

# **'Battle stations' for Hearts at fired-up Spartans**

**Hearts know the fallout from being beaten by a minnow in the Scottish Cup. Cast your mind back three years ago to the 2-1 defeat by Highland League outfit, then champions, Brora Rangers, in the second round at Dudgeon Park on March 23, 2021, one of the biggest shocks in Scottish Cup history.**

The reverse, thanks to goals from Jordan Angus MacRae (12 minutes) and Martin McLean (75) – Christophe Berra netted to make it 1-1 after 70 minutes – came at a time when Hearts were riding high in the Championship.

Then, of course, the Jambos lost 4-0 to then second-tier Falkirk in 2003 in the third round thanks to a treble from Collin Samuel and a single from Owen Coyle. Craig Gordon won't need reminding as he was in goal that day.

Fast forward to today and Dougie Samuel's (pictured) men are well up for the cup and, currently, still have a chance of back-to-back promotions having graduated by winning the Lowland League last season then advancing through the play-offs. No mean feat.

So, they are used to one-off clashes under pressure and Hearts are undoubtedly under pressure here. Kick-off is at 12.15 at

Ainslie Park and the match is scheduled to be live on BBC Scotland.

Of course, the tie is in danger because of the freezing temperatures in the Capital, but Hearts have enjoyed a winter break and should be fresh if it goes ahead. They are in good form having recorded four wins and a draw in their last five games.

Their last outing was on January 2 at Livingston and they are riding high in third spot in the cinch Premiership with 36 points from 21 games, five points ahead of fourth-placed Kilmarnock who have played a game more and seven ahead St Mirren, who are sixth, with 29 points also from 22 starts.

Spartans and Hearts have never met in the Scottish Cup but the Ainslie Park outfit beat championship side Arbroath 2-1 in the last round with goals from James Craigen (35) and Jamie Dishington (50) to earn their crack at one of the heavyweights. David Gold scored for Arbroath after 49 minutes.

Blair Henderson is a danger man, the 29-year-old having scored six goals in his last seven games to help Spartans into third position in the cinch Scottish Professional Football League 2 table with 32 points from 18 starts, three behind second-placed Peterhead who have played 20 games and 17 adrift of runaway leaders Stenhousemuir who have also had 20 fixtures.

The Ainslie Park combine have scored 31 goals and conceded 21 and come into the cup clash on a downer having lost 2-0 last time out to Stenhousemuir in Edinburgh, on Saturday, January 13 to be precise, after a run of four straight wins.

An army of volunteers has spruced up Ainslie Park this week ahead of the tie which is the biggest game ever staged at the complex, opened in 2008, and there is a connection with the Gorgie club who rent Spartans ground for B home matches in the Lowland League.

One final point. Why are they called Spartans? Well, the internet indicates that founders felt it was appropriate to name the team after the Green Spartan army in the hope that the players would give their all as they went into "battle".

Well, it's battle stations for Hearts, providing Jack Frost plays ball for Saturday lunchtime. Defeat would be indigestible for Hearts fans.