

# **Outstanding Clark praised by Hearts boss**

**Zander Clark had an “outstanding” game for Hearts in the 3-0 victory over Capital rivals Hibs at Tynecastle on Monday, and that was no surprise to the Jambos boss, Robbie Neilson.**

The double save from Kyle Magennis in the second-half as Hibs came forward in a bid to salvage something from the game was the icing on the cake for Neilson.

Clark (pictured) had to receive attention in the closing stages of the match after being hit by an object thrown from the crowd at the Hibs end of Tynecastle, but Neilson said the goalkeeper, who was forced to change his blood-stained shirt after a head cut, did not suffer any long-lasting effects from the incident.

The 30-year-old was not sure what hit him as he went to get a drink of water, but hopes that both clubs will do something and he told BBC Sport Scotland: “We don’t want objects thrown at players, not just here, but anywhere.”

Clark has moved into centre stage after the double-leg break suffered by club skipper Craig Gordon in the 2-2 draw at Dundee United on Christmas Eve, and the Glasgow-born stopper is not short of experience.

He played 170 games for St Johnstone and has received call-ups to the senior Scotland squad in the last two years. That all-

round experience will be invaluable as Hearts look to consolidate third spot in the 12-strong cinch Scottish Premiership.

They travel to St Mirren on Saturday (kick-off 15.00) on 31 points from 19 matches having scored 35 goals and lost 30. St Mirren are fifth with 26 points from 18 games having scored 21 goals and let in 25 and they are unbeaten in their last five outings, winning one and drawing the rest.

Hearts, in contrast, have won three and drawn two of their last five and the Tynecastle team will look to continue their form after the World Cup break against a side which drew 0-0 at Kilmarnock on Monday despite talented 21-year-old midfielder Ethan Erhahon having being shown a red card after only five minutes.

Neilson may have injury concerns over Josh Ginnelly and Andy Halliday who were substituted in Monday's game with Hibs, but he said of Clark: "He is a Scottish international, he has played at the highest level for a long time, he has played in Europe and he is a big character."

It was always going to be tough, said Neilson, for anybody to step into Craig Gordon's position, and it is unfortunate that the injury to the Scotland No 1 has occurred, but Clark he said was outstanding in Monday's game, not just with his double save but also with his ability to talk to his teammates and to deal with cross balls.

Neilson, incidentally, does not intend adding to his group of goalkeepers following Gordon's season-ending injury, but he hinted that several players would be moved out and others brought in to "freshen" up the squad for the second-half of the season.