

Neil Doncaster defends SPFL's role in potential Hearts' downfall

SPFL Chief Executive Neil Doncaster has defended the organisation's handling of the game's reaction to the coronavirus pandemic and urged everyone to work together following the collapse of reconstruction talks which sparked anger amongst a number of clubs.

Ann Budge of Hearts accused other clubs of "appalling disrespect" whilst Falkirk claimed Scottish football had become an "utter shambles" and Partick Thistle called Premiership clubs "thoughtless and selfish."

Hearts who were bottom of the table when football was suspended look likely to be 'relegated' 'demoted' or 'ejected' from the top-flight this week although the club are looking at every possible avenue to prevent this.



Ladbrokes Scottish Premiership – Hibernian v Hearts.
Easter Road Stadium, Edinburgh, Midlothian, UK.
22/09/2019.

Pic shows: as Hibs play host to city rivals Hearts at Easter Road Stadium, Edinburgh.

Credit: Ian Jacobs

Doncaster was interviewed at length on Sunday's BBC Radio Scotland 'Sportsound' programme and insisted that there were no easy answers.

He defended the decision not to void the season as that would be unfair to Dundee United who looked certain to win the Championship.

He also claimed that many clubs will have players out of contract before any potential football could be played and pointed out that France have made a similar decision.

He said: "We are trying to work together for the benefit of 42 clubs and get the game back up and running as soon as possible.

"The more we have criticism and infighting, the more difficult that is because instead of working on a plan to get games back up and running, me and my team are appearing on programmes like this trying to defend rather than getting on the front foot and getting games back on as soon as possible.

"You have got to remember we are a sporting competition and every year you get champion clubs and clubs who are relegated.

"Clearly nobody expected a line would have to be drawn under the lower-league season at this stage because of the Covid-19 crisis but we have to deal with the consequences.

"You could go down the road of voiding the season but how would the likes of Dundee United feel about that? And that's aside from the legal ramifications.

“Ultimately in a sporting competition you have to have a pragmatic way forward.”

When asked about potential reconstruction he responded: “You probably need 11 votes out of 12 in the Premiership and 75 per cent in the other leagues, so it was always going to be a difficult challenge,” he added.

“I was told from the Premiership meeting on Friday that whilst there was a genuine sympathy for the idea of reconstruction talks progressing, the view was that now wasn’t the time.

“I do think there remains an open-mindedness to look at reconstruction. The people on the reconstruction board put in a huge amount of work and I would hope that won’t be wasted.”

“This is an unprecedented crisis and leagues are having to respond to that in the best way they can,” he said. These sorts of things will play out across Europe.

“We all recognise that we can’t play games – there’s a government directive that means there’s no football until June 10 at the earliest.

“Some leagues – the German and English – are trying to get games on behind closed doors. It will be interesting to see whether they can succeed. I see a third Brighton player has been reported for Covid-19 and I believe one of the German teams is in self-isolation as a result of a player testing positive.

“The French league have done what we did, they have drawn a line under the season on a points-per-game basis.

“We know how many players are out of contract in May and during June and that will put clubs in a very difficult position and unable to play their remaining games, certainly not with the squads that started the 19-20 season.

“The board have committed to consulting with clubs and are looking forward to hearing some feedback from the Premiership meeting on Friday which I believe covered this issue.”

In response to Hearts’ threat of a formal challenge if they are consigned to the drop and Doncaster responded: “Clubs must do what they feel is right for themselves but ultimately legal action against the league is legal action against the clubs.”