

Craig Halkett and Michael Smith both to miss Edinburgh Derby through injury

Hearts manager Robbie Neilson has provided a bleak injury update for Hearts' supporters ahead of tomorrow's match with Motherwell and Tuesday's Edinburgh Derby.

Both Craig Halkett and Michael Smith were injured during Wednesday's defeat to Celtic and the Hearts boss said both will be unavailable for upcoming matches.

Former Livingston defender Halkett has enjoyed a much-improved season in maroon, in a relatively settled back three, however the defender had a scan on Friday and Neilson is expecting to be without him for a number of weeks.

"Halkett had his scan today, fingers crossed it's only a matter of weeks, but we just need to wait and see because it's quite a bad one," said Neilson.

"He has been doing brilliant for us. He's looked fit, strong and sharp. Something like this is a disappointment for him but he'll just have to use the time to get himself back fit."

He added: "Michael will be out for a couple of weeks too, he is getting an injection in his back and Taylor Moore did some training today, so we'll assess how he is."

In more positive news, Hearts unexpectedly announced the return of the versatile defensively minded midfielder, Toby

Sibbick on Thursday.

Neilson explained with there still being the possibility of John Souttar departing the club in January, Hearts were keen to get a replacement in to avoid being caught short.

“It’s been on the cards for a wee while,” Neilson said.

“We have been going back and forward with Barnsley for a month now, we need to plan for the summer as well. We know John has signed a pre-contract elsewhere and will be leaving. So, we thought, do we wait until the summer? We’ve brought someone in who’s still 22 and that gives us four or five months to do that.

“Halkett is out with a hamstring problem and Taylor Moore is touch and go, so we needed another body in and if John goes then we will probably bring another one in as well.”



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
Sibbick is familiar to Edinburgh, so will have no issues settling in, however is likely to need a little time to get himself up to full fitness according to Neilson.

"His last game was middle of November, so he probably needs a bit of time," he said.

"Depending on the fitness of the other guys it's whether he comes in or not. He knows a number of the boys. He knows the city and the club. When we made contact he was desperate to come up."

"I didn't know him as a boy because I wasn't here when he first came up. But I've seen him play and I think he will do well for us. He is athletic, good on the ball, can play a number of positions in our formation so he will do well."

"It's hard to get players in January who have been playing week in and week out without paying big money. Although he's not played for two months, I think he's played 12-14 games this season at a good level. So, I don't see him being too far away for us."

Motherwell are the visitors to Tynecastle on Saturday, ahead of Hearts' trip to Easter Road on Tuesday and Neilson is fully aware of the importance the next two fixtures could have on Hearts' chances of finishing third.

The Steelmen will be without their top scorer Tony Watt, after he departed for Dundee United earlier in the month, however the Hearts boss is still expecting a tough match.

"Motherwell still play the same way; Tony [Watt] was their talisman. It was a lot of goals to come out of the team, but they've got others who can score. They are still a good team, physicality and dangerous at set plays.

"The next two games are very, very important for that context [third spot]. We're at Tynecastle and in front of a home crowd and it does not matter if it's AC Milan or Auchinleck, you want to win the game."