

Experienced Fletcher carries threat for struggling United

Toby Sibbick knows all about experienced striker Steven Fletcher having come up against him in England and now in Scotland and the versatile player believes the 35-year-old carries a real threat when cinch Scottish Premiership bottom-markers Dundee United visit Tynecastle on Saturday (kick-off 15.00).

Fletcher was involved for 90 minutes and fired two shots as the Tayside team skidded to a 1-0 defeat at Kilmarnock following a strike from Daniel Armstrong after 35 minutes on Wednesday, but the 33-times capped Scottish international has scored four goals and helped set-up two others in 19 matches this term.

Wednesday's defeat saw United slip to bottom of the 12-strong table and they have earned only 20 points from 23 league games, scoring 25 goals and conceding 40, a real concern.

Hearts remain third with 39 points from 24 games and also go into the game on the back of a defeat, a midweek 3-0 home reverse to Rangers, and now there is only a six-point gap between the Edinburgh side and fourth-placed St Mirren who have a game in hand.

Sibbick (pictured at the media briefing by **Nigel Duncan**) recalled the games he has played against Fletcher during the pre-match press briefing at The Oriam and said: "I've played against him a few times and he is very experienced and a very physical player. It will be a tough match and a challenge."

The midweek reverse against the second-placed Ibrox squad snapped Hearts' ten-game unbeaten run and Sibbick said: "We did not get the result we wanted, or the performance. We wanted to start on the front foot but something did not click and it did not happen."

However, Sibbick said the squad were determined to kick-start another unbeaten run by disposing of Dundee United at Tynecastle.

Hearts' manager Robbie Neilson said the squad was disappointed with the result on Wednesday and that the performance level was not what was required. He added: "I felt we were passing the ball back too much and not on the front foot as we wanted, but you get games like that. We have had a brilliant run of ten undefeated and we hoped to make it 11, but we start again."

The 42-year-old Glaswegian, who managed Dundee United from 2018 to 2020, added: "We had a blip on Wednesday but we have to put that to bed quickly. No team is going to go through the season undefeated and we have to move forward."

Neilson admitted being surprised to see the Tayside team slip to the bottom of the table. United level on points with 11-th placed Motherwell who have also played 23 matches.

Ross County are tenth with 21 points from 24 outings with Kilmarnock in ninth position with 23 points from 24 starts and Neilson said: "It's compact at the bottom and it will be a tough game for us."

Cammy Devlin may be back for the Jambos and it will be a last

minute decision on the Australian World Cup squad player and Neilson confirmed that experienced defender Michael Smith will be given every chance of making the squad.