

# Critchley looking for Hampden lift

**It seems a long time since the draw was made, but Hearts and Aberdeen finally square-up at Hampden Park in Glasgow in the Scottish Gas, Scottish Cup semi-final (kick-off 12.30, live on BBC One Scotland), and it's a massive occasion for both clubs.**

The Dons, who sparkled at the start of the William Hill Premiership but whose form dipped dramatically, now seem to be back. Jimmy Thelin's men were 2-0 up on Rangers at Pittodrie last Sunday before a sensational strike after six minutes of injury time from Hagi levelled the game.

Hearts, however, failed to make the top six due largely to their inability to score in back-to-back fixtures against Dundee United at Tynecastle and at Fir Park last Saturday against Motherwell.

Only one point from a possible six cost Neil Critchley's men dear as they slipped to seventh spot.

Aberdeen are fifth with 50 points from 33 fixtures. The Dons have scored 45 goals and conceded 49. The Men in Maroon have 40 points and have scored 43 and let in 44. Not much difference there then.

The sides last met on January 12 in the North East and shared

the points in a no-score draw and the sides also drew at Tynecastle on December 1, this time 1-1 with a Devlin own goal after 62 minutes cancelling out one by Clarkson who netted for the visitors after 37 minutes.

Earlier in the season, October 6, in fact, Aberdeen edged Hearts 3-2 at Pittodrie. Keskinen scored after two minutes for the home side but Kent after 36 and Spittal in 63 edged Hearts ahead only for Devlin to level two minutes later. Palaversa scored the winner with two minutes of regular time remaining.

In the last five matches, Hearts have won one, Aberdeen two with two draws and The Dons have a superior recent record of three wins and two draws. Hearts have won two, drawn one and lost two.

The travelling Hearts fans were angry at the club's failure to secure a place in the top six after the split, and voiced that frustration at the final whistle at Fir Park. Neil Critchley, Hearts' head coach, insists his men must move on from that disappointment.

More than 22,000 supporters will make the trip along the M8 to Glasgow and Critchley visited Hampden recently to get a feel for the stadium.

The 46-year-old's record since taking over from Steven Naismith is 14 wins, seven draws and 12 defeats and he urges his men to put last weekend behind them and show belief.

Victory on Saturday would go a long way to boosting confidence ahead of the crucial post-season games in the bottom six, but defeat would significantly increase the pressure on Critchley and the players in the run-in to the end of what has been a really disappointing season.

PICTURE: Blair Spittal scored at Pittodrie earlier this season. Taken by **Nigel Duncan**