

Hearts eye Euro slot while Celtic target title

Hearts entertain Celtic at Tynecastle on Sunday in the cinch Premiership and victory would secure back-to-back titles for the Parkhead side who have lost only once this season, but the home side need the points as they are five adrift of third-placed Aberdeen in the race for a coveted European spot.

The Jambos go into the cinch Premiership clash on the back of a confidence-boosting, 6-1 win over Ross County when skipper Lawrence Shankland bagged a glory treble and interim manager Steven Naismith aims to cause Celtic problems.

The mindset is about Hearts and the squad have gone back to fundamentals in the two weeks since they disposed of the Dingwall side.

Europe is Hearts' focus and the Gorgie men are fourth with 48 points from 33 games having won 14, drawn six and lost 13. They have scored 56 goals and shipped 49.

Celtic have 92 points having won 30 of their 33 games, drawn two and lost one. They have scored 103 goals and let in 25.

That underlines the scale of the challenge facing Hearts who have played Celtic on 37 occasions, winning only three with three draws.

A 3-0 Scottish cup defeat at Tynecastle followed a 3-1 defeat by The Hoops at Parkhead and a 4-3 reverse in a classic clash at Tynecastle. The other match-up this season saw Celtic win 2-0 in Glasgow.

The visitors main threat is quicksilver Japanese striker Kyogo Furuhashi with 23 goals, two ahead of Hearts' skipper Lawrence Shankland, and other threats include Matt O'Riley, the top assists man in the league with 11.

And Joe Hart, the club's former England goalkeeper, has posted 14 clean sheets.

Naismith is up-beat about the challenge and said was asked if the two week break from league action after the win over Ross County had come at the right or wrong time for the club.

The former Scottish international said: "You can see it both ways, but in the bigger picture I feel it came at the right time for us because we got loads of work done. The contrast between the first performance and the second performance you can see that there was a change and that comes from time and work on the training ground and meetings.

"We got more work done and had a game against St Johnstone which was a good run out for the first team and some of the boys who have been doing well in the B team. So, it has been a worthwhile extra week of preparation really.

"In the period when things were not going so well people stopped doing what they were doing which brought success. I think that if you strip football back there are core things you need to do.

"If you do them you get a chance in every game, the small bits

of detail, we have concentrated in the main things that we have to do. Hopefully, we can add layers to that and make things better and improve in other aspects, but it is a staged process really.”