

Hearts provide clarity after Neilson's departure

Andrew McKinlay, CEO of Heart of Midlothian FC, has issued the following statement following the departure of manager Robbie Neilson.

It reads: "On behalf of Heart of Midlothian Football Club's Board of Directors, I'd like to provide clarity on the events of the past couple of days and offer an update on the short-term future of the managerial position.

"Everyone connected with the club was bitterly disappointed with the outcome of Saturday's cinch Premiership match with St Mirren. We had all hoped that things would turn around, sooner rather than later, but results and performances over the past seven weeks have been unacceptable and there is no sugar coating that.

"At full-time on Saturday we found ourselves at a crossroads and the board took the extremely difficult decision, after much discussion, to make a managerial change in order to get back on track and refocus our efforts on clinching third place in the league.

"I do not need to remind anyone just how pivotal a figure Robbie Neilson has been in this club's journey back to the top of Scottish football. His commitment to Hearts has been unwavering, and he deserves every plaudit for guiding us back into the top flight, to two Scottish Cup Finals, to third

place last season and into group stage European football. Robbie, along with Lee McCulloch, will forever have our gratitude for those achievements, which is why this was such a tough decision to make.

“However, we simply could not ignore the results and performances. The board is here to make difficult decisions and act in the best interests of the club, which is what we feel we have done by making this change at this time.

“I am delighted to say that Steven Naismith has agreed to take over as interim manager until the end of the season. Steven has played the game at the highest level possible, and has taken great strides forward in his coaching career with the club’s B Team and at international level with Scotland.

“He will be assisted by Gordon Forrest, who I am also pleased to say has agreed to remain with the club, and Frankie McAvoy, who has a wealth of top level experience and has built up a great working relationship with Steven through the B Team. We have great faith in Steven, Gordon and Frankie and will give them the best support possible as we aim to finish the season as strongly as possible.

“We enter a crucial period of the season, with two games remaining until the split, followed by a further five matches. With what is at stake, it is no exaggeration to say that we are facing seven cup finals. We had a taste of group stage European football this season and have, in many ways, reaped the benefits. Our aim has always been to repeat this feat and that target has not changed, despite what has transpired recently.

“Our supporters have backed the team in magnificent fashion in huge numbers, home and away, all season. I ask them to continue to do this, to get behind Steven, Gordon, Frankie and the team for the remaining seven games and help us to achieve our goal. By standing together we will give ourselves the best

chance of winning football matches, building momentum and reclaiming third spot, and the prizes associated with it.”

PICTURE: Steven Naismith