

Naismith: 'There was a lot I liked about us today'

Rangers manager Philippe Clement thought the 0-0 game in the William Hill Premiership at sun-kissed Tynecastle was a game of two halves, Hearts took the first 45 minutes and the Ibrox men the second. A share of the points was correct, he concluded, on the day.

Steven Naismith, Hearts' head coach, felt his men should have won, creating, he said, good chances and good moments, more of them than their rivals.

The correctness of the summary by both managers could depend, of course, on which colours you wear.

What is not in doubt was that the 18,448 fans who turned up, and the nationwide audience on SkySports, were royally entertained in ideal conditions for watching a game of football, sun and a light breeze.

And this match had goalmouth incident, desperate defending, controversy when one of Rangers' close season signings, Connor Barron, was alleged to have handled the ball in the box, silky movement, particularly from the Jambos in the first half, and a shot from Cyriel Dessers which crashed against the bar in the second-half.

Both clubs are, however, in transition and underlying that was

the introduction of several players on both sides who were captured during the summer.

Indeed, the transfer of Malachi Boateng to Tynecastle was only completed on Saturday morning. He took his bow with seven minutes of normal time remaining, replacing lively Kenneth Vargas.

Another of the recent acquisitions, defender Gerald Taylor, has quickly become a favourite, and he had the crowd on their feet with a surging run from inside his own half deep into Rangers territory during the first half, a period in which Hearts played their best football.

Jorge Grant linked well with another new boy, Yan Dhanda, who showed a pleasing willingness to provide probing passes to take the home side into enemy territory, and combative Aussie midfielder, Cammy Devlin, indicated that hours of work on the training pitch is paying off. He, on this showing, appears to have developed his game and is now feeding his colleagues with crisp, telling passes, driving them forward.

Barrie McKay, whose stop-start season was interrupted by injuries last term, looked to be heading back to his best, and he also put in a number of tackles when Rangers threatened.

Kye Rowles is continuing to develop a solid partnership with Frankie Kent who once again showed his willingness to a real threat in the opposition penalty box.

James Penrice played his part and, indeed, had a chance early on to open his account with the Jambos after completing his move in the summer, but Jack Butland made the save in the Rangers goal. Lawrence Shankland sniffed around the box all game and goalkeeper Zander Clark produced a great stop with his extended right hand as Tom Lawrence arrowed the ball just under the bar.

Two other newcomers, Blair Spittal, who came on after 64

minutes, and Daniel Oyegoke also made an appearance from the bench as Naismith rang the changes in a bid to break the deadlock.

Later, he told the media: "I think it was an entertaining game for a nothing each. The headlines will all be about Rangers dropping points and all that but I think we should have won the game, we created good chances, we had really good moments, and we had more of them, the first half performance was really good.

"They then make the changes to get a foothold in the game, and they did to a point, but I think it was all in front of us and did not really cause us too many problems. They were direct so, in the percentage of the game, they are going to get some chances in the back of that directness, but I thought we played really well today. The only thing that was missing was a goal or two.

"In the game there are always things you can do better, but we controlled the game first half, the only thing that was missing was the finishing touches but I must say that the first month of any season sees chances go abegging because everybody is not into their stride, but there was a lot I liked about us today."

Clement countered: "I was not satisfied with the first half, for sure the first half hour, where we lacked intensity in duels and a lot of long balls and we did not win the first duel, also not the second duel also not the third duel, and, because of that, we came under pressure from Hearts. Also, with the ball we were not calm enough, not brave enough also to do the right things with the ball and to be in the right position.

"It was really important to have 15 minutes during half time to put things straight, to show them where we were going wrong and to change that and that changed a lot. Second half we took

control of the game and we played better football and created good chances also and we dominated the second half. There are things to work on for the future.”

PICTURE: Hearts v Rangers before kick-off at Gorgie by ***Nigel Duncan***