

Fiorentina under real pressure after home defeat by Lazio

Hearts could have arrived in Florence to face Fiorentina at just the right time, despite being written off by many, including the bookies.

One betting chain has issued odds of 25/1 on a victory for the Jambos in this Europa Conference League tie and Fiorentina are 1/7 with another company. Even a draw is 7/1 with a third.

Fans had harsh words for the boys in Maroon on social media following the 3-0 scoreline at Tynecastle last Thursday.

The miracle is that Fiorentina got only three was one reaction. There were others, but the ire from Jambo fans has nothing to the anger the opposition have felt following a 4-0 defeat at home to third-placed Lazio, who are only three points adrift of pace-setting Napoli, on Monday.

Struggling Fiorentina have won only two and drawn three of their nine league matches so far and have slipped to 13th position in Serie A.

The Tuscan team have only scored seven goals in that period, the joint-second worst scoring record in the league, bottom club Sampdoria have the worst with only five, and the squad have come under intense pressure.

Fans demand more and their manager Vincenzo Italiano admitted to media post-game that the Lazio reverse was a bad one.

However, he argued that his men played well in the first-half against Lazio after their dominant showing at Tynecastle.

Does that mean Hearts will face a backlash or will the

pressure on the team from fans and the local media get to the players?

So far in Europe, Fiorentina have drawn 1-1 at home to RFS of Latvia and lost 3-0 at Turkish-based, Group A pace-setters Istanbul Basaksehir.

Goals by Ronaldo Mandragora, Christian Kouame and former Real Madrid striker Luka Jovic sunk Hearts in Edinburgh.

Creativity and slick passing allowed the Italians to dominate in the Capital and a repeat of that performance could take the home side to within touching distance of qualifying for the knockout phase.

Gaetano Castrovilli is out long-term with a serious knee injury and Riccardo Sottit is also unlikely to play.

Hearts supporters are anxious to see Hearts' team sheet with Liam Boyce, Beni Banningime, Kye Rowles and Craig Halkett sidelined through injury.

Lewis Neilson is suspended following his red card last Thursday and former Scotland player, Robert Snodgrass, is ineligible as he was signed after the registration deadline.

Cameron Devlin could, however, return after missing Sunday's 2-2 draw at Kilmarnock and his waspish nature could unsettle the Italians and assist the Scots.

Lawrence Shankland (pictured right with Robert Snodgrass at the Riccarton training ground on Wednesday by **Nigel Duncan**) netted against Group A bottom-markers RFS who have two points from three starts, a point behind Neilson's men.

The former Dundee United striker could be the man to unlock the Italian defence.

Alan Forrest also netted against the Latvian combine giving Hearts hope but commentators say that their defence will need

to tighten up markedly if they want to maintain their slender hopes of progressing on the European stage this season.

So far, the Scots have leaked seven goals and netted two. Fiorentina have scored four and conceded the same number.

Hearts fans travel with hope and the club have sold their allocation of 2,000 tickets. They will be vastly outnumbered in the 43,000-plus stadium. Kick-off is at 17.45 British time.