

Robbie Neilson praises match winner Walker

Jamie Walker came off the bench to make sure Hearts made it four wins from four in the Premier Sports Cup on Sunday.

The midfielder's 75th minute strike was not enough to see Hearts seeded for the round of 16 draw and as a result the Jambos have been handed an away tie against Celtic.

The Hearts boss remains optimistic though and admitted that he couldn't have asked his players for anymore.

He said: "We won four games out of four, with no goals conceded and we didn't get seeded. The nature of this competition means teams will get 3-0 victories for games getting postponed, which is always going to make it difficult.

"I can't really ask any more of my players. I thought we created loads of chances with good play within it and we just didn't have the final moment, whether it was the rub of the green with the goalkeeper or poor finishing, but all in all 12 points out of 12 with no goals conceded bodes well for the season.

"We knew before the competition started how it was going to be. Really, we would've been better off with the game getting cancelled. These games are difficult though, teams sit in and make it difficult for you, but the players gave it their all."

Jamie Walker regularly came off the bench to score last season for Hearts, and Neilson explained fitness is the issue and

it's something that Walker is working really hard on.

Neilson said: "I thought he was great when he came on. The game started to open up and he gets into pockets of space, he is probably one of the best we've got when it's like that, he takes the ball and drives at defences. He just needs to work on his fitness so he can do that for 90 minutes.

"He needs to keep working away. For me, fitness is a massive part of the game. He had a few niggles last season and through pre-season, so he needs to keep building at it. To his credit, he is working extremely hard to be as fit as he can be.

"We want him to get to a stage where he's doing that from minute one. Technically, he's probably one of the best players we've got. It's the other side that we need to continue to work at."

Craig Gordon made it 11 consecutive clean sheets and Robbie Neilson once again repeated the importance of the Hearts stopper.

He said: "He's been exceptional since day one. He brings a calmness and organisation to back four and if we need him in that final moment he produces."

There was no John Souttar in the matchday squad. The defender played 90 minutes against Stirling Albion on Tuesday and appeared to take a slight knock towards the end of the match, but Neilson said there is no reason for concern ahead of Saturday's match against Celtic.

He said: "John's fine. It was a wee bit too early for him today, but he'll train on Wednesday and get ready for Saturday."



Scottish Championship – Heart of Midlothian v Dundee.
Tynecastle Park, Edinburgh, Midlothian, UK.
06/3/2021

Hearts play host to Dundee in the Scottish Championship at Tynecastle Park, Edinburgh.

Pic shows: Hearts' manager, Robbie Neilson, shades his eyes from the sun during the first half.

Credit: Ian Jacobs