

Neilson keen to offer new contract to keep Halkett at Tynecastle

After the disappointment of not just the result at Fir Park, but the manner in which Hearts succumbed to their second league defeat of the season leaves Robbie Neilson's side needing to bounce back this weekend.

The Jambos host St Mirren tomorrow and will be looking to repay the 3,800 supporters that travelled to Lanarkshire in good faith last weekend but were treated to Hearts' poorest performance of the season.

After the defeat at Pittodrie last month, Hearts responded well with a victory over Dundee United and the Hearts supporters will be expecting a similar performance and result this weekend.

The Hearts boss admitted that his players struggled to impose their own style on the game, which he believes was down to the stop-start nature the game was played in.

"We went to the game last Saturday and it was very stop-start, there was no flow in it," said Neilson.

"The ball was dead for 64 minutes out of 90. That means you've only got 26 minutes of football; we've got 55% of possession,

which works out at 14 minutes of actually having the ball.

“That means that when you’ve got the ball you’ve got to take your opportunities, which we didn’t, but also when you don’t have the ball you need to defend better than we did.”

Historically, Hearts have struggled away from home, however they did get the better of tomorrow’s opponents in Paisley earlier in the season and Neilson was quick to defend his sides away record.

“If you look at most teams, their home form is better than their away form. It’s about figuring out how to win away games.

“People said our away form had changed, now we have lost two away games and people say it’s now the end of the world and the away form is terrible.

“As the manager we have to have a way of playing. You can’t do one way one week and something different the next. You need continuity. We are trying to bring young players through and tell them this is how you play at Hearts.

“I spoke at the start of the season of trying to improve the away form. We did really well at the start of the season, but the last couple of the away games we’ve not performed.”

The Hearts fans have voiced their concerns recently on Neilson being too reluctant to change formation when things aren’t working.

Hearts’ two defeats this season against Aberdeen and Motherwell have largely been down to the opposition having an extra player in the middle of the pitch.

The Hearts boss believes that instead of changing things when something isn’t working, Hearts simply need to be better on the field.

“A lot of times when you lose games people say you need to change this and that, but we decide as a club how we want to play and instead of changing things that don’t work we have to get better at what we are doing.”

Craig Halkett missed out last weekend with a hip problem, but Neilson confirmed he will return this weekend and added that he is keen to keep the defender, who’s contract expires in the summer, at Tynecastle.

“We’re speaking to Craig Halkett as well. We’ll try and get something done. I’d love to keep him; he’s done very well this season for us. Playing in the middle of that back three I think it suits him and he’s improved, as the team has improved.”

When asked if Hearts missed Halkett last weekend, Neilson replied:

“Probably. I think the physicality, the way in which Motherwell play, being direct, strikers using their physicality and backing in, getting into areas because of that and gaining territory, so yes, I think Craig would’ve helped us.”

It’ll be a year on Sunday since Hearts suffered an embarrassing League Cup exit at the hands of Alloa Athletic. That performance was one of many last season, which lacked energy, creativity and just sheer quality.

Now however, Hearts have that in abundance, and despite a poor performance last weekend, maybe some perspective is needed with the Jambos currently sitting third in a competitive top-flight.

When asked about the progress in the last year, Neilson said:

“If we’re going back a year, then it probably shows how far we’ve come. Sometimes when you’re at a club like Hearts, you

win a couple games you're up there then you lose a couple and you're down there.

"We need to have a balance and not be too up and down. We're a good team, we believe that we've showed that this season, but we've still got quite a way to go to make sure that when we don't play it's not downhill like it was at the weekend.

"We've got a young squad as well and quite an inexperienced squad as well, so we have to learn to balance that off and my job is to try and manage the external noise that comes from a good performance and a bad performance."



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: Hearts' Canadian Right-Back, Craig Halkett.

Credit: Ian Jacobs