

Strong response from players after Hampden defeat

Steven Naismith described the Viaplay Scottish League Cup semi-final defeat to Rangers at Hampden as disappointing and the opportunity to reach a major final is now gone, but he said: "There have been a few occasions like this this season, like going out of Europe."

The response from the players has been good and the coaching staff have worked hard this week preparing for what he believes will be a tough game away at Motherwell in the cinch Premiership (15.00).

Hearts are fifth in the 12-stong table with 14 points from 11 games having win on their last league outing and lost the previous two with a draw and then a win. Stuart Kettlewell's Motherwell are two points behind but with 12 fixtures played. They only have two draws to show from their last five.

The Jambos have scored ten goals and let in 11 while the Lanarkshire combine have scored 14 and shipped 19.

However, history shows that the Fir Park side have won three of the last five meetings between the clubs with the Edinburgh side winning two and, of course, Hears lost 1-0 at home to Motherwell on September 3, Matchday four of 33, midfielder

Callum Slattery netting after 29 minutes.

Records show that Hearts had 18 shots on the Well goal that afternoon with one on target while their rivals had four on target. Hearts enjoyed 69 per cent of the ball and had 528 passes against 245 from their opponents.

Recent games, Naismith feels, have shown the better side of Hearts, particularly in the performance at Ibrox when the Jambos were 1-0 ahead but lost to a late goal.

The head coach claimed: "There are positives within that. We need to get to a point where we are being consistent and there are not disappointing periods in games. We are hard to beat when we have not got the ball, but we are not causing problems.

"If we can get that kind of consistency then that makes everything that much easier. The boys get more confident."

He added: "As a squad in general, we are in a position where, in a lot of games, we have a lot more possession than other teams but, when you play the Old Firm, that is harder as they are more aggressive teams. Their quality in the final third when you make a mistake gets punished more than in other games.

"That is where we have to be comfortable and the Livingston game was totally opposite to both the Rangers and Celtic games. We had a lot of the ball and the problems we came up against were different.

"Tomorrow (at Motherwell) it is about how well we move the ball, how quickly we move it and getting the ball in positions that will cause them problems. Ultimately, our job is to score goals."

Naismith said the Fir Park side try to be comfortable on the ball and the head coach believes they carry a threat "up top".

He added; "They are quite aggressive and I have watched them quite a lot this season.

"They have possibly conceded some goals they will not be happy with but they are always a threat and been entertaining. I expect we have two teams who want to go out and win the game rather than not get beaten."

On loan defender Odeluga Offiah (pictured at training recently by **Nigel Duncan**) will sit out with what Naismith described as "medical issues" but Japanese forward Kyosuke Tagawa is back into the group. Other players who have been on the long-term injury list are now working on grass and Naismith welcomed that extra competition.