

Watkins strike earns Killie share of the points

Unmarked Marley Watkins received the ball in space on the left edge of the Hearts' penalty box. He looked up, picked his spot and then sent an exquisite shot with the inside of his right boot high into the net.

It was inch-perfect. Zander Clark, Hearts' international goalkeeper, made a vain attempt to reach the ball but he failed and it bulged the net. Time 67 minutes.

The 18,000-plus Hearts fans in the crowd at this cinch Premiership clash fell silent. Cue joy for the 500-plus travelling support.

Watkins wheeled away, arms raised, and the London-born forward, who has two caps for Wales, was the toast of his team-mates.

He joined the Rugby Park outfit from Aberdeen after spells with Bristol City, Norwich City, Barnsley, Inverness Caledonian Thistle and Hereford United.

And the goal by the 33-year-old was significant as it secured a top six finish for the Ayrshire side who had fallen behind from a headed goal by Costa Rica international, Kenneth Vargas.

Unsurprisingly, Lawrence Shankland was involved in the move. He controlled a cross ball from the left with his chest and took it out wide on the right before cutting to the goal-line.

Then the Scottish international delivered an deft chip to the far post. Vargas did the rest under real pressure and it was a great way to celebrate signing a five-year deal with the Jame Tarts in midweek. It was his eighth of the season. Time 10 minutes.

Home fans must have felt that more goals would come against a physical side in a bruising clash which could have gone either way, but Derek McInnes' men had some good chances of their own.

Stuart Findlay glanced a header wide and Joe Wright saw his header graze the bar then Watkins headed from six yards on half-time. Clark managed to push the ball over the bar.

Shankland forced Dennis into a diving save in the first-half and Vargas had a sniff just after the break.

Late-on, the Rugby Park men blocked three shots at the edge of the box, but Killie boss McInnes felt his men were the ones most likely to score during the second period.

That's despite Hearts enjoying 60 per cent of possession during the 90-plus minutes against 39 from their rivals.

Steven Naismith, Hearts' head coach, said the game was a hard one coming as it did after the international break, claiming his men have travelled extensively and they had one day to prepare.

He felt Killie's goal could have been prevented in the build-up and added: "I'm frustrated as when we go 1-0 up we had some good play."

McInnes said: "I was disappointed to lose the first goal but we had good chances in the first half and we were good value

for at least our point.”

PICTURE: Kenneth Vargas feels the pain earlier this season against Hibs. Picture **David Mollison**