

Hearts FC – McEneff backs teammate Banningime to come back stronger after injury

When the news broke last Tuesday that Hearts midfielder, Beni Banningime would be side-lined until next season after damaging his cruciate, it left a large void in the Hearts midfield.

The 23-year-old was forced off against Livingston, however having seen him walk off the Tynecastle pitch instead of exiting on a stretcher, the Hearts supporters felt a little more relaxed.

After the match, Hearts manager Robbie Neilson explained that Banningime was in good spirits, so there was an expectation that his injury was less severe than first feared.

Scan results showed this was not the case however, and Hearts released an update on Tuesday explaining there was no timeframe for the midfielders return.

The timing of the injuries for Banningime, Cameron Devlin and John Souttar could not have been worse, as Hearts attempt to seal third spot, before a Scottish Cup semi-final with Hibernian at Hampden.

Banningime and Devlin have been key to Hearts' successes this

season, with the energy levels and quality they bring as two sitting midfielders.

Now, Hearts manager Robbie Neilson has to decide who is best equipped to replace those on the treatment table, fortunately there are a few options at his disposal. Peter Haring is expected to feature, which leaves Aaron McEneff, Andy Halliday and Toby Sibbick fighting over the other midfield position.

Despite the bad injury he's suffered, McEneff explains that Banningime is still hanging around the Hearts training camp smiling away as usual.

"I'm gutted for Beni. I'm quite close with him," he said.

"When it happened, I didn't realise how severe it was going to be. I text him a few days later, after he had found out, so I'm gutted as are the rest of the boys, because he's a great guy.

"With Beni's mentality, he's still been in and about the place smiling. He's got a great mentality, so I've got no doubt he'll come back really strong whenever that is.

"He's just a happy person. He comes in everyday with a smile on his face and to be honest his mood hasn't changed too much, and I don't think it will change.

"He's a level-headed guy and he's got a lot of respect within the changing room, so we're all behind him and I'm sure he'll get back from this injury."

As for the rest of the squad, Saturday's trip to Ross County could be viewed as an opportunity to impress the manager ahead of the derby double header.

It would be easy for the minds of the Hearts players to focus on the Hibs matches, but McEneff explained that Hearts are taking it one game at a time.

"We just have to take it game by game, like we've done all season. When we put one game to bed it's onto the next one and it's important not to look too far ahead. I think the best thing you can do is prepare all week for the game on Saturday and that's what our focus is on," he added.

"We know what is sitting in front of us. We know what targets we set at the start of the season and what we want to achieve.

"The group has done brilliantly all season. Now it's the business end of the season and it's time for us to step up as a team and grab things by the scruff of the neck and go and get what we want to achieve."