised Vargas for his strike. Naismith said: "He (Vargas) has great attributes and instinctively makes the right choice."

Former Scotland, Manchester United and Aberdeen goalkeeper, Jim Leighton, who lifted the Scottish Cup on four occasions, made the draw and paired Hearts with Rangers, a side who destroyed the Tynecastle team 5-0 in a recent cinch Premiership clash.

Naismith, a former Rangers player, said: "We were poor defensively at Ibrox and it will be a tough game but we are all about continued progression and we have developed as a unit since then."

PICTURE: Kenneth Vargas celebrates scoring at Livingston in the cinch Premiership and he was on the mark again at Cappielow. Picture **David Mollison**