

Cochrane eyes third spot in cinch Premiership at Xmas

Alex Cochrane and the Hearts squad face a hectic Christmas schedule, boosted by their 3-1 victory over Kilmarnock at Tynecastle last weekend, and they have been provided with another incentive following third-placed Aberdeen's failure to take any points from their back-to-back home jousts with Celtic (a 1-0 defeat) and Rangers (a 3-2 reverse).

The fourth-placed Tynecastle team go into their clash at bottom club Dundee United on 24 points from 16 games, just one behind the Dons who have played 17 fixtures.

Brighton-born Cochrane (pictured right against St Johnstone earlier this year) underlined the importance of last weekend's win after the World Cup break as it kept the Capital combine tucked-in only one point behind The Dons who have played one more game.

Rangers, who are second in the cinch Premiership, are on 39 points, are some way off, but Robbie Neilson's men are determined to finish the season as high up the table as they can.

The 22-year-old believes that United will pose a real challenge despite propping up the rest with only 12 points from 16 starts. The Tayside strugglers have scored only 17 goals and let in 31 while the Jambos have scored 27 and shipped 26, but the former Brighton player defender said: "It will be a tough game."

It's a hectic Festive period for Hearts, and other football teams, but Cochrane said: "We have business to do. We got the three points last week and now we move on to Dundee United.

"For me, personally, it is a surprise to see them (United) down there as they have a very talented squad. They are fighting for points and they need results. It is a tough place to go and we've had some good games with them in previous years. We know we have to be at it from the start."

Australian defender Kye Rowles, who had an excellent World Cup according to all observers, is set to come back into the line-up after suspension.

Stephen Kingsley and Craig Halkett are also pencilled in and Cochrane believes the trio are important players for the club, describing them as leaders, and that could mean Cochrane playing left wing-back, a position he prefers.

The versatile defender has also filled in at the heart of the Tynecastle rearguard this term because of injuries, but he admitted: "I prefer playing higher up the pitch creating chances for Shanks (Lawrence Shankland) and the other forwards, but if I have to play further back I am happy to do that."

The Englishman believes that Neilson's men have done exceedingly well to achieve fourth position in the table given their injury woes but he is aiming higher and added: "To be third at Christmas is what we want."

Looking at the road trip on Christmas Eve, he said: "It is

always tough going away in this league, but we know we have to pick up points starting this weekend."

Incidentally, Cochrane was at Brighton when Argentine World cup winner, Alexis Mac Allister, arrived at the South Coast club during the world-wide COVID pandemic and he said: "I saw him a little bit, but not too much. I was happy for him and the part he played in the (Argentine) team. He'll be enjoying himself right now."