

Defender Halkett glad to be back and seeking win to kick-start Hearts

Craig Halkett scored with a header in a losing cause at St Mirren in the William Hill Premiership on Saturday, a rare moment of joy in a difficult season for Hearts and after a mentally tough spell on the sidelines through injury.

The Scotland under-19 international defender had, only two days previously, appeared at a media briefing where he articulated his lengthy comeback which culminated with restoration of Halkett into first team duty.

The 29-year-old made his long-awaited comeback after nearly two years and he stressed that the injury and stop-start recovery period had been a difficult period in his career.

He has enjoyed a full pre-season and Campsie-born Halkett, who joined Hearts as a free agent from Livingston in July 2019 on a three-year deal after 144 appearances for the West Lothian club, admitted: "I knew the start of the season was going to be difficult as I knew how well the boys did last year. I have bided my time waiting to come in and I have done that. The results have not gone our way, but it is good to get back and try to do what I can to help."

The former Livi Lions skipper, who came through the youth

system at Rangers, and had loan spells at Clyde and Berwick Rangers, said: "You can train and do as much as you can off the pitch, but it is really hard to get match fitness back (after being out so long) and match sharpness can only come with games. It is not so much fitness, it is about the wee things that happen in games, the game reactions mentally and positions, and I am getting there."

Looking at the squad in general, Halkett said that confidence is not as high as it would be if Hearts were winning games and picking up points but he added: "It is something we are really working hard on and we all want the same goal, players, coaches and fans, we all want the same at the club."

Part of the recovery process is re-watching past games and putting them under a microscope to view things that they are doing right and issues the club can improve on.

Halkett said: "As a group, collectively, we all know what the goal is and we want to win games of football. We have not been doing that but, when you are at Hearts you have pressure every single game, no matter if you are winning or losing. We all know what the situation is but we are all confident we have got the quality of squad in the changing room."

"In general, Hearts are one of the biggest clubs in Scotland and clubs are going to give you a little more respect, but, off the back of last year and how well we did, it is up to us to break teams down and to make sure we get the win."

The big defender said: "There are moments in games which are not falling our way at the moment, a scrappy goal or referees decision, but it is up to us to doing what we are doing on the training pitch and to keep working on it and put that work into place on a Saturday. We all know that if we are doing the right things then results will come."

Halkett stressed that the Tynecastle club "have a great group down there" and added: "We are all working as hard as we can

every day and training has been really good most weeks. Come a Saturday, we are just coming up a little bit short and I am sure if we keep doing what we are doing then results will come.”

There has been criticism of Hearts during their poor run and Halkett said: “You don’t want to ignore what everyone is saying, but it is up to us to block it out (criticism from fans) and do what we have been working on and it is just getting that first win and taking it from there.”