

Late Shankland strike earns Hearts a point

Lawrence Shankland clenched his fists in celebration after bundling the ball home from close range to earn bottom club Hearts only their second point of the season in the William Hill Premiership.

His strike, his first so far this term, came in the 96th minute of a frustrating game for the home side in which Hearts created a number of chances which they failed to convert against a resolute and determined Ross County side.

The men from Dingwall, without a win on the road in over a year, had edged ahead near the end of the first half with a sweet strike following a flowing move from inside their own half.

However, the 1-1 draw snapped a depressing run of eight straight defeats for the Gorgie combine and will help boost fragile confidence ahead of their midweek trip to Azerbaijan in the UEFA Europa Conference League against Belarus side Dinamo Minsk.

The Jambos still prop up the rest in the 12-strong table and are a point adrift at the bottom while Ross Country are in seventh spot, five points ahead of Saturday's opposition.

Hearts' interim head coach, Liam Fox, said the club were not celebrating earning a point in a home draw and he added: "The

message I want to get across is that the players kept going right to the end and we can do better.”

He used Academy defender, Adam Forrester, against County after news that Gerald Taylor will be out for a long spell with a knee problem, and Fox felt the 19-year-old, who has impressed in the club’s B team, acquitted himself well.

Fox, in the immediate aftermath, said it was too early to say if there were any injuries to the squad ahead of their Euro trip and Don Cowie, Ross Country’s manager, was up-beat despite the late loss of two points.

The former Hearts midfielder said his men were working hard for each other, putting their bodies on the line and he added: “I am extremely proud of the group.”

He was also delighted with the quality of their goal on a breakaway after 35 minutes against the run of play. Belfast-born Ronan Hale, playing only his seventh game for the Scottish club after switching from Cliftonville in the summer, flicked the ball on to Connor Randall.

He was held up by a challenge from Hearts’ Man of the Match, Beni Banningime, but the ball broke back to the 26-year-old striker who showed great composure to cut inside before curving the ball with his right foot past driving Craig Gordon and into the net.

It was a real stunner for a Hearts side who had dominated possession and territory but the travelling fans celebrated wildly in a corner of the Roseburn stand.

County kept things tight as Hearts forced their rivals further and further back as the clock ticked on.

The home side had fashioned chances throughout the match. Substitute Barry McKay fired over from a good position, Shankland hit the bar during a period of intense pressure from

the Men in Maroon, Shankland headed wide when he was found unmarked at the back post by a superb cross from the left from Stephen Kingsley, Alan Forrest forced a save, and Shankland was denied late-on when a left-foot shot was kicked to safety by Ross Laidlaw, the County goalkeeper.

That escape came seconds before the goal. It followed a corner on the left taken by former County player, Yan Dhanda, recruited by the Tynecastle team during the summer. The ball fell into a ruck of players, including Hearts' goalkeeper Craig Gordon who had left his area to add to the pressure, and it was directed goalwards by a part of Shankland's body.

The strike did not stop the boo boys in the crowd of 18,399, but Fox can take heart from the never-say-die attitude of his men.