

Critchley praises players after Dons draw

Neil Critchley praised his players for their efforts in the 1-1 draw with Aberdeen at Tynecastle with Musa Drammeh, making his first start, Cammy Devlin, Beni Baniangime and substitutes Adam Forrester and Craig Halkett, among the names highlighted at the post-match press conference.

The head coach said: "I thought we were fantastic, particularly in the second half, I also felt that we started well, we were the better team, making two changes disrupts the rhythm and they scored with their first shot on goal.

"It would be easy for us to feel sorry for ourselves, but I said to the players at half time. One is moan or talk about it we fight and we certainly fought in the second half."

The former Blackpool boss added that to lose two players in the back line (Kent and Kingsley) was not ideal, as they are big players, but Critchley felt Craig Halkett, who had a back problem before the game, was "brilliant" and Forrester "was fantastic as well", particularly as Hearts' rearguard were playing against which the coach called "a really dangerous front line".

He added: "That is one of Aberdeen's strengths, they can

change off the bench and, when you are pushing for the game and leaving them space you know you are rolling the dice a little bit, but we went for the game, the crowd was incredible and we nearly won it at the end.”

The up-beat playcaller said Hearts were not even half way through the season and there are still plenty of points to play for and he added: “I said to the players before the game, be committed to being us and the team we want to be. I thought we did that today and we got our just rewards.”

On Drammeh, the coach felt he was “brilliant” and he really enjoyed watching him play. He added: “He brought something different to the front line. He has physicality, he has size and strength and he tired, obviously, but that was another problem.

“Generally, his all round performance and his contribution to the team was fantastic.”

If he keeps playing as he did against Aberdeen then he could claim a regular starting slot and Critchley said: “The players do their talking on the pitch. They make their decisions for me. He has come on he has scored, he has done well in training and Musa is making my job easier at this moment in time.”

Aussie-born Devlin and Congolese footballer Baningime have been excellent recently, he said, and the plan is to rotate in the midfield. You could not, said Critchley, have detected that Hearts had played in Europe in midweek by the end of the game. The energy and commitment was, he added, outstanding as Hearts drove forward in a bid to capture all three points.

His counterpart, Jimmy Thelin, incidentally, fielded a number of fringe players and, overall, felt it was a fair result. His men now host pace-setting Celtic on Wednesday.

PICTURE: Beni Baningime (left) and Adam Forrester, who players mentioned by Neil Critchley for their contributions against

Aberdeen. Picture by *Nigel Duncan*