

Naismith looks for reaction in tough Euro play-off

FC Viktoria Plzen warmed up for their Europa League play-off clash with Hearts with a 3-0 victory over bottom-markers SK Dynamo Ceske Budejovice in the Czech First League on Sunday.

Erik Jirka converted a penalty after 31 minutes to break the deadlock and Cadu made it 2-0 only 19 minutes later with Lukas Kalvach scoring the third with nine minutes of regulation time remaining. All are midfield players.

Plzen had 76 per cent of the possession against 24 per cent from the home side who are pointless after five league games and the visitors had 653 passes against 203.

Hearts' opponents also had 17 shots against ten are now second in the table with 13 points, two behind leaders, Sparta Praha who have an unblemished record after five games.

Plzen have won four of their five league outings and drawn one and third are Slavia Praha with have an identical record.

The Czech side also have a potent weapon in 26-year-old striker Daniel Vasulin who netted the winner in their previous European game against Kryvbas and is a consistent scorer.

The club have undoubtedly started the season well, in contrast to their opponents on Thursday in the 11,700-capacity Doosan Arena in Czechia, kick-off 18.00.

Hearts, sponsored by Stellar Omada, are in tenth spot in the 12-strong William Hill Premiership with a point earned in the no-score home draw with Rangers. They lost 3-1 at Dundee.

And, of course, Tynecastle fans will not wish to be reminded of Saturday's result, a 2-0 defeat in the Premier Sports Cup at Championship side Falkirk, Ethan Ross after 53 minutes and Dylan Tait after 81 doing the damage.

The squad flew out on Wednesday and plan to take a look at the stadium on arrival, and the Gorgie side are obviously looking for a lift ahead of their trip to Motherwell on league business on Sunday (15.00).

This is after a disappointing start to their campaign which includes challenge match defeats to London-based Leyton Orient, who play in Football League One, and Premier League giants, Spurs, as well as a reverse at Fleetwood Town, currently sixth in Football League Two.

The club revealed late on Tuesday that an extremely limited number of away end tickets have become available for Thursday's game and fans travelling who are ticketless should email tickets@homplc.co.uk with their contact details. First come, first served.

Steven Naismith, Hearts' head coach, was a disappointed man after the defeat at the Falkirk Stadium and said that last season the club managed to get through early rounds of cup competitions with professional performances.

Frustrated Naismith felt the club started well at Falikrkr, had chances and did not take them and the players, he felt, gave away a soft goal and then their decision making was poor after that.

Naismith also said that the Men in Maroon gave away too many fouls when they were trying to gain momentum before coughing up a cheap second goal.

Losing poor goals has been a bad habit in recent games and Naismith said: "We need to change that."

And he warned: "We need guys on the pitch who are going to perform. We have a squad here now, if you are not going to perform you are not going to play."

He wants the players to have a reaction and said that the only way to get a run of results is to put on good performances.

The head coach added: "The next game is one of Thursday and we need to go into that with a positive mind-set and the game is different. Falkirk was a one-off cup tie against lower league opposition. We have two ties to get through (in the Europa League play-off) so we need to be better and give up less chances and take chances when they come."

PICTURE: Hearts coaching team prepare for Thursday's clash at Riccarton on Wednesday am. Picture **Nigel Duncan**







