

# **Hearts boss has no worries in spite of injury troubles**

**The battling point Hearts secured at Tannadice on Saturday came at a cost with the Jambos having to use the newly introduced five-sub rule due to a number of injuries.**

**As a result of this, they are now struggling for numbers for Saturday night's Scottish Cup Quarter-Final tie at Tynecastle against St Mirren.**

Gary Mackay-Steven suffered a broken hand, meanwhile Cameron Devlin (hamstring) and Alex Cochrane (concussion) were all replaced in the opening 45 minutes.

Nathaniel Atkinson did not return for the second half but has since recovered, before John Souttar damaged his ankle and was replaced after an hour. Josh Ginnelly also appeared to be hobbling off at the end of a game it was hard not to watch.

The Hearts boss said afterwards that he had never been involved in anything like that in his 25 years in football.

Hearts' summer recruitment was a quality over quantity strategy and now having received a number of injuries they find themselves a bit stretched ahead of a huge game.

Neilson defended the idea to build a smaller squad, which focussed on quality and remains hopeful that some of his injured players will be fit for Saturday.

“We’ve had a really good fitness percentage throughout the season then we have a wee period where we have got a number of injuries,” he explained.

“The benefits of that are the 11 that start on Saturday will all be top three, top four players in Scotland. We don’t have a 24-man squad where we have ten really good players and ten ones that are miles off it. I don’t have any worries about it.

“There are still a few that are borderline. Some will train today, some tomorrow. Some will come in on Saturday morning and we’ll get that test for them, we’re hoping those extra days recovery will be fine.

“We’ll have a strong 11, how many we have on the bench will be a different story. It might be three, it might be six.”

There is added emphasis on the Scottish Cup for teams out with the Old Firm this season as it guarantees European Football until December, which will bring significant financial revenue.

After an embarrassing exit to Brora Rangers last season, Hearts will be looking to bounce back by seeing off St Mirren and securing a trip to Hampden.

Neilson played down the European aspect, adding that Hearts want to win the Scottish Cup regardless of the European benefits it brings.

“I’m not interested in how it gets you into Europe or what it does with Europe. Most managers and players will be the same, it’s about winning the Scottish Cup,” he added.

“To win that you need to win on Saturday then the semi-final then the final. This is part of becoming a winner.

“The season is about qualifying for Europe, brilliant. But you want to win something. You want to win the Scottish Cup. For me it’s not got any influence on European football. It’s about winning.”

Hearts have got the better of St Mirren on all three occasions this season including two victories in Paisley, so they’ll fancy their chances at home, despite their injury troubles.

The Buddies scored a last-minute winner against Dundee on Wednesday night, to keep their fourth place hopes alive and Neilson expects them to be full of confidence after that result.

“They got a great result on Wednesday,” he said.

“I watched the game and to score right at the end they have that lift of having got that. The 4-2-3-1 probably suits most of their players and that front three, four are very dangerous. It’s similar to us, do they focus on the league or focus on the cup. The same with us they probably want to focus on the cup and get as far as they can.”



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A comfortable 3 points for the home side beating the Dons 2-0  
in the cinch Premiership clash at Tynecastle Park, Edinburgh,  
between Hearts and Aberdeen.

Credit: Ian Jacobs