

# Shankland looks to have mojo back

Lawrence Shankland received a clearance from goalkeeper Ryan Fulton near half-way. Hearts skipper looked up and noted that St Johnstone goalkeeper, Andrew Fisher, was walkabout.

Then he flighted the ball towards the unguarded net with Fisher frantically retracing his steps. The ball flew inches wide of the goalkeeper's right-hand post, but that short passage indicated that some of Shankland's spark has returned.

The Scotland striker (pictured) undoubtedly had a good day at the office. His presence around the penalty spot when Harry Milne fired in a cross from the left must have impacted on Saints player Barry Douglas who sent the ball into his own net for Hearts to open their account after 16 minutes.

And the 29-year-old forward played a major part in Hearts' second, clinically drilled home by Alan Forrest, with 31 minutes on the clock, Shankland's subtle pass through traffic opening up the Saints defence.

Shankland is out of contract at Tynecastle and, surely, sitting down with the much talked about front man must be high on the agenda for whoever takes over at Tynecastle.

Yes, Shankland has not enjoyed his best season, far from it, but he has recently scored five goals in three games, and a rejuvenated Shankland could once again push Hearts back up to

where they want to be, challenging for a place in the top three in the William Hill Premiership and securing European football again.

The three points on offer on a fine but chilly night in Gorgie means Hearts remain on top of the second phase relegation group ahead of Sunday's trip to Kilmarnock for their final league game of the season (kick-off 15.00).

On Wednesday, Saints travelled to the Capital with the pressure on and relegation looming large and their 16-year stay amongst the elite of Scottish soccer ended when Ronan Hale netted six minutes into injury-time from the penalty spot for Ross County to level their clash at Dundee. It finished 1-1.

Simo Valakari's men, who have been battling against the drop since late December, when they slipped to bottom spot in the 12-strong table, are four points adrift of the rest with only three points available.

Substitute Graham Carey provided travelling fans in a crowd of over 18,000 with something to cheer following a superb free-kick after 73 minutes to make the scoreline 2-1, but that is how it stayed.

That's despite lively Josh McPake failing to convert after robbing Jambos defender Frankie Kent near half-way, Fulton's left boot getting the Englishman out of jail, and Stephen Duke-McKanna firing an inviting cross deep into the Hearts box from the right which Taylor Steven just failed to connect with late on.

Yan Dahanda, who was full of running and heavily involved until he was substituted with 20 minutes of regulation time left, hit the bar with a right-foot shot from a free-kick from the edge of the box, as the home side dominated possession.

And the Men in Maroon looked in easy street until Carey's goal

which injected fresh enthusiasm into the visitors whose shaky defence has cost them dear this season, one to forget and light years away from the heady Scottish Cup and League Cup double in 2021.

Football is all about results and Saints have failed to deliver enough of them. Valakari said: "This season is history, we need to change thinks."

Liam Fox, Hearts' interim head coach, recorded his third straight win since taking over from sacked Neil Critchley, and admitted: "It was a very hard, fought victory."

So, Hearts travel to Kilmarnock on Sunday, a team reeling from a 3-0 defeat at Motherwell on Wednesday, all the goals coming in nine, second-half minutes.

The Rugby Park side were reduced to ten men when Robbie Deas was red-carded for a tackle on rising star Lennon Miller on the edge of the box after 29 minutes. It was Killie's ninth red card this season, and, of course, Kilmarnock's manager, Derek McInnes, is in the frame to replace Critchley as the boss at Tynecastle. Interesting times.