

# Neilson looking to cash in as Rangers woe continues

Ambitious Robbie Neilson has stressed the importance of performing on the domestic stage if Hearts want to graduate to playing in Europe on a regular basis.

He takes his men to Ibrox to face Rangers on Wednesday, a team smarting from Sunday's 2-1 defeat at St Johnstone and desperate to keep in touch with old Firm rivals, Celtic, who top the table, seven points clear of their biggest rivals. Both have played 13 games so far.

Second-placed Rangers, who dominated the game at Perth, have 29 points from 13 games, having won nine, drawn two and lost two. They have scored 32 goals and conceded 13.

James Tavernier scored their only goal after 74 minutes, the one shot which counted with six others on target, and the Ibrox manager and the squad have suffered the heat from furious fans post-game and on social media.

Saints had three shots on target at McDiarmid Park and netted twice from a stunning James Brown strike after 41 minutes and a second from Nicky Clark after 62 minutes to give the home side only their sixth win of the campaign and their first three points against Rangers since December 2017. It lifts them to sixth in the 12-strong table.

Rangers enjoyed 73 per cent of possession against 27 from the home side and the Glasgow combine also made 574 passes against 224 from Callum Davidson's men and have recorded that defeat, plus a draw and three wins in their last five games.

Hearts, boosted by their 3-2 success in an action-packed clash with Motherwell at Tynecastle on Sunday, are fourth with 20 points, two points behind Aberdeen, with seven wins, one draw

and five defeats. They have scored 23 and let in the same number.

The Jambos have recorded back-to-back league wins against Well and at Ross County (2-1), lost the previous two (4-3 at home to Celtic and 2-0 at Aberdeen) and drew the another, a 2-2 scoreline at Kilmarnock.

Neilson (pictured by **Nigel Duncan** at The Orium training facility) said in his notes in Hearts' Match Magazine, that the next game is always the most important one.

He added that Hearts have two matches left before the World Cup break and said: "It is up to us to ensure we claim as many points as possible."

Neilson wants to see the Men in Maroon pushing for European qualification every season and said: "I think this campaign has been an important first step as we stride towards that goal.

"However, we can't think about European football without taking into account how we get there in the first place. Winning cinch (Scottish) Premiership matches is our bread and butter and we need to be at our best to get back to these prestigious competitions. Not just for us, but for all our supporters as well."