

# Minsk carry threat as Hearts start Euro bid

**Dinamo Minsk warmed up for their UEFA Conference League clash with Hearts on Thursday with a comfortable 2-0 win over mid-table Isloch in the Belarusian Premier League to be in second spot in the table, three points behind pace-setting Neman.**

They have 47 points from 14 wins, five draws and one defeat and are in a good position to make a challenge for the title as Neman have 50 points from 16 wins, two draws and five defeats from 23 fixtures.

Third are Torpedo Zhodino who have 44 points from their 22 games, a record which includes 13 wins, five draws and four defeats and they are three clear of Dinamo Brest on 41 points from 23 starts.

Boni Amian, a 21-year-old midfielder from the Ivory Coast, netted both counters after 51 and 89 minutes for Minsk in the weekend win against Isloch who are 11th in the table, and the club are in form having won four of their last five games.

The Jambos squad was due to arrive in Baku on Tuesday night and interim manager, Liam Fox, has told fans that the club respects everybody and fears nobody.

Fox has watched footage of Minsk games and is fully aware that

the Belarusian team can punish mistakes. Vadim Skripchenko's men recently lost 1-0 to Vitebsk, but have subsequently posted to straight wins.

They have no injury worries ahead of the game and are determined to open their Conference League campaign with a victory after slipping down into the third-tier event following a 2-0 defeat on aggregate to Belgian side Anderlecht in a Europa League play-off.

Hearts also missed out on the Europa League after they were edged 2-0 on aggregate by Czech combine Viktoria Plzen in their play-off tie and the Tynecastle team's domestic form has been poor, failing to win any of their last ten fixtures in all competitions.

Fox stressed that it is what Hearts do on the night which is so important and tweaks can be expected for what the Edinburgh-born coach believes will be a really tough tie.

Spirits were, however, lifted following Saturday's last-gasp draw with Ross County, Lawrence Shankland scoring in the 96th minute, his first of the season, bundling the ball home from close range, in the William Hill Premiership at Tynecastle.

However, it was hard work last season, when the Jambos finished well clear in third at the close of the campaign, which earned Hearts the right to be in Europe and Fox would dearly love to see his boyhood favourites make a mark with a result on foreign soil.

Incidentally, the teams will play in an empty stadium, but that may suit Minsk as their players said in the build-up that they are used to it.

PICTURE: Liam Fox gives a media briefing. Picture *Nigel Duncan*