

Dabbagh sinks nine-man Hearts at Hampden

Brave Hearts travelled back along the M8 from Hampden Park after another major blow in their season, a 2-1 defeat by Aberdeen in the first Scottish Gas, Scottish Cup semi-final after being reduced to nine men.

Michael Steinwender walked after a red card in the first half and Cammy Devlin followed as injury time in extra time loomed.

Lawrence Shankland levelled at 1-1 to give the Jambos a chance but Hearts were broken when Oday Dabbagh netted in the dying minutes of extra time.

Neil Critchley's men were magnificent in defence, with Craig Gordon producing several quality stops, but the loss of two players was too much and Aberdeen march on into their 17th final.

They await either Celtic or St Johnstone while the Men in Maroon concentrate on finishing what has been a disappointing season by competing in the bottom six of the William Hill Premiership.

Earlier, Shankland was back in the side against one of his former clubs alongside Elton Kabangu and teenager James Wilson. In-form Aberdeen switched their goalkeeper, Dimitar Mitov returning with Ross Doohan on the bench.

Jamie McCart had a chance after a Mitov fumble at the first corner of the match after two minutes, but the defender sent the ball agonisingly wide of the Aberdeen right-hand post and the Jambos continued to threaten.

James Penrice darted down the left but the danger was cleared and Kabangu had a sight of goal after the ball was won in midfield by Beni Banningime who fed Wilson. Kabangu's shot was blocked.

Shankland drifted to the right and sent in a testing ball which was again cleared by the Dons rearguard,

Then Penrice battled his way into the Aberdeen box and the ball was sent for a corner, but Mitov gathered comfortably in his six-yard box.

Slackness in the Dons defence meant Hearts maintained their dominance of possession, but they had so far failed to turn that advantage into a goal.

Pasey Topi Keskinen, however, always looked a threat against young Adam Forrester and he won a corner deep in Jambos territory on the left. The in swinging corner found Papa Gueye who bulleted a header towards goal. It bounced back off the bar and it nestled in the back of the net after hitting the back of Craig Gordon, Hearts' goalkeeper. The veteran international was credited with an own goal, time 17minutes.

Eight minutes later, Keskinen picked up the ball on the left edge of the penalty box but shot wide, a warning for Hearts, then Cammy Devlin saved the day when Morris shot for goal with Gordon struggling to get back into his six yard box. The Aussie flicked the ball to safety, a big let off for the Jambos.

But Hearts hit back seconds later through Shankland after 28 minutes. The captain rammed the ball home from six yards from an angle with his right foot after a Penrice cross was missed

by the Aberdeen defence, his fifth of the season.

That brought the travelling fans to life and Kabangu picked up the ball after a move involving Jorge Grant and Wilson, but his back was to goal and the chance was snuffed out.

At the other end, Michael Steinwender was in the right place at the right time to head a dangerous ball for a corner. Leighton Clarkson's first delivery was cleared and he went short with his second, but a mistake meant the ball was sent to the other end of the pitch. Devlin and Shinnie clashed but a quick check ruled out a penalty.

The Men in Maroon, however, kept up their pressure as the break loomed. Hearts had started the game strongly and were finishing strongly but, two minutes from half-time, disaster for Hearts. The speed of Keskinen forced Steinwender to lunge into a challenge just over the half-way line and John Beaton brandished the red card as it was judged as a goal-scoring opportunity. Steinwender covered his face with his maroon shirt as Neil Critchley, Hearts' head coach, was forced into changes as the match swung in Aberdeen's favour.

Frankie Kent, who has been sidelined since December with injury, was told to get ready for action as ten-man Hearts tried to shore up their rearguard and the Capital combine's fans voiced their disappointment as Beaton signalled the end of an eventful first half.

Kent made his comeback and Craig Halkett joined him on the pitch with Wilson and Kabangu left in the dressing-room. Hearts retrenched to a back five but Shankland had a chance after a high ball was won by Kent in the Dons' box. The Scotland striker was off balance as the ball came to him and he sent it wide.

At the other end, Ante Palaversa sent in a tremendous cross and Gueye flashed a header inches wide of Gordon's right-hand post, a scare, but Critchley's men survived.

The Jambos were not out of this contest and McCart headed over from a Penrice corner and Penrice dashed down the left, crossing into the box, and Forrester lashed the ball over.

Aberdeen made a change, Hibs-bound Jamie McGrath came off the bench as Jimmy Thelin looked for more urgency from his men, Palaversa made way. Minutes later Clarkson sent a ball towards goal and it took a wicked deflection. Gordon could only watch and hope that the ball would go wide. It did.

Devlin was then booked for a foul of Gueye after 76 minutes and Stephen Kingsley, another recent injury victim, was then introduced for Forrester. Alexander Jensen was next into the book after a foul on the left but Grant's free-kick was an opportunity wasted by a poor delivery.

Keskinen and Gueye came off and the Dons introduced Oday Dabbagh and Jeppe Okkels from the bench but the side from the Granite City huffed and puffed in the final third of the pitch against the dogged Jambos who stuck to their task.

The fans continued to urge their men forward as the clock ticked down and the Dons threatened again, but McCart nodded the ball to safety. Penrice and Beningme worked an opening and Penrice had a chance on his right foot. The ball flew over.

Sandar Kartum came on to replace hard-working Grant for Hearts with just over 86 minutes gone and, as the clock ticked into three minutes of injury time, McGrath flashed a shot high and wide.

The Dons pressed for the game-winner but Hearts stayed strong. Alfie Dorrington was booked for a heavy challenge on Kartum mid-way into Hearts half but Beaton signalled the end of a game in which the Maroon defence had been outstanding.

Dante Polvara was sent on for Morris as the Dons looked for something different to unlock the Jambos rearguard and, eventually, they found more space as the Men in Maroon tired.

Critchley's men were penned in, and Dabbagh let fly with his left foot from 16 yards. The ball flew through a ruck of players and Gordon saw it late but gathered it low to keep the scoreline level. A sensational stop.

Animated Critchley issued instructions on the touchline to his men and the game re-started but Dorrington lasted seconds before going down with a leg injury. Jack Milne came on for the seven times winners of the competition.

The Jambos, who have lifted the cup on eight occasions, resumed their rearguard action and Jensen side-footed the ball wide when in a good position on the right. He had plenty of time but finished poorly.

McCart cleared from inside the box as Musa Drammeh got ready to come on. Shankland suffered cramp and was unable to shake it off. Musa was introduced and Penrice was felled by Mats Knoester. He received a yellow card.

The Dons persisted and Gordon and Penrice had to make last-gasp saves as Thelin's men upped the tempo.

A second major blow came when tenacious Devlin received a second yellow with four minutes left. He attempted to clear the ball but clipped a Dons player leaving the Jambos with only nine men.

Jenson made way for Fletcher Boyd but the game-winner came seconds later and it was Dabbagh who pounced after another great save from Gordon, the striker firing home with his right foot from inside the six-yard box. A massive moment for the Aberdeen team. Time 118 minutes.

Blair Spittal replaced Banningime as four minutes of injury time were added and Aberdeen passed the ball around as Hearts chased the ball. It was all over and the Dons celebrated as the Jambos faithful left the ground.

SUPERB GORDON: The veteran goalkeeper (right) made a series of great saves to deny Aberdeen at Hampden. Picture ***Nigel Duncan***