

McEneff happy to fight for a Hearts starting place

Many Hearts fans were delighted for Irishman, Aaron McEneff, when he marked a rare cameo appearance off the bench against Dundee United with a goal.

Hearts won that match 5-2, in what was an thrilling encounter, but many fans left Tynecastle that day in November speaking about McEneff, whose name had not been on the team sheet since August.

There was much hype around McEneff's arrival from Shamrock Rovers in the 2021 January transfer window, and despite scoring a few goals, it would be fair to suggest there's more to come from the attacking midfielder.

Hearts face Ross County at Tynecastle on Sunday and will be without midfield duo Beni Baningime and Cameron Devlin. The latter is suspended after an accumulation of yellow cards and the former remains side-lined with an injury, therefore McEneff may well be drafted in for a start.

After his goal against Dundee United, manager Robbie Neilson heaped praise on the 26-year-old for working hard and grasping his opportunity.

McEneff admitted the winter break has come at the wrong time for him on a personal level, having just worked his way into the side, but explained his attitude has always surrounded working hard.

"My remit since I've been young was to keep my head down and work hard, no matter what the situation was like," he said.

"Football changes – you have good times and bad times and this year there have been bad moments where I've not been involved in the squad, or I've sat on the bench and not got a game.

"You do get frustrated, but I've always maintained a level head," he added.

"There is a good group of lads in the changing room, and we all get on well, so when I've had the chance to come in and help this group, who have been doing well, you have to be ready for it and be ready to play at the level the team is playing at.

"I've been in and out of the team at times and not been in the squad at all earlier on in the season. Recently, I've been in the team a lot more, so this has come at the wrong time for me, personally, but we just have to see what happens because those decisions are out with the control of any of us as players.

"From a players' perspective, we want to play games. That's what you always want to do, but you'd much rather play the games in front of a full house. That's the feeling within the changing room at the moment.

"It's frustrating because you go from last season, playing in empty stadiums, to getting the buzz back with the fans being in the stadium this year. That's what football should be about. For me, the atmosphere without the fans is just not the same. So, we do want to play the games, but we'd much rather do it with fans in the stadium."

After the Scottish Premiership clubs voted in favour of the winter break commencing after the Boxing Day fixtures, the Edinburgh Derby has been rescheduled for 1st February, hopefully in front of a full crowd at Easter Road.

McEneff wasn't part of the matchday squad during the goalless draw at Tynecastle earlier in the season but is looking forward to sampling the Edinburgh Derby atmosphere and admits it's those sorts of games that bring the best out of players.

"I'd rather play in a full stadium, delay it until the end of the season and play it in midweek. It's just not the same for you guys, for anyone watching if it's not a full house. It's not the same for any management or players involved in the game.

"I just think, especially with the derby games, because they're the ones where the atmosphere brings the best out of players on the pitch, it's not the same, and I think if you asked anyone in the changing room, they'd give you the exact same answer."



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' Irish midfielder, Aaron Mceneff, gets the ball under control.

Credit: Ian Jacobs