

Hearts instructed to stop pre-season training for 10-days

Hearts have been instructed to stop their pre-season training until at least August 24 under new rules agreed by the Joint SFA/SPFL response group to prevent further coronavirus chaos.

A missive sent out from the JRG yesterday following Covid-19 rule breaches at Aberdeen and Celtic prevent any adult (Over-18) teams other than Scottish Premiership sides from doing organised training in ANY form.

Glasgow City women's side have been given an exemption from the further rules as they prepare for a Champions League tie.



Rod Petrie, Joint Response Group Chair: "The message from First Minister could not have been clearer. The JRG must now ensure that the planned resumption of football beyond the Scottish Premiership is done in a controlled manner with the strictest adherence to protocols and guidelines.

"The pause on the return to training for the professional game outwith the Scottish Premiership will not impact on the proposed start dates of the respective league competitions but will give sufficient time to reinforce protocols, educate players and make sure of the ability of clubs in the lower divisions to conform."

Neil Doncaster, SPFL Chief Executive: "Today's measures underline the fact that Scottish football is doing everything

it possibly can to protect our game. The recent, high-profile breaches must be used as further motivation for all those with our game's best interests at heart to comply absolutely with these necessary restrictions and safeguards."

Hearts responded with a statement on the club website: "Heart of Midlothian Football Club can confirm that we were advised at 4.30pm this afternoon of the decision of the Joint Response Group to delay the return to training for clubs out-with the SPFL Premiership and that as a consequence, Hearts were required to cease training with immediate effect.

"We requested a delay to the publication of that decision, while we discussed the implications. While the situation was being discussed internally, the decision was published, some 20 minutes or so later. While recognising the hugely complex decision-making processes involved in dealing with the Covid-19 crisis, the Club has nonetheless objected to this decision in the strongest terms.

"To be clear, we had previously requested to return to training on 3rd August to fit in with our training plans and needs. Along with a Betfred Cup campaign and Championship season to prepare for, we also have a Scottish Cup semi-final to participate in. We confirmed that we were able to comply with all the required protocols, which we have done. All other Championship clubs were given the same opportunity to return to training. They chose not to return at that time, as was their right.

"Having received authority to return to training, we built our plans around the agreed date. Our players and support staff were taken off furlough; contracts were signed with new staff and new players on the clear understanding that we would be in full training. We signed contracts with service providers, including Oriam and our Testing company. Testing has once again been carried out this week, with costs incurred, in anticipation of continued training. Suffice to say that at a

time when every football club in the land is managing its costs as tightly as possible, we have incurred significant “unnecessary” costs.

“We have done nothing wrong and yet, once again, we are being disproportionately disadvantaged by a decision which has been described as “the fairest”. We should not forget that this situation has come about, not because of Covid-19, but because of behavioural issues, not by our employees but by those of other clubs. This delay reflects a lack of confidence that certain clubs will be able to comply and meet the required protocols. How can it possibly be “fair” that we should be penalised?

“When questioned in what way this was “the fairest way forward”, we were advised that some other clubs now wanted to return to training and it was deemed that by preventing them from doing so, without halting our training, would give us an unfair advantage.

“Our fans are naturally incensed by this action, especially given what has transpired over recent months. For the avoidance of doubt, everyone at the Club is equally incensed. We are currently considering our options.”