

Kabangu double secures cup win for Hearts

Newcomer Elton Kabangu claimed a double in 17, second-half minutes as Hearts came from behind to march into the fifth round of the Scottish Gas Scottish Cup with a 4-1 victory over Highland League pace-setters Brechin City.

The Men in Maroon turned the match around with a strong second-half performance with the busy Belgian centre stage for his two goals after 62 and 79 minutes. The other goals came from Yan Dhanda and an own goal from Kevin McHattie.

Earlier, the Edinburgh club introduced Kenneth Vargas, Adam Forrester and Kabangu into their side with Craig Gordon in goal at Glebe Park hoping not to slip up in Angus.

Patrick Cregg, Brechin's manager, has tasted Scottish Cup glory with St Johnstone and was keen to see his unfancied side progress and they started brightly against their opposition from the William Hill Premiership.

Hearts, however, threatened early on the tight, heavy pitch and Vargas was in a good position at the edge of the Brechin box but he slipped at a vital time as the ball came in from the right hand side, then James Penrice fired a shot in which was blocked.

Vargas then met a cross from the left from Yan Dhanda, but his

header went wide. Brechin worked hard, forcing Hearts back, but they failed to find the final ball before, after 12 minutes, Marc Scott latched on to a reverse pass and fired into the side netting from a tight angle.

That sparked Brechin but they suffered a setback when skipper Euan Spark hurt his shoulder in a challenge on Kabangu during which he earned a booking. The experienced defender had to leave the field after treatment.

Scott Bright, on loan from St Johnstone, was introduced as Spark was helped from the field in real pain.

Brechin put that blow behind them to take a shock lead in 23 minutes, 18-year-old Bright latching onto a clearance from Penrice to thunder a left-foot shot into the net from 30 yards with Gordon having no chance. It was a real screamer and a Scottish Cup shock was on.

The Jambos were now under real pressure and, at the other end, Dhanda had an opportunity at the edge of the Brechin box with his right foot, but he blasted the ball wastefully over the bar as Hearts struggled to get a grip of the game.

Vargas had an attempt blocked before Brechin's Kevin McHattie, a former Hearts player, was booked for a foul, and then home goalkeeper Leonard Wilson had to rush out of his area to blunt a Hearts attack.

The Costa Rican player had another attempt blocked but the Brechin defence held firm as Hearts failed to find any flow and Forrester was booked for diving as he broke into the box and fell to the floor.

The visitors had so far failed to test the home goalkeeper, and did not show their real quality, and the Jambos fans expressed their disappointment at the performance.

Their mood change when Dhanda picked up the ball on the left,

shifted inside and unleashed a special shot into the net with his right foot with the clock on 40 minutes, another fabulous goal, but a vital one for Hearts.

His second goal for the Capital combine, the other coming against Dinamo Minsk in Europe, came at a good time and Grant tried to send Kabangu clear, but the visitors failed to find the net again despite three minutes of injury time leaving the scoreline at 1-1 at the end of the session.

Neither team made changes at the break and Hearts were first to threaten, Kabangu attempting to find the net with a left foot shot from the edge of the box. It flew well over.

Dhanda fed Vargas on the left and his cross ball was parried by the Brechin goalkeeper with several Hearts players in the danger area, and the former Ross County player sprayed a great ball across the pitch to Jorge Grant on the right but Brechin managed to send the ball for a corner.

Once again, the ball was cleared but seconds later Hearts were in front. Time 51 minutes. The Tynecastle team turned the match on its head when Dhanda found Kabangu with a head flick and the Belgian sent in a dangerous cross.

It was met by McHattie who deflected the ball towards his own net and Vargas provided the final touch to put Hearts in front.

Brechin rang the changes in a bid to get back level but it was Hearts who added a third when Vargas sent the ball into the danger area and Kabangu spun to send the ball home through a ruck of players.

The Angus side shrugged that disappointment off and upped the tempo, but Devlin had a shot cleared near the line as the Tynecastle team began to hem the home side in.

And the Jambos increased the pressure with a triple change,

Blair Spittal, Daniel Oyegoke and James Wilson making their entrance as Dhanda, Forrester and Vargas departed.

One of Brechin's substitutes, Cillian Sheridan was booked for a high challenge on Grant as the Men in Maroon continued to press before Wilson raced from his goal to deny Grant after a great cross from Penrice on the left hand side of the pitch.

Wilson sent a cross in from the right which was scrambled away but Brechin were not out of this and they forced a corner and the ball arrived for Craig Tosh but he blasted over.

Hearts raced to the other end and Wilson fed Kabangu first time and the newcomer made no mistake, firing home with his left foot for 4-1 off a defender. Time 79 minutes.

James McCart departed and Gerald Taylor, who has been sidelined with injury, made a surprise appearance as Hearts dominated. Grant then tested the Brechin goalkeeper and the Glebe Park side were hardly seen as an attacking force.

Teenage striker Wilson then drove to the by-line and crossed. Grant shot and his effort was cleared near the line. It was all one-way traffic with Spittal and Penrice heavily involved.

Devlin departed with Alan Forrest entering the action with three minutes of normal time left and Brechin also made two changes but the game was now beyond them and the Premiership team ate up the minutes by passing the ball around the, by now, bumpy pitch.

Dhanda told BBC Sport Scotland: "We got it done. It was tough and they went 1-0. It is difficult when the pitch is tough to play on."

Kabangu, the Man of the Match, added: "It was a real Scottish game. I am here to score goals and I am just happy I scored today. I don't want to stay on two goals, I am a striker, I want more."

PICTURE: Yan Dhanda (left) levelled for Hearts at Brechin.
Picture ***Nigel Duncan***