

Birthday boy Critchley seeks boost for struggling Jambos

Thousands of words have been written since Neil Critchley was unveiled to the media at Tynecastle as Hearts new head coach, three days before his 46th birthday, now it is crunch time.

St Mirren visit Tynecastle on Saturday (15.00) and they will be backed by a full travelling support who will be keen to see their men bounce back after a 1-0 defeat to Dundee United at the SMiSA Stadium in their last fixture before the international break.

Saints, however, remain sixth in the 12-strong William Hill Premiership having collected eight points from the same number of games and that points total for Stephen Robinson's men includes a 2-1 win over the Jambos in Paisley last month.

It was Toyosi Olusanya who netted the game-winner in 34 minutes after Craig Halkett had levelled at 1-1 in the 18th minute, glancing home a cross from Blair Spittal. Gerald Taylor's own goal after eight minutes had put Saints ahead early on and that defeat led to the dismissal of Steven Naismith and his coaching staff 24-hours later.

Hearts need points desperately. Only two have been earned since the start of the league campaign. The first came in a 0-0 draw with Rangers on opening day, a result and a performance which augured well for the season.

However, things did not pan out and the Tynecastle team then suffered eight straight defeats in all competitions.

Liam Fox, Hearts B team coach, took over as interim manager and steered the Capital combine to a in a 1-1 home draw with Ross County at Tynecastle then a 2-1, injury-time win at Dinamo Minsk in the UEFA Conference League, Yan Dhanda, a summer recruit from Ross County, providing the finishing touch.

There were further signs of improvement at high-flying Aberdeen in the Premiership where Hearts were edged out 3-2 in a pulsating game after leading through a Spittal goal after 63 minutes but they could not hold on for that much-needed first win of the season, Ante Palaversa scoring with two minutes of normal time remaining.

The statistics indicate that the clash with St Mirren will be a tight and, in the head-to-head over the last five matches, Hearts and St Mirren have both won two games with one draw.

The Tynecastle faithful need a lift. Andrew McKinlay, Hearts chief executive officer, believes the fans will get behind the team on Saturday and he is confident Crewe-born Critchley is the man to spearhead a drive up the table. Only time will tell.