

# **Robbie Neilson looks ahead to Cove with fans back at Tynecastle**

**Following a comfortable victory over Peterhead on Saturday, Hearts welcome Cove Rangers to Tynecastle on Tuesday night, a team managed by former Hearts player Paul Hartley.**

Cove were beaten 3-2 by Stirling Albion in their opening group stage game and now come to Tynecastle needing a result. Neilson admitted that he is impressed with what Hartley is building at Cove and insists Hearts will need to play well if they're to come out on top.

Neilson said: "I know Paul really well. I've known him for years. I speak with him regularly, we had a couple of players on loan up their last season obviously {Logan and Smith}, he's building a good squad, he's not got a huge number of players just now, but he's brought in some experience in midfield, they'll be a difficult team to beat."

Hearts controlled the game on Saturday and Neilson said he was pleased with what he saw in a game which he believes, was an early tester for his side, but he expects the slicker Tynecastle surface to hugely benefit his players on Tuesday night.

He said: "We want to win every single game, getting off to a really good start at Peterhead was great, I was really happy with it, I thought we controlled the game, these games can be

difficult in pre-season, because the fitness levels aren't always there, there are new players coming in and players going out, the pitch can be dry and sticky, but tomorrow the pitch will be slick, and we'll have had a game under our belt, so I think it'll be a different game."

Neilson has often mentioned how key momentum is in football and the Hearts gaffer does have his gripes about the early resumption, but believes these matches are the perfect way for his side to build momentum before their opening day showdown with Celtic.

He said: "It doesn't matter who you play in the first game, you want that momentum. You want to be doing well in pre-season. There are pros and cons for the Premier Cup. The cons are, that it comes very early when you're still trying to put your squad together, but the pros are it gets you competitive from the start, so when the League campaign starts it's not your first competitive game."

Fans will return to Tynecastle on Tuesday night for the first time since 7 March 2020. That day Conor Washington cancelled out Chris Long's opener in a 1-1 draw with Motherwell and although the atmosphere at Tynecastle wasn't great that season, Neilson expects his players to benefit considerably from the return of supporters.

Neilson said: "I think a number of the players last year missed the fans, just that pressure and intensity, even just in pre-season with 250-300 people makes a big difference and I think the players will really benefit from it.

"Last season the football wasn't great, in general, I watched a lot of games last year, there was no atmosphere, the games were flat, but you see at the Euros it's night and day, the benefit of fans is massive, especially with the atmosphere at Tynecastle."

Hearts' squad numbers were announced last week, and the

notable absentees were numbers six and nine, Neilson explained Hearts are still in the market for two targets, who could potentially take those numbers.

Neilson said: "We're still working away, there's a couple guys we're trying to get done as soon as possible, but all managers will tell you it takes time. Scotland isn't a country where players will come right way, we need to negotiate back and forth, but we've got two targets at the moment and hopefully we can get them in soon."

One player Hearts did manage to sign this window was Alex Cochrane, who has impressed the Hearts boss since joining on loan from Brighton.

He said: "I've been delighted with him, we watched him a lot last year, before he went over to Belgium. Obviously, we know David Weir really well (Loans Manager at Brighton), so we spoke to him regularly about it. I think he's just a good player, technically very good, he's a good athlete and he's got a good attitude, very pleased with him on and off the pitch.

"He started as a central midfielder, but he can play left back, left wing back and left centre back, so he's very comfortable on the ball and someone I'm very pleased with."

Hearts maybe struggling with signings on the pitch, but off the pitch the appointments just keep coming, with a new head of recruitment being announced today.

William Lancefield spent four and a half years as Southampton's lead scout, before departing for Tynecastle, to take up the role vacated by John Murray, who retired last month after 25 years at Hearts.

Neilson said: "I met him last week, Joe knows him better than me, he had him at Norwich, then he went down to Southampton. He has a good experience of the English game, he's based down

there, so he'll be able to go to the games, speak to the agents and players and do the communication side of things."

Lancefield isn't the only new arrival at Tynecastle, Neilson explained Hearts have also appointed a lead recruitment analyst to help with data analysing.

He said: "Nowadays football is a lot more data led, we've brought in George Brown from Rangers, who is a data analyst, he looks at the recruitment side of it. It's so important nowadays, because it's such a big part of the game now, gone are the days where you go and watch a guy a couple of times and make a decision, so very pleased to have the pair of them on board."