

Andy Halliday 'delighted' to extend Hearts deal as he eyes future coaching role

On Monday, Hearts announced that Andy Halliday had joined Stephen Kingsley, Michael Smith, Craig Halkett, Craig Gordon and Euan Henderson in signing a new deal at Tynecastle.

It is easy to mention the former Rangers man's experience and versatility when discussing his list of attributes, however Halliday comes across as a player who refuses to let his teammates performance levels drop, and if they do, he'll be the first to give them an earful.

Halliday signed for Hearts in September 2020 after his Rangers contract expired and he admits that having grown up in Scotland, he feels privileged to now ply his trade at a club like Hearts.

"Being from Scotland, you know how big Hearts are," Halliday explained.

"They've been a sort of sleeping giant over the last few years, not really competing at the end of the table they should be and unfortunate to be demoted to a lower division last year, but for me it was still exciting to come here and be part of that rebuilding process.

"I've really enjoyed my time at the club since the day I

signed. We've had a lot of plaudits this season and I feel as a club we're going places and with the spine of the squad we've got, I feel we can try to kick on and it matches my ambition.

"I didn't see many people tipping us to be up close to the Old Firm for the majority of the season and although we've had a wee blip, hopefully we are at the start of another good run because we've still got a bit to go in the league."

"I'm not ashamed to admit that when I left Rangers, I was trying to explore different cultures and different leagues and maybe broaden my experiences, purely because I didn't know what sort of reaction I would get from different fans (in Scotland). I'm not the most popular player when I go to grounds – I don't know why – but since the day I walked in the door, Hearts have made me feel really welcome."

Robbie Neilson spoke last summer about bringing the average age of the squad down, but when 30-year-old Halliday was approached by the Hearts boss over a new contract, he admits the negotiations didn't take long.

"The conversation actually started in January, and he [Neilson] made it clear to me at that point he was trying to look at the contracts of the players who played every week and maybe had a bit of interest out with the club, but when they were tied down he wanted me to stay as well.

"I told him that this is a club I enjoy being at and I want to stay. So, when we started speaking properly at the end of January, the talks didn't last long.

"The biggest praise I can give the manager is that he's never been anything but honest with me since day dot. If he feels I should be doing more on the pitch, he'll tell me and also if he thinks I'm doing well."

Although, he is not at the stage of retirement yet, Halliday

is already plotting his next move for when he decides to call time on his playing career and is keen to follow Steven Naismith into a coaching role at the Hearts Academy.

Halliday has already completed his UEFA B licence coaching badge, with a plan already in place to complete his A licence later in the year.

“I realise I have got a job to do because we have young players,” he said.

“It was brilliant to see them get to the Youth Cup final; they are the future of the football club. It’s brilliant to see four or five of them training with the first team every single day. I’ve always been one who loves seeing younger players break through, especially younger players who are big Hearts fans as well. To see them train with the first team and breakthrough, would be brilliant.

“I’ve already done my B licence and had a couple of Zoom calls this week because I’m doing my A licence this year as well. I had a couple of conversations with Steven Naismith. I’d love to take advantage of the position I am in and take a little more to do with the 18s, 16s, 14s.

“I remember being a young player myself. When a first team player comes out and says hello or says your name when you are 13, 14, that feeling knowing a first-team player knows your name is amazing. I always feel that gives a player an extra ten per cent.

“Even when it comes to players not getting a new contract at Hearts, I’d love to be that player to bridge the gap where they can pick up the phone and give me a wee phone call about what they can do next.

“I want to take advantage of that fortunate position I am in because I am under no illusions that I am very, very fortunate to be at a great football club like Hearts. My focus is on

being a football player but anytime I get that spare time I'd love to be a bit more involved with the academy."