

Hearts travel to Hampden with 'confidence'

Second-placed Rangers have 75 points from their 33 games in the cinch Premiership. Third-placed Hearts have 62, a gap of 13 points.

The Ibrox side have won 24 of their 33 cinch premiership fixtures and lost six with three drawn. Hearts have won 19 of their league games and lost nine, drawing five.

Rangers have scored 72 goals and conceded 23, the lowest goals against total in the league. The Jambos have scored 46 and lost 34.

These are the numbers ahead of Sunday's Scottish Gas, Scottish Cup semi-final at Hampden, but Rangers form has dipped and they are on the slide having won only one of their last five games.

They drew 0-0 at Dundee in midweek and lost 3-2 at second-bottom Ross County last weekend, a major shock. Prior to that, the Ibrox men drew 3-3 with Celtic at Govan, beat Hibs 3-1 also at home where they also suffered a 2-1 reverse to Motherwell.

Not good results for a side seeking silverware and they are now under real pressure with Old Firm rivals Celtic now three points ahead in the title race.

For Hearts, the mood is definitely up-beat. Steven Naismith (pictured), Hearts' head coach, has enjoyed good recent results and does not have a lengthy injury list to worry about

although Aussie midfielder Calem Nieuwenhof, a consistent performer this season, misses out through injury.

Long-term absentees Craig Halkett and Liam Boyce will also be spectators but, otherwise, Naismith has a full squad which appeared last weekend to pick from.

Fans have already been told that international goalkeeper Craig Gordon will be between the posts as he has been during the cup run, but Naismith has left all guessing about who will be in Sunday's line-up.

The club's head coach is a former Rangers player. He knows the intense pressure which his former club will be under to deliver, particularly as they have slipped behind in the title race.

Naismith, a former Scotland international, has played at the highest level and has repeatedly, in press briefings, talked about calm heads being key in games.

He also stresses making the right choices in critical moments in games. This is a critical moment in Hearts season, a season which, so far, has seen the Jambos beaten 3-1 in the Viaplay Cup semi-final by Rangers on November 5, but sitting comfortably in third position in the 12-strong cinch Premiership table.

Naismith, and the Tynecastle fans, hope his men deliver a KO blow to Rangers on the big stage.

Confidence is high and Naismith said that the comeback win over Livingston at Tynecastle last weekend was a result of the belief his men have in what the coaching staff are trying to achieve at Tynecastle.

Naismith feels it will be an open game at Hampden between two clubs anxious to deliver for their fans and Hearts look like carrying a support of up to 20,000 to the National Stadium.

The Men in Maroon have certainly made strides this season, the statistics prove that, but this is a real chance to move a step closer to landing silverware, something the team, the club's management and the fans really crave.

So, the question is, can their heroes really deliver on Sunday against a wounded team? Hearts last two results, a 2-1 win at Paisley against St Mirren and the 4-2 success over bottom club, Livingston, have helped consolidate their high position in the table and the coach told fans: we travel with confidence.