

Naismith respect for Scottish Cup rival

Steven Naismith was a colleague of Rhys McCabe at Rangers, and he has great respect for the work the work the 31-year-old from Polbeth is doing as player-manager of Scottish Championship side Airdrie.

Hearts' head coach squares-up to central midfielder McCabe as the Tynecastle team face a tricky fifth round, Scottish Gas, Scottish Cup tie at the Excelsior Stadium on Sunday in a game to be televised by BBC Scotland.

And the Central Scotland club have beefed up their line-up with the recent addition of Glasgow-born midfielder Chris Donnell on loan from English Premier League side, Fulham.

The Jam Tarts are favourites to go through but Naismith (pictured by *David Mollison*) has been around the block. He understands the hurdle the Gorgie men face but he enjoys the Scottish Cup but wants his team to progress at the expense of his former club-mate.

It was 2020 when the clubs clashed in the Scottish Cup, this time in the fourth round, and the venue was Tynecastle before a crowd of 14,777. Then, Irving, Clare, Henderson, Halkett and Naismith scored in a 5-0 win with, according to statistics from SkySports, Hearts enjoying 66 per cent of possession against 34 per cent from Airdrie. The home side had 20 shots against seven in return and 12 were on target.

In the last round, Hearts disposed of Edinburgh-based Spartans 2-1 in the last round at Ainslie Park, thanks to a late goal, and Naismith expects another bruising battle against a side boosted by a 1-0 victory over Raith Rovers in the Scottish Challenge Cup Final.

Prior to that, Airdrie drew 1-1 with Partick Thistle in the league, beat St Johnstone 1-0 at home in the Scottish Cup, fourth round, and then Raith 1-0 at the Excelsior in the championship after a 2-0 victory over Inverness at the same venue and a 2-1 success at Queen's Park, so they are in-form and gunning for further cup glory.

Naismith said of McCabe, who made 19 appearances for Rangers before moving to Sheffield Wednesday, Portsmouth (loan), Dunfermline Athletic, Sligo Rovers, St Patrick's Athletic, Brechin City, Queen of the South and then Airdrie: "Airdrie are a really good side and a lot of credit goes to Rhys.

"He is similar to myself, he takes a job probably earlier than people expect him to, but he is doing something much harder in that he is still playing and coaching and managing.

"He has worked hard and he has continued to do well at a club that have a decent amount of change season-on-season with the playing staff and I am delighted for him.

"I have a good relationship with him as he was a young player at Rangers when I was there and it is credit to him that he is still playing, still keeping his fitness levels up and being involved in sessions, but also taking the burden of taking the team and managing the team. He is doing an excellent job and we know they are a really good football team."

For travelling fans, the address the Excelsior Stadium is Craigneuk Avenue, Airdrie ML6 8QZ.