

Willie Kirk eager to develop the next crop of Scotland stars.



Willie Kirk, the new High Performance Football Manager at the Scottish FA's National Performance Centre for Women's Football, is eager to use his experience in club football to develop the next crop of Scotland stars.

Kirk was appointed last month following a successful four and a half years at the helm with Hibernian Ladies, and he has his sight set on overseeing the growth and development of the game in this country.

"My job consists of managing girls development – this ranges from putting on football technical sessions, modules on recovery, sport psychology, as well as developing good communication with club coaches," Kirk told the Scottish FA's website.

Kirk's experience in women's club football means that he understands fully the relationship which the Centre should have the clubs. The players that live and train at the National Performance Centre, a campus-like environment which combines elite-player training in conjunction with their studies, all play for different clubs, but Kirk believes that they can work in partnership.

"From my background I am aware that the players belong to their clubs. Using a holistic approach, we are here to help maximise their potential. The job will be interesting since each player has different needs and wants which the Centre can help identify and work on."

The opportunity to lead the National Performance Centre was one that was too good to refuse. The position at the Centre allows Kirk the chance to focus purely on football.

“In my previous role at Hibernian, as well as coaching the first team, I also worked in the club’s community development whilst examining the overarching structure of the club.

“Being High Performance Football Manager now gives me a chance to properly focus on a small group of players but in a professional environment.”

The National Performance Centre has been at Stirling University since it was first established in 2009 but this summer relocates to Heriot-Watt University. Development work on the new National Performance Centre, due for completion in 2016 and also based at Heriot-Watt, starts later this year. The move to Edinburgh is a switch which Kirk supports.

“I think relocating to Heriot-Watt two years in advance of the National Performance Centre is a good move.

“To be based there and to see the development will be fascinating in itself and come 2016 it’ll be an unbelievable facility. There are certainly some exciting times ahead.

The role that the National Performance Centre plays in the sport’s development in Scotland, Kirk believes, cannot be understated. For a number of reasons they are invaluable, allowing the players to train and improve in a professional manner, whilst also bridging the gap between youth-level and the A-squad.

“The National Performance Centre is vital. We’re in an amateur environment but we are trying to do things as professional as possible. Anything we can give to these players out-with their clubs is a bonus since their clubs simply do not have the capacity or the resources to do that.

“This particular Centre is a middle ground between the Under-19 and the A-squad, since fewer and fewer are players are going immediately from one squad to the next.

“The Centre is a good stepping-stone in their preparation and their development. All the girls at the Centre receive fitness testing and athletic ability assessments, which will all be used and compared to A-squad players.

“The long term is to get as many players from the Centre into A-squad as possible.”

Another important feature of having centres such as the one at Heriot-Watt is that they allow Scottish players and coaches-alike to stay in touch with more advanced countries.

“We’re seeing with results at Under-17, Under-19 and A-squad level that we are competing with countries which are much bigger and have more access to resources.”

Kirk has been in Norway this week watching the Women’s Under-19 side compete at the UEFA European Championships, and he has been encouraged by the side’s victory over Belgium on Tuesday. Crucially, the squad featured eight players who are with the Centre, seven of which played ninety minutes in the Group A opener.

“It is good to see them playing against the best in Europe. It is the highest standard they’ve played at so it was important for me to come out here and see exactly the sort of standard that we are aiming for.”

Photo by Hibernian Community Foundation shows Williw being presented with leaving present by Scottish Internationalist Joelle Murray.