

Grant header secures three points for Hearts

Hearts continued their unbeaten run in 2025 with a nervy, 3-2 victory over Kilmarnock, but it was not pretty. Nobody in Maroon was complaining as their men moved up to ninth spot in the 12-strong William Hill Premiership table.

Earlier, the Jambos paired teenager striker James Wilson with Belgian-born forward Elton Kabangu up-front. Newcomers Sander Kartum and Michael Steinwender were not in the squad as they are not considered to be up to speed having been recruited from foreign clubs who have different schedules from Scotland. Lawrence Shankland was back on the bench.

Neil Critchley, Hearts' head coach, reverted to a 4-4-2 formation against what is always a well-organised and robust Kilmarnock formation and the visitors were minus several experienced players.

However, Killie had recorded back-to-back wins against the Jambos and Scotland international defender, Calvin Ramsay, on loan from Liverpool, in their starting line-up.

Both teams struggled to find a rhythm in the opening minutes, producing a scrappy game, but it was Ramsay who set up a chance for Killie forward Marley Watkins. The Welsh international earned a corner, but it was cleared by the Jambos defence.

The home side broke with Wilson driving towards the Killie box. His cross from the left was met by Jorge Grant who miscued. The ball rebounded to Wilson who saw Kabangu at the back post. The teenager found his man and the Belgian side-footed the ball home for his first league goal for the Men in Maroon on his home debut. Time: seven minutes.

Seconds later Kabangu had another chance but slipped at a key time. Killie broke upfield and Craig Halkett stretched for the ball near the goal line. He needed treatment and left the field with 21-year-old defender Lewis Neilson, who played 17 games for St Johnstone on loan, came on in his place.

Killie saw their chance and pressed forward attempting to exploit the change with the untested pairing of Jamie McCart and Neilson at the heart of the defence, but Hearts were next to threaten with James Penrice sending Blair Spittal down the left flank. His cutback was fired over by Wilson.

Kabangu needed treatment soon after but resumed only for Killie to force a fine save from Craig Gordon at the other end following a neat deflection on a header. Once again, the game became scrappy, but Kilmarnock made it tough for the home side to break forward, closing down the opposition.

Penrice and Spittal, however, combined and once again found space down the left. The ball in was a good one but Wilson was unable to get a touch. Seconds later Wilson was found by a cut back from Penrice and Ramsay was in the right place at the right time to block the left foot shot and send it for a corner.

Former Livingston player, Penrice, then picked up a loose ball inside the Rugby Park half and his cross was missed by the advancing Hearts players, another chance for the home side who looked the most likely at this stage.

Hearts were awarded a free-kick wide out on the left and Spittal's deep cross found Jamie McCart near the far post and

the unmarked former St Johnstone defender headed home. Time: 33 minutes. However, VAR was called in and the goal was ruled off.

Ramsay made another important intervention as half-time loomed and tempers flared after the former Aberdeen player felled Cammy Devlin in midfield, much to the annoyance of the majority of the 18,000-plus fans in the stadium.

Devlin was a constant menace to Killie in midfield, snapping at opposition heels and winning the ball back, but Hearts were careless in possession and a number of players failed to find their own men with passes. Promising moves broke down as a consequence.

The home side continued to look for openings and Killie defender Robbie Deas pulled down Kabangu on the left to earn a booking. Spittal played the ball down the line to Penrice who sent the ball back to Spittal who wastefully sent the ball high over the bar.

Five extra minutes were added and Derek McInnes, Killie's manager, showed his frustration in the dugout as his men wasted opportunities to put pressure on the home side, but Killie were still a threat.

Kyle Magennis earned a yellow card for a foul on Kabangu and Gordon sent the free-kick high towards the Killie box but the home side wasted the opportunity before Jorge Grant was shown a yellow card for a heavy tackle. Watkins was also shown a yellow for dissent in the same incident before referee John Beaton signalled the end of the half with Hearts holding a narrow lead.

Killie introduced Daniel Armstrong at the start of the second half in place of Ramsay. Neil Critchley sent the same players back out.

Teenager Wales then stunned Hearts with a first-time finish

for his fourth goal of the season after a fine move and a great cross from Watkins. Gordon dived but the finish was clinical. Time 50 minutes. Killie had to wait for a VAR check but it was given and the sides were all square.

Déjà vu for Hearts who were ahead the last time the sides met at Tynecastle only to end up pointless. The home fans became restless.

Their favourites threatened again and Wilson was felled by Armstrong on the edge of the box. The substitute had his name taken.

Spittal took command and fired the ball inches over the bar with his right foot from the free-kick with the goalkeeper rooted to the spot.

Wilson then threatened with Deas sending the ball for a corner and Penrice found McCart darting in unmarked from the back post area. He headed home from the middle of the six-yard box to restore the Jambos lead. It was McCart's first goal for the Gorgie club on his home debut. Time 58 minutes.

The goal was a massive boost to the home side and the success-hungry Jambos fans who were celebrating again when Grant attacked the ball in the six-yard box as the Killie goalkeeper Kiera O'Hara fumbled a cross from the left. The ball trundled over the line for a 3-1 scoreline. Time 61 minutes.

However, ex-Hibee Fraser Murray made Hearts pay for indecisive defending when he latched on to a cross from the right by Armstrong and prodded the ball home with Gordon beaten. VAR was called in to adjudicate on offside, but the scoreline stood. Time 67 minutes.

McInnes made two substitutions and Hearts introduced Shankland after missing five games with a hamstring injury. He was joined in a triple change with Yan Dhanda and Musa Drammeh joining him, Wilson, Grant and Spittal all departing.

There was work to do to secure the three points and the second goal sparked Killie. Drammeh had a great chance to make it 4-2 when Kabangu picked up the ball and slid it through to the 23-year-old Spanish-born forward who side-footed the ball against O'Hara's right-hand post.

Killie looked to keep the pressure on and Dhanda gave away a free-kick in a dangerous position a few yards in from the right touchline. Armstrong fired the ball in but Gordon scrambled it away to thwart the danger.

David Watson felled Dhanda inside the final ten minutes to relieve the pressure but Killie kept on coming until Hearts broke and Forrester found Kabangu on the edge of the six-yard box. He touched it to Drammeh who fired wide of the far post.

The nerves were jangling at Tynecastle and the home side survived another scare. Watson was found on the edge of the box and fired for goal but Gordon dived full-length to his right to save with his right hand, the ball going for a corner.

Bruce Anderson was introduced by the Rugby Park side who went for broke, but Hearts moved upfield and Drammeh found himself one-on-one with the Killie goalkeeper. The striker's left-foot effort was saved, another golden chance gone as the minutes ticked away.

Four minutes were added as home fans sat on the edge of their seats hoping for a welcome win. Kabangu was withdrawn by Critchley and Malachi Boateng introduced as the Tynecastle backroom team attempted to shore up the defence.

Boateng was booked seconds after coming on and Hearts broke. Shankland had the ball and advanced towards the Killie box holding a four-on-two advantage at one stage. The Scotland striker decided to pick out Devlin whose effort was scrambled away.

The final whistle then sounded and the home fans cheered as their men secured a 3-2 win and moved out of the bottom two. Critchley was smiles better after recording his first win over Kilmarnock who replaced Hearts' in 11th position.

PICTURE: Craig Gordon (right) makes vital late save as Hearts secure welcome win. Picture by ***Nigel Duncan***