

Naismith: Hearts 'huffed and puffed' but 'lacked quality'

Frustrated Steven Naismith reflected on the narrow defeat by Viktoria Plzen at Tynecastle and admitted: "We lacked quality."

Hearts' head coach also said that his men "huffed and puffed" but did not really put pressure on their opponents from Czechia.

The Jambos also lost what Naismith called "another cheap goal", something which has dogged the squad so far this term.

Plzen now look forward to glamour ties in the Europa League, and a clash with Manchester United was mentioned as a prime draw by their management team.

Hearts await their fate in the Conference League draw which is set to happen at 13.30 UK time on Friday.

Reflecting, Naismith felt Plzen defended well and showed why they have competed at a high level in previous seasons, but the head coach still believes that Hearts have missed a great chance to make an impact and play some of the big names in European football.

Boos rang out around Tynecastle at the final whistle which will be disappointing for the squad and the coaching staff who now prepare for a key William Hill Premiership clash with newly-promoted Dundee United on Sunday (15.00).

Failure to win that game, which is at Tynecastle, will further

heighten the pressure on Naismith who has still not guided his men to a win this season.

Naismith told the media: "We lacked quality to win the tie. We got the crowd involved early but we did not really put that pressure into real chances and that was the disappointing part. We huffed and puffed without really causing them any problems.

"We had a couple of chances in the second half, but it was all about nearly. The quality was lacking."

He added: "You can see why Plzen are consistently in Europe they defended their box really well and made the right passes as the right time to score the goal and that is probably the biggest difference on the night.

"In the first half we were in the final third and had bodies forward but made the wrong pass or the wrong cross. Plzen are an experienced European team and I am sure they will cause loads of problems."

Looking back over the last year, Naismith said his guys have shown they have the quality but bringing that consistently and in big moments when you need it is missing.

The former Scotland international does not think there is anything you can pin point about what is wrong. New recruits, he said, are still bedding in but he stressed that too many players are by-passing the opportunity to stake a claim to stay in the team on a regular basis.

However, he argued that there was a positive, Hearts are in Europe until Christmas and that is, he declared, a success, but, for now, the backroom team will assess the bumps and bruises from the Europe tie when they come in on Friday morning and then concentrate on Dundee United.

Will Lawrence Shankland, the club's main striker, play? He sat

out Thursday's tie and his fitness has to be assessed as Naismith revealed the injury was in an "awkward place" in his knee and there is discomfort when the 29-year-old player kicks the ball or makes a tackle.

He said: "Every result which does not go your way then the next game becomes more important and I think we need to bring a tempo and an attacking threat which was not there tonight. We need to make sure we put on a good performance."

Last night was far from being a good performance and the killer blow followed a loose pass which was picked up in midfield and the move ended when Lukas Cerv calmly stroked the ball home from the edge of the penalty box after 76 minutes with the home defence struggling.

The visitors also won the first-leg 1-0 thanks to an own goal in the final seconds from Daniel Okegoke who was an unused substitute at Tynecastle.

Ironically, the only goal on this occasion came after a short period of pressure from the home side in which a long-range shot from Gerald Taylor and a shot on the rebound from Stephen Kingsley tested the visiting defence.

Daniel Vasulin had several chances earlier to open the scoring for Plzen, but Craig Gordon produced a quality stop, spreading himself to divert the goal-bound shot, and Taylor put in a last-gasp tackle to deny the tall striker, but Hearts, frankly, didn't threaten enough and a number of balls were floated into the box allowing goalkeeper Marian Tvdon to collect with ease.

The statistics so far this term make grim reading for Jambos fans. Three pre-season defeats, 2-1 at home to Leyton Orient, 5-1 at Tynecastle to Spurs, and 3-0 on the road at Fleetwood, a 0-0 draw with Rangers in the league in Gorgie followed by a 3-1 reverse at Dundee and a 3-1 defeat Motherwell, two defeats in Europe, both by 1-0, and a 2-0 defeat at Falkirk in the

second round of the Premier Sports Cup at the first hurdle.

There is a demand, said Naismith, when you pull on a jersey for the Men in Maroon and he added: "We are not hitting it." That is why victory over Dundee United is so vital on Sunday to stop the rot.

PICTURE: A big flag was displayed in the Gorgie Road end at Tynecastle against Plzen. Picture ***Nigel Duncan***