

# Kingsley stresses the Celtic threat in Scottish Cup

Stephen Kingsley believes it will take a 90-minute-plus performance if Hearts are to beat Celtic at Tynecastle on Saturday (kick-off 12.15) and progress to the semi-final of the Specsavers Scottish Cup.

The 28-year-old defender agreed that the Tynecastle club had pushed Celtic in recent games and that proved they can compete, but it is getting the win which is the key.

The Stirling-born left-back or centre-back, who has also appeared for Falkirk, Swansea City, and Hull City, as well as Yeovil Town and Crew Alexandra, has been at the Gorgie club since 2020 and appeared in around 70 games.

So he is aware of what it takes to compete with the Parkhead club and he stressed that Hearts need to be resilient to subdue the highly-talented Parkhead combine.

The player (pictured at the packed press conference at The Oriam by *Nigel Duncan*) said the hunger to move forward in the competition is there and added: "We have a squad of players to reach the later stages of tournaments. We've been close many times. We also have a burning desire to take the next step."

Kingsley argued that Hearts can take positives from their performance at Celtic Park on Wednesday night in the cinch

Premiership when they lost 3-1 after going ahead with a Josh Ginnelly goal after six minutes, but the player said: "Celtic will probably have the majority of the play. They are relentless and we have to be robust in defence."

Manager Robbie Neilson said it is always tough playing Celtic at Parkhead but come Saturday it is a different game with a different atmosphere and the home crowd could have a "massive" influence on the outcome.

He added: "We managed to nullify them (Celtic) on Wednesday night and they still had the majority of the play. They are a top team but we have to cover the yards."

Tynecastle is a tighter pitch than Parkhead and that, said Neilson, could go two ways. The tightness of the pitch means you can press more but it makes it more difficult to get on the ball.

Hearts fans will no doubt demand their men "have a go" and Neilson said: "We want to be on the front foot, we want to be aggressive and we did it the other night. We have to do that on Saturday."

Playing a team back-to-back means there is not a lot of time to alter things between games, said the Jambos boss. The players have had a training session and a half session but some of that time has been spent on recovery from Wednesday.

The manager added: "We will stick to our principles and how we want to play, but Celtic are such a good team. It is important we don't lose goals and, if you do that, you have a chance."

Skipper Lawrence Shankland will be a last-minute decision because of an injury worry and Neilson said: "He is an important player for us and he has to be bang-on when he plays."

A couple of other unnamed players are also on the injured

list but he added: "There will not be a huge amount of changes."

Neilson stressed: "It is such an important game for us. We can get to Hampden for a semi-final and it is a great opportunity, with the teams left in it, to progress even further, hopefully, but you have to take care of the first game."