

Bhoys blow Hearts away with second-half blitz

Four goals, two of them in four nightmare second-half minutes, saw William Hill Premiership pace-setters Celtic ease clear of Hearts and the chasing pack in the William Hill Premiership with a 4-1 victory at Tynecastle.

Yet, it could have been a different story had the home side taken their chances against The Bhoys in the opening half.

The reverse leaves the Tynecastle team in deep trouble at the foot of the table. Hibs prop up the rest with eight points, Hearts have nine, Kilmarnock 12, St Johnstone 13 while Ross County and Dundee both have 15.

Hearts have played 14 games while Kilmarnock and Hibs have played 13 as have Dundee.

Earlier, Blair Spittal had a clear sight of goal in the second minute after a superb move started by Kye Rowles who fed Lawrence Shankland. He nodded to Spittal who found himself free in the box but he shot straight at Kasper Schmeichel.

Then James Penrice let fly from 25 yards but Schmeichel was there again as Hearts opened brightly, but Malachi Boateng was forced to clear from near the penalty spot as Celtic drove forward and Daizen Maeda headed over when in a good position.

Rowles then made a crucial defensive header as Celtic continued to probe for the opener and Hearts were finding it hard to get out of their own half. When they did get hold of the ball, they carelessly handed it back to the opposition.

Spittal and Penrice did combine on the left but the danger was quickly snuffed out and Celtic again advanced towards the Hearts goal. Rowles was forced to clear twice in quick succession, his second going for a corner and Frankie Kent cleared for another which came to nothing.

At the other end, Penrice darted into the box and picked out Shankland but the Scotland striker fired the ball wide with his left foot and held his head in his hands as the ball ended up in the stand.

In-form Nicolas-Gerrit Kuhn picked up the ball near half way and fed Kyogo Furuhashi with a deft left foot dink over the top, but the Japanese hit-man failed to read the bounce of the ball and the danger was cleared.

However, Hearts broke and had another chance with Spittal heavily involved. He crossed to Shankland and his header was clutched by Schmeichel. Greg Taylor floored Cammy Devlin and Spittal took the free-kick, floating the ball into the box towards Kent, but Celtic cleared comfortably.

The Hoops continued to dictate play and possession, but Hearts still carried a threat and they picked up a loose ball and moved down the right. Boateng glanced the header towards Shankland on the six-yard line but the ball did not fall kindly for Hearts' skipper and was cleared.

Celtic patiently moved the ball across field looking for an opening, and Kent was left to mop up following another dangerous cross, however, the home side kept plugging away and broke down the left through Spittal and magnificent Penrice who had proved a real threat.

The ball was sent towards Forrest lurking on the edge of the Celtic box but his fierce shot was blocked by Cameron Carter-Vickers.

Brendan Rodger's men may have enjoyed the lion's share of possession in an entertaining first session, but Hearts had the best of the chances and they may regret not taking them.

The question was simple, could Hearts retain their energy level in the second-half, and home coach Neil Critchley resisted any temptation to change his line-up.

Craig Gordon in Hearts' goal had enjoyed a relatively quiet night as his aggressive midfield dug deep, but he had to react when Kyogo spun and fired towards goal. Scotland's No 1 spread himself and the ball came off his leg and was cleared.

But the Japanese was on target after 54min when the ball rebounded from a clearance by Daniel Oyegoke to Kyogo who netted at the second attempt. Critchley shook his head in frustration as his side had played well up to this point, but were behind. Worse was to come.

Maeda was booked after 58 minutes for a clumsy foul on Devlin but the Japanese shrugged that off and was involved in Celtic's second. It arrived seconds later, the ball being dispatched on the counter attack from the Hearts free-kick.

Maeda fed Kuhn who blasted the ball home with his left boot from the left hand side of the Hearts' box, a superb strike from a class player who is attracting the attention of German national team bosses.

Rodgers made changes with Maeda and Arne Engles leaving the field for James Forrest and Paulo Bernardo and Hearts sent on Jorge Grant for Boateng and Kenneth Vargas replaced Forrest.

Alistair Johnston then made way for Anthony Ralston but, before he left the field, Reo Hatate fired just wide.

Penrice was then booked for a foul on quicksilver Kuhn and now misses the visit of Aberdeen next Sunday, but Hearts burst forward and Ralston kneed a deep cross from the right hand side from Oyegoke to the far post onto the crossbar. What a let-off for Celtic.

Kuhn and Kyogo departed for Adam Idah and Yang Hyun-Jun with 15 minutes remaining and Celtic got themselves in a muddle in their own box. The ball fell to Shankland who passed to Devlin but the shot from the Aussie midfielder was blocked, a great chance to gain a foothold in the game gone.

Musa Drammeh and Yan Dhanda waited on the sideline to be introduced as substitute Idah made it 3-0 after 77 minutes, Bernardo slipping the ball to the former Norwich City player who made no mistake from close range.

Hearts fans started to drift away from chilly Tynecastle as their favourites slipped to another defeat, not good news with a UEFA Europa Conference League trip to come in midweek and high-flying Aberdeen due at Tynecastle three days later.

But substitute Drammeh cheered those remaining with a brilliant right-foot finish from 20 yards following a driving run after being fed by Vargas, giving Schmeichel no chance in only his third appearance for the Jambos. Time 81 minutes.

A glimmer of hope, perhaps? Bernardo had other ideas and he had a sight of goal soon after but sent the ball over the bar.

One of the assistant referees was injured and the fourth official stepped forward after a delay which included a return to the dressing-room leaving Rodgers and Critchley bemused.

Gordon then made two quality back-to-back saves from Yang and Idah to keep the scoreline the same as seven minutes of stoppage time was signalled. Celtic broke and Forrest was floored by Jorge Grant. Penalty.

Up stepped Idah (pictured against Hibs by Ian Jacobs) to face Gordon and the Republic of Ireland striker took his time before firing low into the bottom corner for 4-1. The 23-year-old netted two goals in just 16 minutes since arriving as a substitute.