

Hearts Confident Ahead of Betfred Cup Semi-Final



Photo: SPFL

Hearts make the short journey to BT Murrayfield on Sunday quietly confident they can reach their first League Cup final since 2013. Craig Levein's men take on league champions and cup holders Celtic in the Betfred Cup semi-final played at the home of Scottish rugby. If there have been those who have opined that the League Cup/Betfred Cup has been devalued in recent years – particularly as there is no Europa League place for the winners – there will be around 60,000 fans at BT Murrayfield who will beg to differ.

Hearts haven't won the League Cup since 1962 but their performances in the majority of their games this season has given the Maroon Army hope that this might be the year to end this barren run.

Certainly, confidence is high. Hearts are not just top of the Premiership table – they are five points clear. Players such as Olly Lee, Callumn Morrison, Peter Haring, Michael Smith and the inimitable Steven Naismith have transformed Hearts from a team lacking direction to one who have a determination, impregnable team spirit and a will to win.

Levein, normally associated with a cautious approach, is clearly revelling in the transformation of his team. He told the official Hearts website:

"I think we've got a good chance of winning the game. I would never say anything is guaranteed in football, but the players are confident.

"Our games against Celtic recently have been close and we have recent experience of winning.

"Both teams have got injuries and are missing some really good players. It's a semi-final. If either of the teams aren't on their game, then they're getting beat.

"The players recognise that this is a chance and an opportunity to get to a national final. I expect both teams to be focused and ready.

"One thing is for certain and that is that we will do our absolute utmost to win the game."

Hearts have sold more than 28,000 tickets for the game and despite long-term injuries to key players Christophe Berra, John Souttar and Uche Ikpeazu the boys in maroon remain confident of reaching the final.

Levein will make a late decision whether to play influential midfielder Peter Haring who has been nursing an injury of late and missed Hearts wins over Aberdeen and Dundee.

The Betfred Cup semi-final between Hearts and Celtic kicks off at BT Murrayfield at 1.30pm on Sunday. You can read Mike Smith's match report in The Edinburgh Reporter on Sunday evening.