

Dream start for Critchley as Jambos stun Saints

Daniel Oyegoke stroked the ball into the roof of the net from just outside the St Mirren penalty box giving Ellery Balcombe absolutely no chance. Cue broad smiles from the player and his teammates and from all around sun-kissed Tynecastle, apart from the 600 visiting fans in the Roseburn Stand.

The 21-year-old, Barnet-born's first goal for the Jambos since he arrived from London side Brentford came just one minute into the second-half to put the Men in Maroon, who had dominated possession in the opening session, a 2-0 lead.

They joyfully added two more strikes before the final whistle to run out convincing 4-0 winners and lift the Gorgie side off the bottom of the 12-strong William Hill Premiership.

Remember, this result came against a side which had beaten them 2-1 on September 21 in Paisley, just before the international break, a scoreline which had deep implications, costing former head coach, Steven Naismith, his job along with his assistants, Gordon Forrest and Frankie McAvoy.

Hearts' first victory of the current league campaign lifted

them off the bottom of the table and into the second-bottom position with five points, the same as Capital rivals, Hibs, but the Jambos have a goal difference of minus five against minus six for the Easter Road combine. Hearts have, however, played nine games and Hibs eight.

Guess what, the bottom two clash next Sunday in Leith (12.00) and it's a game which could have come at the right time for Hearts, now guided by Crewe-born head coach, Neil Critchley, and his assistant, Mike Garrity.

They have only been in the hot seat for only four days prior to Saturday. The fans were expectant, indeed, hopeful that a new broom would sweep away the hurt generated by a dismal start to the season.

The majority of the 18,757 inside the ground warmly welcomed Critchley ahead of kick-off, but there was tension. Another defeat could not be contemplated, but this Hearts team came out of the trap with purpose, passion and pace.

They pegged Stephen Robinson's men back, forcing errors, and were rewarded. Critchley clenched his fists in delight on the touchline when a slick move started by Blair Spittal who fed Beni Baniyime. He who moved the ball on to skipper Lawrence Shankland.

His stabbed pass with the outside of his right boot into the danger area found the Costa Rica international who converted low past Ellery Balcome and it fired the home side who continued to drive forward in a bid to add to their tally.

Aussie defender Kyle Rowles had a chance at the back post as half-time loomed, but he sent the ball wide, but there was a scare for home fans when Killian Phillips popped up at Craig Gordon's right-hand post, beating Oyegoke to the jump, but he failed to find the net. A let-off.

The second session opened with a stunning strike. Delighted

boss Critchley said he had no idea where Oyegoke's goal came from, but it completed a slick sequence of passes, shifting play across the pitch, and certainly eased tension.

The Buddies came more into the play in the second half, but Blair Spittal almost made it three when goalkeeper Balcombe's attempted clearance hit the former Motherwell man and trundled towards the unguarded net, but the goalkeeper recovered in time to save his embarrassment. A let-off.

Critchley rang the changes in a bid to secure a confidence-building win and Hearts Academy graduate, James Wilson, was one of four substitutes used. He came on after 76 minutes and ten minutes later bundled the ball home from close range after a Yan Dhanda free-kick on the right to the far post was nodded across the goal by Frankie Kent.

The 17-year-old Wilson was in the right place at the right time to tap-in his first goal for the senior side and it was no wonder that he raised his arms in celebration. There was more. Three minutes into injury time, Blair Spittal, who with Dhanda and James Penrice had been influential throughout, profited from gritty play in the middle of the pitch from another substitute, Cammy Devlin.

The determined Aussie picked up a ball on half-way, drove forward, despite the attention of a Saints player, and laid the ball off to the former Motherwell man who calmly picked his spot and guided the ball beautifully into the corner of the net from the edge of the box.

Cue more celebrations. Bring of the Hibeas was heard around the ground as Saints boss Robinson fumed in the away dugout. His face spoke volumes. A disappointed man, certainly, as his team have lost seven of their last ten games in all competitions and, at Tynecastle, they failed to really test Gordon in the Hearts goal.

The 41-year-old, Scotland international, however, did require

on-field treatment after diving bravely at Roland Idowu's feet late on from a cross from the right, but this was undoubtedly Hearts' day. They had 60 per cent of possession against 40 per cent from the opposition and made 509 passes against 339. The home men also had four shots on target with none in reply, however St Mirren had created six corners to one by Hearts.

The result was one to savour for Critchley a day after his 46th birthday and only four days since he took charge. The coach said: "When you go to sleep, you dream of a few goals and a clean sheet."

His new charges delivered in full and the ex-Liverpool youth coach added: "The players have been really receptive to me this week and I'm delighted for the supporters to go home happy."

Critchley admitted that St Mirren's starting formation surprised them, but Hearts made changes at half-time.

The first goal he argued was "massive" but he felt that Hearts could have controlled the game better in the second-half. He added: "The best form of defence is attack."

Robinson declared: "There were not enough people who took responsibility. We made stupid decisions, poor decisions. This performance is not acceptable., arguably one of the worst performances since I've been here."

PICTURE: The scoreboard at Tynecastle tells the full story, a 4-0 win for the Jambos. Picture **Nigel Duncan**