

Neilson focused on Saturday's trip to Pittodrie

Robbie Neilson, Hearts' manager, hopes to have some of his injured players, including skipper Lawrence Shankland, available for consideration for Saturday's tough trip to Pittodrie in the cinch Premiership.

The Tynecastle team may have brushed Aberdeen aside on a bitterly cold night at Tynecastle on January 18, winning 5-0, but Neilson acknowledged in that The Dons had proved tough opposition so far this term.

Currently, Hearts occupy third position in the 12-strong cinch Premiership with 45 points from 28 matches while Aberdeen are fifth with 38 points from the same number of games.

Hearts have scored 49 goals and shipped 40 while the men from the Granite City have scored 43 and let in 52.

City rivals Hibs split the two and they have 40 points from their 28 starts and Neilson told a press briefing at The Oriam and he wants to maintain that point cushion over the chasing pack at 5pm on Saturday.

In the last ten meetings, however, Aberdeen have won four and Hearts three with the Tynecastle team having scored 17 goals and let in 14, and the Edinburgh side want to avoid an unwelcome treble as they have lost their last two away league

games, at Motherwell and Celtic.

Records show that Hearts have not lost three in a row since December 2021. Ironically, that was a run of defeats against Aberdeen, Motherwell and Celtic.

And The Dons have won each of their last six home league matches against the men from the Capital but when they lost 5-0 at Tynecastle in January, four of the goals came by half-time.

And the Jambos are seeking to record back-to-back league wins over Aberdeen for the first time since May 2016.

That's a result interim boss Barry Robson does not want to happen. He would rather see a repeat of the victory over Hearts which Aberdeen recorded at Pittodrie on October 16 when goals by Lopes and Besuijen after 74 and 79 minutes secured a 2-0 victory.

Neilson (pictured) said that he hopes to have the majority of injured players back after the 3-0 Specsavers Scottish Cup defeat at Tynecastle by Premiership pace-setters Celtic and the club have followed a regular training pattern this week ahead of the trip north.

He added: "We need to get back at it. We are sitting third in the league, five points ahead of Hibs, and the last two results we have had we were not happy with, but you have to look at the bigger picture."

Aberdeen, he agreed, have proved tough opposition so far this term and he said: "Up there, we found it difficult and Pittodrie is always difficult. At Tynecastle we seemed to have the upper hand at times. We got a result."

The manager acknowledged that it was important to have as many key players as possible available for selection, but he added: "We are in a good position just now and we are looking to get

a few of them back for the weekend.”

Shankland, has trained in the last couple of days and could be included but Neilson stressed: “Aberdeen and Hibs have improved and now it is a fight to get third position.

“The most important game is Saturday, it is not about focusing on the long term. If we win the game on Saturday it keeps us up there. It is a tight league.”