

# Well next as Hearts count Dingwall cost

The 1,600 Hearts fans who travelled to the Global Energy Stadium in rain-drenched Dingwall on Sunday, and those watching at home on their TV screens, will find it hard to forget the nightmare end to the William Hill Premiership clash at Ross County.

The scoreline entering second-half injury time read 2-0 and the Jambos looked set for three welcome points in their bid to move up the table.

Minutes later, two balls into the box and two strikes, the first from midfielder Josh Nisbet after 97 minutes and the second from Jordan White two minutes later. The Jambos, and their soaked supporters, were reeling.

Now, it's Motherwell on Thursday (15.00) at Tynecastle and, hopefully, their favourites can provide a cure for that dismal Dingwall hangover. The loss of two points means the Men in Maroon are back in second bottom spot in the table with 17 points from 20 starts.

They are looking up towards a Motherwell side who are sixth with 27 points and a club coming along the M8 on the back of a highly-creditable performance in a 2-2 game. Well were 2-0 ahead but there was VAR controversy with the scoreline at 2-1-

at Ibrox on Sunday. Motherwell boss Stuart Kettlewell was sent off for his protests after the goal was disallowed.

There is not much between the teams as regards goals for, 25 for the Fir Park side and 23 for Hearts. Well have shipped 33 goals and the Jambos 31, but, crucially, Kettlewell's squad and won eight and drawn three of their 19 starts.

Hearts have won four and drawn five of their 20 games and head coach, Neil Critchley, desperately wants points on the board, particularly as fans see the recent revival in fortunes of Capital rivals Hibs who were bottom but are now seventh with 24 points from 20 games, statistics which include six wins and six draws.

Victories at home over Kilmarnock, and on the road at Hearts and Aberdeen, plus a 3-1 success at Easter Road v Ross County, have lifted spirits at Hibs.

Picking over the pieces of the late Dingwall debacle, Critchley admitted: "It is tough. For 96 minutes we are comfortable, we have been the better team, and, obviously, in difficult conditions for both teams, we have won the game."

The Englishman (pictured by **Thomas Brown**) told Hearts TV: "We have been in no danger whatsoever. They (Ross County) had hardly created a chance and then, for two crazy minutes when we don't defend the box well enough, it has cost us three points.

"It is as simple as not defending the box, preventing the ball from coming into the box firstly. We have done well all game from the corners that have come into the box, we have protected Craig Gordon really well.

"But, the game is never over until it is over."

Overall, Hearts, he said, get one penalty area right, Critchley said Hearts were ruthless in that area, with two

good goals, but he said: "We are not good at the other end and, if you do not get both right, you don't win."

The coach admitted it was difficult to play football in the conditions – driving rain – and Critchley conceded you rely on moments in a game like that. He said: "We produced really good moments for the first and second goals.

"We are 2-0 up, in control, we're comfortable and we don't look like conceding. You have to see it out and you have to be professional. You have to keep doing the things that put you in that position and we have not done that."

The issue of the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) reared its head again when James Penrice was fouled by Ross County's Michee Efete and Critchley said he was "sick of talking about VAR". He added: "There is contact and contact well inside the box which makes it a clear penalty." The Scottish Football Association's Key Match Incident Panel have deemed, subsequently, that Hearts were wrongly denied a penalty. Too late for the Jambos who, had they scored, would have been 3-0 ahead.

The head coach praised the 1,600 fans who made the 168-mile trip and he said: "The biggest disappointment for myself is that you want to make people happy, the people at the club, the people around you and, especially, the supporters who have travelled in horrible conditions.

"They travelled in big numbers and got right behind the team and, up until 96 minutes, they had seen a really good team performance. They should be going home in good spirits. Thank you to them for travelling. It means a lot."