

Naismith delighted and Rodgers annoyed after Tyne clash

Steven Naismith, Hearts' head coach, felt his men deserved their 2-0 victory over cinch Premiership title candidates, Celtic, who were reduced to ten men early on. His opposite number, Brendan Rodgers, felt an outside force had decided the game and the defeat stopped The Hoops going to the top of the league.

Earlier, Celtic had a penalty saved by the legs of Zander Clark, Hearts had a 'goal' from Lawrence Shankland ruled off for offside, and there could only have been centimetres in it, and the Jambos scored two goals.

One was from the penalty spot after a Celtic player had been adjudged to have committed a handball in the box and the other followed a slick, front to back move, finished off by with aplomb and the minimum of fuss from a natural-born striker, Shankland.

Overall, there were enough talking points in this incident-packed game witnessed by over 17,000 fans, to keep the neutral in the SkySports audience happy. The Hearts fans, well they

loved it and the victory secured a win double over the defending champions this term, the Men in Maroon having secured a win by the same scoreline earlier in the campaign.

In that game just before Christmas, Shankland scored (15mins) along with Stephen Kingsley (30mins) and the Stirling-born player had a huge impact in this tussle as part of a revamped defensive unit which also included Toby Sibbick.

Back to Naismith who told the post-match press conference: "It was an entertaining game, one that I think we deserved to win, and there were a lot of action points I suppose.

"We started the game well which got the crowd involved, there was a good atmosphere, and then throughout the game at the right times we controlled the game, we asked Celtic questions."

He conceded that both penalties, one from Celtic and the other to Hearts, converted by Jorge Grant, were "soft". The Celtic one first. Naismith said: "Alex (Cochrane) put his foot on the ground and the Celtic player kicked him. Ours is the handball rule that I think nobody is happy with and the red card is a red card."

It was handed out to Hyunjun Yang after he lifted his foot high on Hearts' left hand touchline on Cochrane. Time 11 minutes. Naismith said: "I thought we controlled the game really, really, well which makes it a satisfying afternoon.

"We saved a penalty and we scored with the one we got. It is what is is. Overall, I think we deserved our win, comfortably. It was two and it could have been more. We need to kick on. We are in a good place.

"We need to go into games against teams at the top of the league feeling confident we can compete and, hopefully, get points and then in other games we need to stamp our authority on it.

“The other goal was offside, only just, and it was a brilliant performance against a really good team. We have a good solid group who all want to get better and learn and that showed today.

“They can see there is progress and can see we are in a good place. Competition is high. Toby (Sibbick) comes in today from not having many minutes and does really well. When you get your moments you have to take them and I thought the players who came in did that.”

Naismith revealed that Shankland has been carrying a knock recently and was a doubt before the game but the Glasgow-born striker was adamant he wanted to play.

Naismith he added: “He (Lawrence) is the best striker in Scotland and he is going to score goals, but I don’t not want to single anybody out, the whole team played well, Zander saved a penalty and our work on and off the ball was good as well.”

Rodgers said: “My feeling is that the game was decided by officials. On the field and outside of the field. You guys have known me long enough to know that I don’t comment on officials, but today that felt it was really poor officiating.

“The first one, the sending off was no force. Show a still image of that then of course you see the foot up with the head there but it is not the reality of the move.

“Don (Robertson, the referee) got it right on the field. It was a high boot so it was a yellow card, no malice, no force. For John Beaton to actually look at that on VAR and to say that was a sending off is incredible.

“The second one is worse, to have a penalty go against you for that then there will be penalties every single weekend and midweek. I do not know what he is supposed to do.

“Tomo, he is jumping he got a nudge and he is coming down and the ball falls onto his arm, there is no intention to move it or anything. Again, you get the chance to look at it, to see it, so to give that it left us with those two decisions and left us with an uphill task in the game.

“Credit to my players, they fought and they kept going. They (Hearts) got a bit of luck in the second-half. Their keeper as made a few good saves and if we get one of them it changes the momentum of the game, but it was a poor day for officials.”

For the record, Celtic’s on-loan striker Adam Idah, had a spot kick saved after 11 minutes, Yang was red-carded after 16 minutes and Grant’s penalty, a strong shot with his right foot after sending Celtic goalkeeper, Joe Hart, the wrong way, came after 43 minutes.

Shankland’s goal arrived in 56 minutes with Calem Nieuwenhof assisting. The Aussie midfielder, who has been developing his game since arriving in Scotland, slipped in the Celtic penalty box but still managed to get the ball to Shankland who did what Lawrence does best.

Celtic are two points adrift of their Old Firm rivals, Rangers, while the Jambos are 13 points clear in third ahead of fourth-placed St Mirren.

PICTURE: Mascots before the Celtic game and below a section of the crowd at Tynecastle. Pictures by **Nigel Duncan**

