

The Quiet Man Aims to Deliver Again for Hearts

He's the quiet man of Scottish football. But anyone thinking Hearts Head Coach Robbie Neilson is less determined than any other manager in Scottish football seriously needs to think again.

The man who famously scored the winner for Hearts in a Uefa Cup tie in Basle in 2004 and who earned the nickname 'The Tackle' for his goal saving challenge against Gretna during the Maroons' 2006 Scottish Cup Final triumph was, perhaps, a surprise choice when Hearts replaced Gary Locke as Head Coach in the summer. However, Director of Football Craig Levein knows Neilson very well from the time Levein himself was in charge of Hearts and he saw in the former full back not only a keen student of the game but someone who would be eager to try new methods to try to return Hearts to the top flight of Scottish football.

It's been well documented that the Hearts players this season train twice, sometimes three times a day as the Head Coach tries to get his team not just physically and match fit but mentally attuned too. As one of the leading lights in Hearts excellent displays this season, Prince Buaben, says the three sessions a day is not all about running round the pitch and doing physical exercises. Some of the additional training sessions are about looking at the opposition, the type of game Hearts can expect and, in the case of last Saturday's game at Queen of the South and this weekend's forthcoming fixture at Alloa Athletic, how the team will play on an artificial surface. Indeed, Hearts trained at Alloa's Recreation Park on Wednesday ahead of Saturday's game – paying for the privilege.

'I played under Craig Levein at Dundee United' says Buaben, 'so I knew all about the philosophy. Robbie Neilson is also a

great advocate of this approach. So many other clubs have their players in for training in the morning then they go away and do what they please afterwards. It's different at Hearts and it's all about developing as a player, developing as a team. Yes, some of the younger players moan a bit about the extra sessions or not having a day off the day after a game. But they're now discovering it's making them better players and making the team a better unit'

Hearts are presently clear of the pack at the top of the SPFL Championship, six points ahead of chief promotion rivals Rangers and twelve ahead of city rivals Hibernian, a gap which may well prove significant even at this early stage of the season. Neilson, though, is the last person in the world to get carried away by Hearts impressive start. And he's demanding more of his players.

'We've made a good start but that's all it is' he told the club's official website. 'It's about winning the next game. We go to Alloa next week and we've already spoken about it in the dressing room. We're ready to go again.

We need to get geared up for that because it's about winning games, it's not about other people's form or who they're playing against. We must keep winning. If we keep winning then we'll win the league.

It's about what we do day in, day out, week in, week out. Every minute we're on that training field we're gearing up for a game on Saturday. We must make sure that we don't waste any time.

Our role this year is to make sure that we get promoted back to the Premiership. We must focus on ourselves."

It's a message the quiet unassuming man of Scottish football is driving home to his players, particularly the younger element. As he proved at Dumfries last Saturday and is likely to prove again this weekend, Neilson isn't afraid to change a

winning formula. He has hinted at making one or two changes to a team that has won seven out of eight league games this season and who face the Wasps at the weekend.

'The Tackle' isn't a man to rest on his laurels. As a player, Robbie Neilson contributed to two of the most joyous occasions in my days as a Hearts supporter – that winning goal in Switzerland and that magnificent challenge in the 2006 Scottish Cup Final. As a Head Coach whose reputation is growing by the week and whose approach to the game is refreshingly different – and, so far, successful – who's to say he won't deliver another joyous occasion for all Hearts supporters come May?