

Hearts support bringing winter break forward

Tuesday's announcement from the First Minister Nicola Sturgeon left Scottish football with a decision to make.

Do they plough on and play the remaining three matchdays prior to the winter break with the 500 fans permitted, or do we bring the winter break forward and rearrange these fixtures for when full capacity is allowed to return, hopefully in three weeks time.

It has now been confirmed that clubs in The Scottish Championship, League One and League Two have agreed to plough on to prevent fixture congestion, however the Premiership clubs will begin their winter breaks after the Boxing Day matches.

Hearts have confirmed they were in favour of bringing the winter break forward which would mean rescheduling of their fixtures against St Johnstone and Hibernian, originally to be played on the 29 December and the 3 January.

Hearts vs St Johnstone will now take place week commencing 17 January and the rearranged date for the Edinburgh Derby is now 1 February.

When asked about the current predicament, Neilson responded: "I found out yesterday afternoon about the First Minister's comments and the restriction on the fans. We are just preparing for the game on Sunday and hoping it goes ahead. The powers that be will decide if that's going to happen or not.

If it does, we will crack on. If it doesn't, we will need to reassess it and see what we do.

"For me, it's very important to have fans there. We had a period of 18 months, and we all accept it was very difficult to get through the games. The preference for the club and myself would be to bring that winter break forward as much as we can to ensure that, when the games do get played, we get as many fans there as possible. They are the heart and soul of the club.

"That's probably the biggest problem we have, the rescheduling of games. You have Scottish Cup games coming up, World Cup play-offs and other international games. It's difficult to get a date for them. That's not my department. My remit is to get the boys ready for games and right now we are getting ready for Ross County on Sunday."

Hearts were due to have home fixtures against Ross County and St Johnstone on the 26th and 29th December prior to the New Year Derby and Neilson admitted that much like football supporters, the busy festive schedule is one that managers and players enjoy also.

"It's a period we all like and look forward to because you have your Boxing Day games, your derbies over the course of the New Year period. We just need to prepare for the next game and what will be, will be.

"You would play the derby game every week if you could. It's a massive game for us. Yes, you would like a full house there to bring that atmosphere and intensity. It's out-with our control. If it goes ahead, great. If not, it will get rescheduled, and we'll be ready for that one."

Reports emerged earlier in the week linking Hearts with Nathaniel Atkinson, Neilson confirmed talks are ongoing but admitted the deal is not done yet.

The Hearts boss has previously spoken about his need for another striker being at the top of his Christmas tree.

“We know what we need to get in and we’re moving forward with a couple of targets,” Neilson said.

“Players will come in and players will go out. Atkinson is one that has been put to us. It’s still a deal that is still to be done so I don’t want to take too much about it but it’s an area we’d like to strengthen.

“It’s more the profile we’re looking for, the age, the athleticism. Hopefully they can come and firstly, settle in quickly and then do well for the club.”

Hearts welcome Ross County to Tynecastle on Boxing Day in what will be the last Scottish Premiership game for three weeks.

Beni Banningime remains out along with Stephen Kingsley, however Neilson was optimistic with regards to the rest of his squad.

“Michael Smith is back, Boycie will train on Friday, Josh Ginnelly is back from suspension. Stephen Kingsley got scanned although we’re still waiting on the results of that. It does not look as bad as we expected. I don’t think he’ll make the weekend, but I expect him, if the games go ahead, to be definitely available for the derby.”