

Robbie Neilson on the Glasgow “long blink”

Robbie Neilson was half-way down the Ibrox tunnel when Allan McGregor flapped at Gary Mackay-Steven’s corner and Craig Halkett nodded home to rescue a point for the Gorgie side and stretch their unbeaten run in the cinch Premiership to nine games.

The Hearts boss was given his marching orders by referee Don Robertson for complaining about an altercation between Stephen Kingsley and Rangers substitute Juninho Bacuna, in which the latter grabbed the defender by the throat.

Robertson brandished a yellow card in the direction of both players, before Neilson was also shown two yellow’s and sent away from the technical area.

Neilson will now be absent from the dugout in Hearts’ next three fixtures against Dundee, St Johnstone and Aberdeen, after the one game ban he accepted triggered a two-game ban that had been suspended following a defeat last season.

Lee McCulloch, Gordon Forrest and Steven Naismith will all be in the Hearts dugout and Neilson doesn’t expect his absence to impact on the players, as he explains the reasons behind accepting the ban he was offered.

“No, it should be alright,” he said.

"The players know what they need to do. We don't change much in what we're doing, and I will be able to communicate with the bench.

"I got offered a ban last time. I didn't accept it and I ended up getting 2+2, so if you get offered one, you know there's the potential to get another 2+2," he explained.

"The way it works on the panel, you're guilty until you prove your innocence, so there's not really much point in going into it, sometimes you just need to accept these things as disappointing as it is.

"We've been all been there before. It's the old Glasgow long blink, where you don't see things, so we'll just need to move on. It's done now, we're still not very happy about it but we have to accept it.

"These tests will come throughout the season. When you're up the top end of the league, you'll get these suspensions, red cards, penalties and we just need to deal with it."

Hearts welcome Dundee on Saturday and it's fair to say that Neilson hasn't forgotten the Dens Park clubs' actions last summer which led to Hearts' demotion to the Championship.

The Hearts boss highlighted to his players the importance of the matchups last season, but with plenty new arrivals he admitted the importance will be reiterated.

"We spoke about it last season and we will touch on it again," said Neilson.

"I think it's very important there's that bit of edge about the game and it's good to have that within the game as long as it doesn't boil over. The players will be motivated and ready to go. And I'm sure the 20,000 Hearts fans will have the place rocking."

Away from all the bad blood, Neilson acknowledges the

importance of the next eight days for the Jambos, with trips to St Johnstone and Aberdeen following the Dundee grudge match.

“It’s the same three points you are aiming for. We got a decent point at Ibrox, but we need to carry on from that as it’s a massive week for us with Dundee then two really tough away games as well.”

“I think the players will be up for it, playing at Tynecastle in front of 20,000 fans. They trained well this week and we are on a good run of form. It’s just about making sure we take that into the game.”

As for Saturday’s opponents Dundee, they will arrive at Tynecastle in high spirits after heaping more misery on Aberdeen boss Stephen Glass, by picking up their first win of the season, coupled with Leigh Griffiths’ first goal in his second spell with the club.

Neilson admits that with Hearts remaining the only unbeaten side in the cinch Premiership, other sides will raise their game, amid the opportunity to end that unbeaten run.

“I’m sure they would [like to end it]. When you go so far unbeaten you are always a target for teams. Everyone we come up against now wants to be that first team to beat us. We just have to deal with that.

“No matter where we are in the league Hearts always have a target on our back. It’s like the Old Firm because teams will up their game against you. They know we are doing well, and they will have to bring their best game. It will be no different on Saturday. Dundee will be at it; they will be firing and ready for us.”



Premier Sports Cup – Heart of Midlothian v Inverness
Caledonian Thistle

25/7/2021.

Hearts play host to Inverness Caledonian Thistle in the Premier Sports Cup at tynecastle Park, Edinburgh, Midlothian. Pic shows: Inverness Caley forward, Michael Gardyne, holds off Hearts' Right-Back, Michael Smith, as Hearts' manager, Robbie Neilson and Inverness Caley manager, Billy Dodds, look on.

Credit: Ian Jacobs