

# Critchley focused on Euro challenge

Neil Critchley assured fans that he prepares meticulously for all games, home or away, domestic or European, and he is under no illusions about the challenge facing Heart of Midlothian FC when Bundesliga side Heidenheim visit Tynecastle on Thursday (20.00) in the UEFA Europa Challenge League.

For the record, the German squad sit in 12<sup>th</sup> spot in the 18-strong table with ten points from nine starts, and their record so far includes a 1-0 home defeat to RB Leipzig on October 6. Leipzig are second in the table.

Heidenheim have also lost 4-2 at Dortmund, another strong German side, who are fifth in the standings, and the team from Southern Germany have only won one of their last five games and drawn another, suffering three defeats.

The team, based in Baden-Wuerttemberg, close to the Border with Bavaria, have scored 12 goals and shipped the same number, but Critchley has put them under the microscope.

The 46-year-old coach (pictured at Hearts' pre-game media briefing by **Nigel Duncan**) acknowledged that Hearts have made a good start to the Conference League.

He refuses to look beyond Thursday night's game. Of course, he would love to have secured three points by the final whistle which would, said the coach, put the Capital club in a "really positive position".

There is no doubt that the Jambos are in a good place having won 2-1 at Dinamo Minsk thanks to a late strike four minutes into injury time from Yan Dhanda, when Liam Fox was in interim charge, and followed up by beating Cypriot side Omonoia 2-0 at Tynecastle thanks to goals from Alan Forrest and Blair Spittal, both in the first half.

Hearts' players will undoubtedly require a strong mentality and focus to earn a result and Critchley stressed the need not to lose the ball in critical areas of the pitch.

The coach argued that the Gorgie men have to impose themselves and play their game over the entire 90-plus minutes. Intensity and emotion will play a part on the night, and Critchley has a strong squad to pick from.

Yutaro Oda and Calem Nieuwenhof will be absentees as they recover from long-term injuries, but, otherwise there are no concerns from the 2-1 victory at St Johnstone on Saturday.

Critchley confirmed that he watched Celtic's 3-1 victory over RB Leipzig, and was complimentary of the performance of the Glasgow side. He quipped: "Hopefully, we can be the next Scottish team to win against German opposition."