

Hearts boss Critchley: 'we're in a fight'

Put simply, the Jambos are in a jam. In-form Simon Murray struck his 21st goal of the season after 38 minutes to lift Dundee into fourth in the six-strong Second Phase, Relegation Group and out of the play-off spot.

Ross County slip into this precarious position on 35 points with St Johnstone now on 29 points after their narrow, 3-2 defeat at Motherwell.

It is the Fir Park side who move to the top of the relegation group with 42 points, two ahead of Hearts and four in front of Kilmarnock who beat The Staggies 2-0 at Rugby Park with Dundee now on 37 points.

Earlier, the name of Lawrence Shankland was conspicuous by its absence when the teams were confirmed at Tynecastle as Hearts opened their bottom six campaign, the striker having been injured at Hampden.

Teenage striker James Wilson was also missing through suspension however, Frankie Kent was named in the starting side after playing over 70 minutes as a substitute at Hampden in the Scottish Gas, Scottish Cup, semi-final defeat to Aberdeen.

Head coach Neil Critchley had stressed he was looking for 15

points from the next five games, despite the club's poor recent run with only one goal scored and one point earned in four games, but these are tough times at Tynecastle and the defeat by the Dens Park men makes it even tougher.

Naturally, the visitors celebrated the three points with their fans in the Roseburn Stand at the final whistle as the Gorgie faithful, those that had stayed to the bitter end, gave vent to their feelings.

In the end, Hearts were undone by a cool finish from Murray who harbours ambitions to play for Scotland. The 33-year-old was given a yard of space in the box and took full advantage.

However, Murray and his hard-working teammates deserved the praise heaped on them by manager Tony Docherty in his post-match briefing with the media.

They covered every inch of the lush Tynecastle turf, tracking back, picking up loose balls and forcing Hearts, who had the lions share possession, to play around them. Notice a pattern here?

Yes, chances were at a premium for both sides but Dundee took one of theirs. Just before the deadlock was broken, Seb Palmer-Houlden failed by inches to score from a header after a cross from the right found him clear near the penalty spot and with only Hearts' goalkeeper, Craig Gordon, to beat, but, in truth, they had little else during 90-plus minutes in Gorgie.

The Men in Maroon did have the ball in the net in second-half injury time, bundled home by late substitute, Alan Forrest, but it was ruled off after a VAR check.

And another substitute, Kenneth Vargas, had earlier shot straight at Dundee goalkeeper Trevor Carson when in a good position on the left side of the penalty box.

The Jambos also hit the post late in the first half through

Cammy Devlin. The ball was scrambled clear.

Two minutes later, Murray struck and it was an uphill struggle from there.

Even some of the normally ebullient Gorgie Ultras packed up and headed for the exits, including the drummer, however I can't say I was disappointed when he packed in.

Hearts huffed and puffed but were unable to breach the determined Dundee defence despite deploying five substitutes and playing three up front during the second half.

And, in a last throw of the dice, they pushing defender Kent into attack and skipper Craig Gordon also left his goal to provide another attacking option in injury time.

This was a day when little went right for Critchley who became increasingly animated as the clock ticked down.

Tony Docherty exhorted his players to dig deep as the final whistle loomed, and you can understand fully why he raised his arms aloft at the end and looked towards the main stand.

His squad have everything for the cause. Docherty conceded that before the game he told them to leave nothing in the pitch They didn't.

He added: "I could not be more proud of them, putting in that level of performance. I am delighted with the endeavour, the intelligence and the work rate they showed."

Docherty acknowledged that Hearts have quality players, but he left with the points.

His counterpart left the playing arena head down, boos ringing around the half-empty ground.

Critchley has problems to solve, and quickly, as the Men in Maroon slip down the table towards the drop zone.

He was recruited through analytics. The Cambridge Dictionary described analytics thus: “a process in which a computer examines information using mathematical methods in order to find useful patterns.”

Hearts must now find a useful pattern to unlock opposition defences. Recent games have produced positive possession and territorial statistics, but lack of penetration, basically goals. This can't continue.,

Critchley wanted 15 points from his five post-split games. The maximum he can accumulate now is 12 but others around him are also desperate. The stakes are high and games are running out.

Crichkey talked post-match about his men dominating the game, and the creation of chances, but, critically, the lack of quality in finishing them off.

Hearts, he said, were in a fight, a fight to secure their slot amongst the elite of Scottish football and he added: “We have to show the right level of fight.”

There was no lack of effort, he added, but crucially Critchley declared: “From the half way line, we lacked quality in our decision making. We've got four games to go and it is important that the players show the fight and commitments that will get us out of this situation.”

He also spoke about the players taking the safe option with their passing. That played into the hands of dogged Dundee, and he understands the fans being restive.

There are high expectations at Tynecastle and Critchley has a full week to turn things around before a tricky trip to Dingwall to face Ross County. The survival scrap continues.

Hearts: Craig Gordon, Frankie Kent, Beni Banningime (Drammeh), Jorge Grant, Canny Devlin, Blair Spittal (Dhanda), Elton Kabangu (Forrest), Sander Kartum (Vargas), James Penrice,

Jamie McCart (Kingsley), Adam Forrester. Subs: Ryan Fulton, Stephen Kingsley, Craig Halkett, Calem Nieuwenhof, Michael Steinwender, Alan Forrest, Yan Dhanda, Musa Drammeh, Kenneth Vargas

Dundee: Trevor Carson, Clark Robertson, Ryan Astley Ingram), Joe Shaughnessy, Scott Tiffoney, Josh Mulligan, Lyall Cameron, Simon Murray, Ziyad Larkeche (Samuels), Seb Palmer-Houlden (Robertson), Antonio Portales (Fraser). Subs: Jon McCracken, Ethan Ingram, Imari Hines-Samuels, Charlie Reilly, Finlay Robertson, Billy Koumetio, Scott Fraser, Mohamed Sylla, Aaron Donnelly

Referee: Ross Harris