

Spittal 'fantastic' in Europe claims boss

Blair Spittal epitomised Hearts against St Mirren, according to new head coach, Neil Critchley, and the former Motherwell midfielder played another starring role as the Tynecastle team comfortably disposed of Cypriot combine Omonoia at Tynecastle in the UEFA Europa Conference League.

Critchley felt the 28-year-old midfielder was fantastic in the 2-0 European win and he added: "I thought he (Spittal) was fantastic, honesty, I have been really impressed with Blair really focused, good technically, can score goals on a regular basis and I thought it was just a good all-round team performance.

"Cammy Devlin in the middle of the pitch put in some tireless work, making interceptions, and Shanks (Lawrence Shankland) up-front gave a captain's performance. Their goalkeeper made a tremendous save and that prevented him getting a goal he deserved.

"The two centre backs again were great and I can't fault any of them, I felt they were fantastic."

Academy graduate, Adam Forrester, also received praise from the new boss. The 19-year-old defender started against the

Cypriots and Critchley said the teenager stepped-up.

The English coach added: "I have been really impressed with Adam as a person. Good temperament, not arrogant, humble, he wants to learn, get better and I thought he gave a top, top performance for a young boy, I was so impressed with him."

Experienced midfielder, Beni Baningime, was not in the squad and Critchley explained that was because he was feeling unwell overnight after training on Wednesday and, hopefully, he will be available for Sunday when Hearts cross the city to face Hibs.

Looking ahead to the Derby, Critchley said he is really excited at facing Hibs, "can't wait" was his take on the William Hill Premiership clash. He added: "I know the importance of the game to the supporters and the team are in a good place.

"We have to handle the atmosphere, we have to make sure we play our type of game and, if we do that, we can give anybody a game."

PICTURE: Blair Spittal slips in training at Riccarton by ***Nigel Duncan***