

# Critchley: 'I'm gutted for the team and the fans'

Neil Critchley, Hearts' head coach, said the narrow, 2-1, extra-time, defeat in the Scottish Gas, Scottish Cup semi-final at Hampden Park was a difficult one to take because of the way the game finished, Aberdeen snatching the winner inside the final two minutes of extra time.

Critchley (pictured) said: "I am gutted for the team and the supporters."

However, the Englishman, who must prepare the side to host Dundee on Saturday (15.00) in their first William Hill Premiership game after the split, added: "We have to move on. We have to finish the league in a positive fashion by winning as many games as we can."

The coach was pleased with the way his men started the game in Glasgow and he described it as "a real positive fashion", however, he was frustrated that Hearts conceded a poor goal from Aberdeen's first real "moment" in the Jambos final third.

Critchley said: "I thought we responded brilliantly well and we were the better team. The sending-off changed the game but, even with ten men, I thought we were fantastic. Every man showed real character, defended with good organisation and we

still carried a threat.

“Sometimes you need a little bit of luck, or for the football gods to be smiling on you, and the least we deserved was to take it to penalties. That opportunity was taken away from us.”

Critchley said he had no words to make the players feel any better, but he added: “They gave what I class as a Hearts performance, full of heart, full of grit, full of determination, character, spirit and, not without ability either.”

The former Blackpool boss said he had to make a “really difficult decision” at half-time around the formation for the second half following the red card shown to defender Michael Steinwender.

Hearts removed forwards James Wilson and Elton Kabangu and replaced them with defensive duo, Frankie Kent and Craig Halkett, a move which some, he declared, might sound negative, but he countered: “We felt that gave us the best chance of staying in the game and to make it difficult for Aberdeen.

“I thought the players did that magnificently well. We frustrated them to very little, we carried a threat and Craigy (Craig Gordon) made a magnificent save in the first-half of extra time, the only real chance the Dons had.”

Thanking the over 21,000 fans who made the trip along the M8, Critchley said: “You want to make people happy, they got behind the team, they travelled in numbers, you see what it means to them, the passion and I like to think we gave them a passionate performance. It is so hard to take when you don’t see them celebrating at the end, they deserved that.”