

Hearts will play Aberdeen without top goalscorer

After three consecutive 1-1 draws against Rangers, Dundee and St Johnstone, Hearts are looking to get back on the winning trail against Aberdeen.

The Jambos dominated the second half at McDiarmid Park on Wednesday but couldn't find a winning goal after Josh Ginnelly cancelled out Liam Gordon's opener before half time.

Hearts' top goalscorer Liam Boyce hobbled off against Dundee last weekend and missed the trip to Perth four days later. Armand Gnanouillet led the line in his absence and Robbie Neilson confirmed the Northern Irishman will be absent again for the trip to the Granite City.

"Boycey won't make it," he said.

"Armand did really well at St Johnstone, I was really pleased with him. He led the line well, and other than getting a goal he did everything for us, so I was happy with him. He's had to be patient, but Boycey has been scoring goals, so he has had to wait his time," he added.

"But there are a few boys like that. It's part of football, he has to take his chance. We've been quite harsh with him in that he's not played a lot of games and we chuck him in and expect him to be bang at it.

"He's played 30 minutes then 90, we're hopeful that he'll get more game time now. It's like any player, some players need

two games to get going, some need five. When I was a player I needed six or seven. Armand has that opportunity now; he needs to go and take it.”

Hearts have a number of first team players out of contract in summer, one of whom is Gnaudillet and whilst many players might feel like they’re playing for their Tynecastle futures, Neilson says with the squad depth Hearts have at their disposal, the players need to be on their game, regardless of their contract situation.

“It’s important for everyone to show what they can do, whether you are under contract or whether you’re not. Every game is an audition, every window there’s pressure on you because we might be bringing other players in, so for me it doesn’t matter if you have three years or six months, you’ve got to be at it in every game.

“We’ve got good options, especially in that attacking area. I speak to players when they are joining the club and say they are not going to play 38 games, 90 minute every week.

”They’ll be starting games and coming on and when they get that opportunity it’s important they are at it.

“It’s just being honest with them from the start. For me that position [winger] is probably the hardest on the pitch in that you’re expected to come back and defend, you’re expected to go and attack and take people on one against one and be explosive.”

Hearts have been punished for a lack of ruthlessness in front of goal this season and Neilson confirmed he is already looking ahead to the January transfer window, with another attacker high on his list of priorities.

“We’d still like to get another attacker in, whether it’s a wide player or a striker,” he explained.

“You always need that in January to give the team a lift and it will also be dependent on where we are in terms of positions, if everyone is fit or we have injuries.

“We want to build, and you want to come out of every window in better condition than you went in. That will be the same in January. It might be everyone staying and one or two coming in. Or it might be that one or two go but the aim is always to make the squad better than it was going in. The summer window was good, but that’s the way it should be, we should be bringing in good players.”

Hearts will face an Aberdeen side full of confidence after victory over Hibernian last weekend and a hard-fought point at Ibrox on Wednesday.

“They started the season really well then had that blip but when you look at the players they’ve got, you always expected them to come back again and they’ve done that. For us, it’s always a tough game up there, but we feel as if we’re in a good place and we hope to go there and get three points.”

After taking over 3,000 fans to Perth on Wednesday night, only 900 Jambos will be making the journey north on Saturday, much to the manager’s disappointment.

“I am disappointed actually,” Neilson admitted.

“We took 3,500 on a Wednesday night to Perth so I would have expected three, four thousand – maybe more if we got it. It’s the way it is, there is not much we can do about it and I’m sure the 900 that are coming up will have a good time. It’s up to them, they made the decision, and we have to accept it.”