

Naismith tells Hearts fans: “We are in a good place.”

St Mirren have caused problems for Hearts this term and it is The Buddies who provide the opposition in a crucial cinch Premiership clash in the West of Scotland on Saturday (kick-off 15.00) as Steven Naismith's men bid to home in on third spot in the table.

Fourth-placed Hearts have 48 points from their 34 games so far this term with St Mirren two places below the Edinburgh side with 44 points from the same number of fixtures.

The Jambos have scored 56 goals and leaked 51 while St Mirren have scored 39 and let in 51. The recent head-to-head record has seen Hearts win three, draw one with one defeat.

Of course, Hearts' Euro ambitions suffered a major blow when they lost 2-0 at home to the Paisley side on April 8 with Main and Gogic netting in five, nightmare minutes.

Hearts, incidentally, had 66 per cent of the possession during that game and recorded 488 passes against 248, but the points still went west.

Previously, a Barrie McKay goal saw Hearts edge their rivals 1-0 and the sides have also drawn 1-1 with Strain netting for The Buddies and Robert Snodgrass for Hearts.

Naismith remains up-beat despite Sunday's 2-0 defeat by Celtic and told the media at the pre-match briefing at The Oriam that confidence is high in the dressing-room, even after the home reverse to the champions.

The interim manager reported that Alex Cochrane is suspended – Hearts have not appealed, by the way – but otherwise everybody is available apart from those players on the long-term injury list.

He added: "We are in a good place. I said after the Celtic game that there were lots of positives. Not just looking back and watching the game, but the data that comes with it is not perception, it is fact, that in the first-half, especially, we were the more dominant team and we had better chances. The way we played the game was in better areas for us.

"So, there are loads of good things that come from the game. We also analysed the goals and what we can do better and overall we are definitely progressing as I would like."

Naismith argued that they challenged the team which has been at the top of the table and "way out in front" this term with their performances and added: "We gave them (Celtic) very little opportunity, especially in the first-half, and we caused them loads of problems. Not many teams have done that this season.

"The game (against St Mirren) is really important in that how the season finishes will be determined by the next two or three games. The next couple will define where you will be sitting and then you have two games left.

"We would rather be in this position, trying to go for European places, than being mid-table and not involved in this."

He believes that from the moment he took over to now the team are "in a much better place" and added: "I think the players

have seen the opportunity and the group is really together.

“St Mirren have been consistently in most games all season and they have done really well to get in that top six. It has been something as a club they have been pushing for the in the last few seasons and narrowly missed out. This time they have nailed it and that is an achievement in itself.

“The manager (Stephen Robinson) has come in and done a fantastic job and we need to guard against them, but we definitely have a threat going forward.”

And the boss said that Yutaro Oda (pictured), taken off after Cochrane’s red card on Saturday, would be in contention for a place after impressing in his first-half performance against The Hoops.