

'Written Off' Hearts Up For The Cup

This may be one of the youngest Hearts teams in the history of Edinburgh's finest football club, but in Billy Brown they have one of the most experienced and wily men in football.

Ahead of the all-Edinburgh Scottish League Cup quarter final tie at Easter Road on Wednesday, the Hearts assistant manager declared that most observers have written off his team's chances of not only avoiding relegation this season but of getting one over their city rivals in the quest for a semi-final place.

"It will certainly be a challenge to get a result on Wednesday night – and a challenge to go on for the rest of the season and prove everybody else wrong," said Brown.

"Ever since I've been in football, you've got to prove yourself and it makes it sweeter when you prove yourself right when everybody else says, 'you couldn't do it'. Listening to everybody and reading the papers, I feel we have been written off by most people. On that basis, maybe the pressure's off."

Brown, now in his third spell as assistant manager at Tynecastle – he was Jim Jefferies' right hand man on two previous occasions, being instrumental in Hearts ending their 36 year wait for a major trophy when they won the Scottish Cup in 1998 – was adamant that no one at Tynecastle shares the consensus of opinion that Hearts will be playing in the Championship next season.

"I certainly haven't given up and the manager hasn't written us off either. Like me, he's fully up for the challenge."

Hearts are in a dismal run of form that has seen them failed to win their previous seven SPFL games with their only wins coming in penalty shoot-outs against lower league opposition

in Raith Rovers and Queen of the South in the League Cup. But Brown insists nothing has changed.

“We had a major task at the start of the season, we’ve still got that major task and we’ve still got enough games to be successful in that task,” added Brown. “We’ve got one of the best up and coming managers in the game. He’s meticulous, he’s passionate and he’s got a stern streak in him that will do well and get us out of this situation. At the moment, there isn’t a better man to take Hearts forward. I’ve worked in partnership with one of the best managers this country’s had for a long time in Jim Jefferies so I know what it takes. And there’s no doubt in my mind Gary Locke has got what it takes to get us out of the situation we’re in”

Brown said the spirit in the Tynecastle camp is as strong as it was at the start of the season.

“All the doom and gloom is from people in the media. There’s no doom and gloom here. We’re up for the task. There’s no great cloud hanging over Tynecastle. Everybody likes to think there is but there isn’t. We’ve certainly got a chance of winning the cup tie against Hibs – certainly the players are not lacking in confidence despite what a lot of people may think.”

Brown refused to entertain the idea that the League Cup quarter final was a distraction for his young team. “It’s not a distraction, it’s something everyone here relishes. People might say Hibs are favourites and you can understand that. They have signed loads of players and there are not many clubs who pay £200,000 for a player as Hibs have. So there is a financial outlay and big expectations for their supporters. They are at home, there are not many young players in the Hibs team and they are playing a young team. I would think, if there’s extra pressure in a game like this, it’s certainly not at this end of the city.”

Despite his talking up of Hearts city rivals, Brown remained as confident as ever. "It's a game we are desperate to win and these games mean more to the supporters than any other. As long as we give our all we can get a result."

Hearts striker Callum Paterson is likely to replace the injured Ryan Stevenson for the tie at Easter Road which will be broadcast live on BBC Scotland television.