

Palaversa fires home late to deny struggling Hearts

Aberdeen maintained their 100 per cent record to keep pace with leaders Celtic at the top of the table at the expense of ten-man Hearts, but the Tynecastle men pushed the Dons hard in a pulsating game at Pittodrie.

The visitors can, however, take positives from the performance against high-flying Aberdeen who are now 19 points clear of the Jambos who finished third in the Premiership last season.

The home side go off to a tremendous start in front of a packed house of 19,175 fans in the Granite City when 21-year-old, Finnish winger, Topi Keskinen netted after only two minutes with Jamie McGrath setting up the chance, the ball appearing to flick off the foot of Aussie defender, Kye Rowles, and looping over Tynecastle goalkeeper Craig Gordon.

It was the worst possible start for a side propping up the rest in the 12-strong William Hill Premiership, but the visitors could have been level. Dons defender, Gavin Molloy, passed the ball into the path of Lawrence Shankland who fired straight at goalkeeper Dimitar Mitov. A major let-off for the home combine looking to maintain their unblemished record.

Jimmy Thelin's men pressed forward in search of a second however it was the Tynecastle team who had a great chance but the ball hit off Shankland's shin from close range.

The Gorgie side's interim manager, Liam Fox, introduced James Penrice for Stephen Kingsley and minutes later Shankland had his name taken for a challenge on McGrath, but soon after the Scotland striker provided the pass for defender Frankie Kent to level after 34 minutes, heading home at the back post from close range.

That lifted Fox's men and Blair Spittal, recruited from Motherwell during the summer, was given time to curl the ball into the corner of the net for a tremendous counter. Time: 63 minutes.

Aberdeen were rocked, but not for long as Keskinen crossed and the ball was deflected into the path of Nicky Devlin after 65 minutes. The player, who was called into Scotland's squad for internationals in Croatia on Saturday and at home to Portugal on Tuesday, October 15, volleyed home from the edge of the box.

Thelin made a double change and Duk, who went AWOL in the summer in a bid to get a move away from Pittodrie, and striker Ester Sokler, came on with ex-Hibs forward Nisbet and Leighton Clarkson coming off.

Ante Palaversa and Shayden Morris were introduced in place of Keskinen and McGrath in the Dons midfield and then Hearts suffered a massive blow after 75 minutes when Jorge Grant was red carded for a second yellow card, pulling down Duk.

Fox sent on Alan Forrest and Beni Banningime for Yan Dhanda and Kenneth Vargas as Hearts dug in and tried to earn a valuable point from the game.

The Jambos survived a penalty claim as a Sokler header deflected off a Hearts defender but they went ahead minutes later when Ante Palaversa netted against the ten men with two minutes of regular time remaining.

Duk drove to the by-line, cut the ball back and 24-year-old

Croatian midfielder Palversa did the rest, firing into the roof of the net for his first goal in Aberdeen colours.

Six minutes of injury time was indicated and the travelling fans kept hoping that their favourites could pull an unlikely leveller out of the bag, but the home side held out for a 13th straight win.

The Jambos fans did, however, applaud their men for their efforts and the Tynecastle team must take heart from their showing at a club which is flying high.

PICTURE: Jorge Grant (middle) shown a red card at Pittodrie.
Picture ***Nigel Duncan***