

Pressure on for Hearts in top six race

Four points separate teams from sixth to ninth in the 12-strong William Hill Premiership, Hearts, St Mirren, Motherwell and Ross County, are involved, and the pressure is really on with only two matches remaining until the split on April 13.

Hearts currently occupy the sixth spot with 39 points from 31 fixtures. St Mirren are seventh and Motherwell eighth and they are only a point behind with Ross Country three back from the Paisley and Lanarkshire sides.

Neil Critchley, Hearts' head coach, is desperate to make the top six and a home win over Dundee United, who are fifth with 44 points, could go a long way to securing that position with a visit to Fir Park to play Motherwell the final fixture. It has proved a tough travel for the Jambos in recent seasons.

Hibs and Aberdeen are already there thanks to victories over St Johnstone and Motherwell last weekend and high praise must go to 36-year-old David Gray who has steered his Easter Road men into third spot currently after being bottom of the pile earlier this term.

So, the focus for Hearts is on Sunday (kick-off 14.30) in the first instance. United edged the Jambos 1-0 on their last

visit, Ross Graham netting after 76 minutes.

Hearts had 14 shots against 12 from United, the Jambos had two on target and United four, but the Men in Maroon enjoyed 66 per cent of the possession, and had 574 passes against 301. The home side also had six corners against four from Goodwin's men, yet they still lost.

The Jambos have won six of their last ten meetings with Dundee winning once and the Men in Maroon have scored 23 goals with only 12 in reply.

United travel south having earned a narrow victory over Ross County last weekend which meant that they were almost there in their top six quest, a great achievement for manager Jim Goodwin and his squad.

The Tayside team have won 12 and drawn eight of their 31 games so far, losing 11. They have scored 39 goals and conceded 40. Hearts have won 11 and drawn six of their games, losing 14, and scoring 43 goals and conceding the same number.

Not much between the teams then, but Hearts have won three of their last five while United and won two and drawn one of theirs.

PICTURE: Hearts head coach Neil Critchley by ***Ian Jacobs***