

Livingston to face Ross County in play-off final

Livingston disappointingly missed out on automatic promotion to the top flight of Scottish football by three points, and David Martindale admitted he would rather be sitting on a beach somewhere right now.

However, the Lions now have another bite at the cherry when they face William Hill Premiership strugglers, Ross County over two legs in the play-off final.

The first game is in West Lothian on Thursday with the return at Dingwall on Monday, both games covered on Sky TV, and this is the third time that County have been involved in the pressure pot play-offs.

Martindale's men edged The Staggies 3-2 in the Scottish Gas, Scottish Cup, fourth round, in mid-January, thanks to a close-in strike from Andrew Shinnie after 119 minutes, and he remains confident that his squad can claim a place back in the Premiership at the first attempt.

The Almondvale boss has no real injury concerns ahead of the first-leg, a few minor bumps and bruises, but the niggles will not prevent the players being available for what is a crucial clash.

Martindale said his squad has been fairly consistent for months and he added: "I love the play-offs myself, but, would I rather be in Falkirk's position right now? Yes, 100 per

cent, I would be sitting on a beach right now, but the play-offs are exciting and one of the best things in Scottish football. They have definitely got that format right and to be involved in it is exciting.”

The boss has kept the majority of players who he felt would be beneficial to The Lions in their Championship campaign and he has recruited successfully during the season. He added: “From the minute the boys came in the building to now there has been a real progression.

“Relationships have grown on and off the park and the players can take massive credit for where they find themselves.”

Defensive solidity, with experienced players pivotal, has been key to Livingston finishing second in the Championship and Martindale hopes that that department continues to stand firm in the next two games. Around 20 clean sheets have been achieved during the season, according to the boss who added: “I have been looking at Ross County since the Scottish Cup.

“They are a fantastic club, a wonderful club, it is so professional, it is a lovely part of the world, I have a lot of respect for them.”

Straight-talking Martindale is not big on superstition and historical stats, but there is a big belief in the changing room and he said: “We’ve had that all year. From day one they (the players) have consistently applied themselves to put themselves in this position.

“Going into this game, all the apprehension, all the anxiety, is with the club sitting 11th in the Premiership (Ross County). There is a huge amount of pressure on them. For us, if we go and do it, and there is a belief that we can do it, and it will not be a surprise to us.

“I have always coached the next game and not put much emphasis on the game after but there is no reason why we can’t win up

there, we did it in the Scottish, and we will not be doing anything different in this game to how we approach the next game.

“Things are going to be geared to winning this game of football (on Thursday).”

New owner Calvin Ford, a great, great grandson of car magnet, Henry Ford, will not be at Almondvale but aims to watch on TV and the football club's backroom staff are working to find out where he can watch coverage at his home near Detroit.

For those in Britain, kick-off is at 8.00pm and coverage is on Sky Sports Football. Tickets for those who wish to be there are selling well.



David Martindale of Livingston. PHOTO Nigel Duncan