

# Critchley looking for Hearts to show their true quality

Neil Critchley takes Hearts to St Johnstone on Saturday with the new head coach looking for the players to show their quality and to bounce back after what he termed “massive frustration” at letting slip a 1-0 lead to skid to a 2-1 defeat to Kilmarnock at Tynecastle on Wednesday.

The home reverse sees Hearts looking up at the rest in the 12-strong William Hill Premiership and the scoreline hurt even more as the new head coach felt that for the first 58 minutes the Men in Maroon dominated play.

Indeed, the first half numbers showed that the home side enjoyed 71 per cent of possession, had four shots to one against, had six corners to one in reply and completed 301 passes against 122 by the opposition.

Alan Forrest broke the deadlock after 44 minutes and Critchley said: “We scored a really good goal and the frustration is more about the goals we conceded, that is what cost us the game.”

The English-born coach told Hearts TV that when you are 1-0 up at home you are in the ascendancy, and he felt his men had a couple of chances after the break to score. They failed to

make the opportunities count.

Critchley said: "We were under no pressure, quite comfortable. Craig (Gordon) did not have much to do but, in the space of five minutes, we find ourselves from being in a good position to being in a poor position and chasing the game."

For the first goal after 58 minutes, Critchley said his men failed to deal with a long kick. Killie skipper Kyle Vassell tussled with Jambos defender, Frankie Kent, then Matty Kennedy, following up, put the ball in the back of the net, far too easily.

The second goal arrived for Vassel five minutes later following a long throw in and it brought relief to the player who had not found the net against Tromso on August 8 in the Conference League qualifiers.

Critchley said: "You have got to get the details right, you do not stay in front of a man at the near post, he gets first contact, second contact and we get outmuscled inside the penalty area.

"We have got to be much stronger and stand up to those moments, better than we have done in recent games, and I was disappointed with our response after that."

Hearts, in fact, had 30 minutes to rectify the deficit but failed and disappointed Critchley said: "There was more than enough time to get back into the game but lost our way a little bit."

The fed-up gaffer added: "We huffed and puffed, lacked some intelligence and some quality and did not really look as if we would get that equaliser which is hugely disappointing."

It was the first time that the former Blackpool boss has suffered a defeat since he arrived in the Capital and points are now a must on Saturday at Perth. St Johnstone are ninth

with ten points from 11 starts and also come into the clash on a downer having lost 3-1 at St Mirren in midweek.

Eying Saturday, he said: "We will find out a lot about the group in the next few days and you always learn a little more in defeat. I've seen the good side when we are winning now we will see what it is like when we lose a game.

"We have to go to St Johnstone on Saturday and show what we are as a group, show some character and I am looking forward to the next few days."

PICTURE: Neil Critchley on the touchline at Easter Road by ***Ian Jacobs***