

Smith warning ahead of clash with Livi Lions

Michael Smith knows what to expect if he appears for the Boys in Maroon against Livingston at Tynecastle in the cinch Scottish Premiership on Saturday (kick-off 3pm).

The 34-year-old Irishman said: "It is always tough playing against Livingston. You are always up against it and they are always really up for the game. It is never easy. It is at Tynecastle and it is up to us to go out there and win the game."

Monkstown-born Smith has been a regular in Robbie Neilson's line-up during the first phase of the season and, reflecting, the international defender, said the club have enjoyed some good results and some bad ones. Europe, he added, had been a learning curve.

Everybody, he admitted, has found the schedule tough at times, with a few long distance travels thrown in, but he said: "I know what I have to do to get myself ready for the next match."

Of course, Smith (pictured in training by *Nigel Duncan*) played in England so has knowledge of playing twice a week for a sustained spell and said: "Down south it is Saturday. Tuesday and I have experienced that before. It is tough on the body, but it is all about recovering well and being ready to go

again.

“If you are winning most weeks it can be really easy and you look forward to the next game but, if things are not going so well, things can go wrong, even in training, but I feel the group here are brilliant and the coaching staff as well, and everybody’s attitude has been spot on.

“Yes, we’ve had a lot of injuries but, I think, especially if we win tomorrow, we will be sitting right up there.”

After the break Hearts should have pretty much everybody back with people vying for places and if that happens Smith said: “We will be really strong.”

Despite Wednesday’s defeat at Ibrox, the defender said: “We are starting to pick up form now. We have a game before the World Cup and we will see if we can end it (the first part of the season) on a high.”

He also had encouraging words for 23-year-old English defender Toby Sibbick, a target for some fans earlier in the campaign. Smith said: “Toby suffered from a lack of confidence at the start, but the last few weeks he has been a rock, phenomenal.

“We always knew he was a good player. He has got pace, he’s got power and he is good on the ball and I am really pleased for him. He has been brilliant in the last few weeks.”