

Hearts manager and captain react to football's suspension due to Coronavirus outbreak

After the announcement from the Joint Response Group of the SPFL and SFA that all domestic professional football games have been suspended indefinitely, Hearts have said they fully support the decision and understand that while this scenario may cause inconvenience and uncertainty among supporters, the health and wellbeing of supporters, players, staff and the general public must take priority.

Manager Daniel Stendel and captain Steven Naismith have given their reaction to the news

Stendel told the official Hearts website:

“It is a big blow for everyone to have no football, but this is an extraordinary situation and people’s health must come first.

“You see in other countries that games are being postponed, then you have European games and English games called off, so it makes sense that matches in Scotland are the same.

“We do not know what will happen next. I’m sure that the clubs will be speaking to the league and a sensible decision will be made. I have said before that I think the league should be played to a finish and I believe that is the fair thing to do.

“However, I do not know if this can happen so we need a solution that is fair to everyone and I am sure that this is what the league will do.

“For now we will plan the best way for the players to keep fit and be ready in case we can start playing games again.”

Club captain Steven Naismith says suspending the league is the right decision

“I think it definitely is the right move. Britain in general has kind of been the last ones to make that call but the biggest thing here is health and safety. That’s paramount for everything. You then go further down, and football is about the fans. To compromise on any health issues or closed-door games goes against what we all do this game and love this game for. I think it’s the right decision. It now gives everybody a situation where we can sit

and look at what the best way forward is, what structure going forward is the best to be played out. That's not just domestically but that across all of international football and every other competition out there. Overall it is the right decision and we as a club will follow what the guidelines are from now on in to be ready for the next game, whenever that may be."

"We don't know what is going to happen next. These conversations will have been going on for days and there will be a process that we now follow. The main thing now is that we, as a country, can get over this virus and move forward. Once you're at the other end of that and looking back then it'll definitely be the right decision and the safest one."

Naismith admitted the players talk about the situation in the dressing room

"It's something that was talked about more frequently over the last day or so, in terms of what's happened in different leagues and what measures they're all taking. It's natural to then speculate what is going to happen. The course and the spread of this virus has been that rapid and that quick that it was inevitable that there was going to be a shutdown. Now we're at that point."

"When it's on your actual doorstep and it's getting to the point where this virus is that deadly then it puts things into a clearer perspective and that is that health and safety

is paramount. We can play football when everybody's moved on beyond this virus and get back to enjoying that."

The skipper also gave his views on playing games behind closed doors.

"It's not right not to have fans there cheering on their team. Going further down, fans have paid their money so there's the whole financial aspect of it. At the moment, in general, everybody's personal agendas have to be put aside for what's best for the whole country and the whole world in this pandemic. The right measures are now being taken. This process will go on for as long as it needs to go on until everything's cleared. I don't think there can be any short-term measures here. This is a serious issue that the coverage that everybody has seen shows. It is a very serious situation."

Finally, Naismith said he was confident he and his teammates will be prepared when football resumes.

"You don't want to be caught cold when it comes back around to training and fixtures. The professional levels in the game now are such that people do keep going when there's a period of internationals, a break or when there's time off. Players still get on with their individual programmes and make sure that they're in the fittest state possible."