

Critchley: we earned 'three big points' at St Johnstone

Neil Critchley, Hearts' head coach, has known of the talents of Beni Baniyime for some time, having tried to sign him before, and he is delighted he now wears a maroon shirt.

No more so than on Saturday after 76 minutes when the dribbling skills of the Congolese player won the ball in the middle of the pitch, then the 26-year-old took off, leaving several St Johnstone in his slipstream, before finding Kenneth Vargas to his left with a deft touch for the game-winner.

How the Jambos faithful in the 5,917 crowd celebrated. The goal lit up McDiarmid Park if you wear maroon and the delighted coach claimed that the 2-1 victory at St Johnstone produced what he called "a big three points" for the Jambos in a really difficult but entertaining game.

The English-born coach (pictured by *Nigel Duncan*) told Hearts TV: "To come out as winners, and the manner in which we won the game, was so pleasing."

Critchley felt his players started the game really well at Perth, showing a reaction from the 2-1 home defeat by Kilmarnock on Wednesday, and added: "We were on the front foot and we had numerous corners and scored from one of the corners, which was good.

"I was pleased with the first half but, in the second half, we

lost a bit of energy and they (St Johnstone) started on top and, when they scored, we then responded. That gave us some life and energy and it was a fantastic second goal.

“Beni (Baningime) was brilliant, Kenneth (Vargas) finished it off, and we had to really grind it out, putting bodies on the line, defending set-pieces, long balls. I thought we did that brilliantly well. We had to fight and scrap and see the game out.”

Critchley feels he has quality players in the group and he revealed that he told the squad that immediately after the midweek defeat and the message before the game in Perth was that the players had to respond and to show character. Indeed, show what his Hearts are all about.

The three points moved Hearts off the bottom of the 12-strong William Hill Premiership and the coach said: “We are in a tough situation and it is up to us to change it. It is only us who can do something about that.

“Don’t look backwards, look forward. St Johnstone were really strong in the second half, really tough, and gave us a tough time but I thought our character was magnificent.”

Critchley also mentioned evergreen goalkeeper, Craig Gordon, who he said made a “magnificent” save during the game and now it is into Europe with German side Heidenheim arriving at Tynecastle on Thursday in the UEFA Europa Conference League (kick-off 20.00).