

Kingsley the hero for ten-man Hearts

Stephen Kingsley fired home for ten-man Hearts to claim a moral boosting victory at Kilmarnock to end the Tynecastle team's William Hill Premiership campaign on a high.

The experienced defender struck with one minute left of regular time as battling Hearts withstood pressure from the Rugby Park side despite Yan Dhanda being red carded in the first session, having to replace goalkeeper Zander Clark early on and substitute hot-stop, Ryan Fulton, struggling with a leg injury for much of the remainder of the match.

Earlier, interim manager, Liam Fox, in his last game before leaving Tynecastle, made three changes from the 2-1 victory over St Johnstone at Tynecastle on Wednesday, Zander Clark, Stephen Kingsley and Calem Nieuwenhof replacing Ryan Fulton, Craig Halkett and Jorge Grant. Kilmarnock's interim manager, Chris Burke, also made three changes.

However, there was little to excite either set of fans in the Ayrshire sunshine in the early stages, the match having the vibe of a late season rubber with little at stake, with a number of misplaced passes punctuating the flow.

Kyle Vassell tried to change things and he made a neat turn in midfield. He fed Fraser Murray who drive towards goal before feeding Daniel Alexander but he fired over the top.

Murray burst into the action again but he was stopped by a heavy Adam Forrester challenge. The young Hearts defender was yellow carded.

Nieuwenhof then drove forward deep into the Killie rearguard but his initiative floundered near the penalty box before attention moved to the other end of the pitch where Clark was seen clutching an ankle. He was immediately replaced by Fulton. Time 22 minutes.

Then Frankie Kent brought down Vassell providing Killie with a chance from a free-kick 25 yards out, but ex-Hibs player Murray wasted the opportunity by blasting the ball high and wide when he should have tested Fulton.

Forrest then cut in on goal but Rugby Park goalkeeper, Robby McCrorie, gathered with Nieuwenhof lurking. At the other end, Milne fouled Armstrong who lashed the ball across the Jambos box but nobody was there to deflect the ball home.

The home side's drummer tired hard to inject something into the game but even he failed before Yan Dhanda was involved in a challenge near the edge of the box. Stuart Findlay was injured in the incident and required treatment as VAR reviewed the situation with a potential red card against the Hearts player.

The referee was sent to the pitch side screen and Dhanda made the lonely walk back to the dressing room with less than ten minutes remaining of the first session. A harsh decision, many thought.

The card injected some enthusiasm into proceedings and brought the drummer back in action, pounding away as Hearts were awarded their first corner of the game. It came to nothing.

Ten-man Hearts continued to move the ball around, retaining possession, but the Men in Maroon had two scares before the break.

Brad Lyons fired in a strong shot from the right which whistled wide of Fulton's right-hand post and Vassell was disappointed when he failed to get his head to an Armstrong cross from the right hand side.

Overall, Hearts had rarely been seen as an attacking threat in a disappointing first period which ended blank despite the Jambos enjoying 58 per cent of possession against 41 by the opposition. Kilmarnock, however, had six shots to the Jambos three but the visitors made 266 passes against 184 from Killie.

Findlay failed to reappear for the second half with Bruce Anderson being introduced and the substitute had a free header in the box with the first attack but sent the ball straight towards Fulton who gathered.

The pressure continued and Liam Donnelly was challenged by Nieuwenhof which resulted in a free-kick in a central position but Armstrong fired the ball straight into the Jambos wall.

Kilmarnock forced Hearts into defending with everybody behind the ball except Lawrence Shankland who cut a lonely figure up top until a breakaway found Forrest who cut in goal before sending a weak shot towards McCrorie.

Quality with the final ball was missing from both sides as the clock ticked on with Killie dictating the pace and Hearts spoiling in a bid to stay in the game.

Milne was removed in favour of Halkett and, minutes later, Fulton was careless with a short pass out of his box and Killie's Murray wasted the opportunity, slicing the ball well wide.

Bobby Wales was replaced by Marley Watkins but it was Herts who threatened next with Nieuwenhof shooting for goal. McCrorie gathered comfortably. Then Devlin and Shankland linked and the Aussie midfielder fired for goal only to see

McCrorie tip the ball over.

Nieuwenhof required treatment before he was substituted. Shankland and Forrest also departed with Elton Kabangu, Sander Kartum and James Wilson coming on. Halkett was handed the armband.

Fulton was patched up with his left leg seeming to be the problem as Liam Polworth and Cole Burke took the field for Killie, Lyons and Armstrong making way and, within seconds, Killie had a great chance but Murray wasted it, firing over from the penalty spot area.

The Rugby Park side looked the most likely to break the deadlock and they continued to hem Hearts into their own area, keeping the pressure on, but the Men in Maroon broke free and Wilson fired the ball wide from an angle on the right.

However, it was normal service soon after as Killie powered down the right only to be blocked by Hearts who, up to now, had managed the game well despite being minus one man.

Vassell was then substituted by ex-Jambo, Gary Mackay-Steven, as Fulton continued to struggle with Kent, who had been outstanding the game, taking goal kicks and the goalkeeper was again given treatment but remained on the pitch with four minutes of regular time remaining.

What a shock for Killie seconds later. Hearts moved forward and the ball broke to Kingsley (pictured by **Nigel Duncan**) from a header on the edge of the box with a minute left. The experienced defender drilled the ball into the bottom right-hand corner with his left foot from a central position to spark celebrations among the travelling support.

The goal was checked by VAR with a challenge by Wilson under scrutiny, but the goal stood and Hearts claimed their fourth win in a row.