

Robbie Neilson explains Devlin transfer – and looking ahead to St Mirren

Following their opening day heroics against Celtic, Hearts now travel to St Mirren at the venue where their 2019/20 season came to a premature end.

Jonathan Obika scored the only goal of the game that night, at which supporters were warned that any coughing whilst in the turnstile queues would result in them being refused entry to St Mirren Park over Covid-19 fears.

The season was called to a halt after that fixture and with Hearts sitting bottom of the league at the time, they were demoted to the second tier of Scottish football.

Seventeen months on from that dreaded night, the Jambos are back in the top-flight and will return to Paisley for their first away match of the league campaign, for which boss Robbie Neilson expects to have a full squad to choose from.

Neilson said: "We're good. Walker did a bit of training today, so we'll see how he reacts. Hopefully he'll train fully tomorrow with the group. Other than that, we're all good."

"Saturday was a great result for us. But it's done and in the past. We spoke about it on Monday morning, it was a great three points, but we need to do it all again when we go to St Mirren.

“You know what games like last Saturday are like, they take care of themselves with the atmosphere, the intensity. It’s the following week that you need to be at it. It’s about making sure they are ready for it.”



Premier Sports Cup – Heart of Midlothian v Inverness Caledonian Thistle 25/7/2021. Hearts play host to Inverness Caledonian Thistle in the Premier Sports Cup at tynecastle Park, Edinburgh, Midlothian. Pic shows: Hearts’ midfielder, Gary Mackay-Steven, holds off Inverness Caley centre forward, Manny Duku. PHOTO: Ian Jacobs

Reports yesterday revealed that Hearts had agreed a deal to sign midfielder Cameron Devlin from Australian side Newcastle Jets. Neilson confirmed the agreed deal, but explained complications are present regarding visas and isolation, before the Aussie could arrive in Gorgie.

He said: “We’ve agreed a deal with the player and the club but there is still some paperwork that needs to get done. Obviously he needs to get a visa so he can come into the country. We’re still waiting on that because he’s been at the Olympics, he’s now had to go back to Australia, and he’s had to isolate because he’s been abroad. Now he has to go apply for the visa, so it will still be a bit of time before we know if this deal will get done or not.

“I think Australia is on the green list. We’re hopeful he’ll be able to come and train. There are different levels to what they can do. They can either have to quarantine totally or they can come in, to train and then go home. Then there’s the ones who are just free to go.

“It’s just one of those things. I’d rather wait the extra 10 days and get the player I want than somebody we’re not after.

“First and foremost, we’re just hopeful he gets the visa application through, and he gets over. Then hopefully we can get him here as quick as possible, but to be honest, there’s

not much we can do.”

Beni Banningime made his debut in Saturday’s victory over Celtic and impressed supporters with his ball winning and energy in midfield, Neilson expects that if they can get the deal finalised, Devlin will also prove to be a big hit.

Neilson said: “We’re looking for someone in there that one retains the ball well but also can compete, cover the ground, win tackles and pass forward. The stat guys flagged him up then we watched him, and we really liked him. We’ve got the deal done so I think he’ll do well for us.

“This deal has been going on for two months now, so he should be worth the wait. We’ve been working in the background trying to get it sorted. We’re delighted that we’re nearly there, but we aren’t there yet.”

Devlin was in the Australian Olympics squad with Harry Souttar (brother of John) and Neilson explained the experience will benefit the midfielder, who asked some of his teammates about what to expect at Hearts.

“I think Harry and Cameron spoke, and I spoke to John about him. Cammy didn’t play a lot over there, but just to be involved in the Olympics was great for him. I think he spoke to a few Australian lads who used to play here as well.”

Neilson put the circulating rumours of an alleged Armand Gnanouillet tantrum to bed, but explained Hearts are still in the transfer market and are looking at a couple of specific areas to strengthen in but refused to put a number on the amount of potential arrivals.



Scottish Championship – Heart of Midlothian v Dunfermline. Tynecastle Park, Edinburgh, Midlothian, UK. 23/01/2021 Hearts play host to Dunfermline in the Scottish Championship at Tynecastle Park, Edinburgh. Pic shows: Hearts’ new signing, French striker, Armand Gnanouillet, PHOTO: Ian Jacobs

"I don't like to say. We have target areas where we need to get people in. Hopefully we get Devlin in, and we have already started looking at other areas as well.

"I'm pleased with the squad overall but there is still more work to do. There are still areas where we need to bring quality in. We don't have huge depth in the squad now so there are still areas where we need to strengthen.

"As a manager, you want all your players in at the start of the season. You could fill your team with players who will move on in six months' time. We want to bring in players who will progress the club. We have good players here already so anybody coming in has to be at a really good level.

"The difficulty is we are competing against English Championship clubs and teams from abroad. We are missing out on players to them because they can pay more money. We have to wait and get the ones that we really want.

"We want to build a wee bit of continuity at the club as well. Look at St Mirren, they've had five or six key players there for three years or so. That helps the team because you are only bringing in one or two."

In previous transfer windows Hearts have conducted numerous squad overhauls with ridiculous player turnover figures. Now however, Neilson explains it's solely about adding little bits of quality to his already talented squad.

"We have a good group here and we just want to add quality. It's hopefully longer-term deals so that, once we get to next summer, it's not wholesale changes again.

"When managers change mid-season, it's always going to be like that – large player turnover. One manager does one window, the next manager does the next window. It's about trying to get stability with players here – guys who will be here for a longer period that we can build the club around."