

# Neilson urges Hearts to up game ahead of Italian job

Hearts manager Robbie Neilson rued the loss of what he called cheap goals to Italian side Fiorentina as the Jambos skidded to their second defeat in Group A against a side with only one win in their previous ten matches in all competitions.

And he urged his men to be more pro-active rather than reactive in the return in Florence on Thursday when more than 2,000 Jambos are expected to be at the Stadio Artemio Franchi.

They are desperately hoping that the Italians don't enjoy another whirlwind start to the game.

At Tynecastle, Hearts were on their heels after only four minutes when unmarked Ronaldo Mandragora nodded the visitors, who are currently in 13th position in 20-strong Serie A, in front.

And the Italian side continued to press, forcing Hearts into some dogged defending.

The Tuscan combine emerged with a 3-0 scoreline with further goals from Christian Kouame after 42 minutes, smashing home a loose ball from eight yards, and former Real Madrid striker Laka Jovic with 11 minutes remaining. He finished off a counter-attack from close range.

Neilson, reacting to a move in training at rainy Riccarton early on Wednesday, described the Italians as a fantastic football club and added: "They put in a top, top performance."

The playcaller admitted that the game had been a real learning curve for the squad and he added: "To compete at this level you have to be on top of your game. We gave away some really sloppy goals, the first two especially."

And Craig Gordon, Hearts' captain, and a veteran of international competition with Scotland, sportingly admitted: "Sometimes you have to say they were too good."

Praise indeed and Hearts know what to expect when they arrive in Italy, another severe test, but the numbers indicate that they need to avoid defeat to have any chance of qualifying for the knockout phase.

Hearts in training at Oriam on 12 October 2022 filmed by Nigel Duncan

That means his men can't switch off for a second otherwise it could be fatal as the reverse left Hearts third in Group A with three points from the same number of games, one point ahead of RFS from Latvia who prop up the four-strong table.

Fiorentina have four points from their three outings with Turkish side Istanbul Basaksehir topping the group with seven points.

It's a mountain to climb for the Jambos as the winner of the group progresses while the second-placed team will play one of the teams who exit the Europe League by finishing third in their group.

The winner of that moves into the latter stages of the Europa Conference League.

Hearts have advised supporters travelling that a passport is the only valid form of ID to be shown with the match ticket for entry to the stadium.

The match ticket name must match the passport name but a digital version of a match ticket can be shown along with a passport to enter the stadium.

Free shuttle busses, they added, are available to take fans to the stadium from the city centre and Italian public safety authorities request that anybody without a ticket should not

travel.



Robbie Neilson Hearts Manager at training at Oriam on 12 October 2022 PHOTO Nigel Duncan