

Hearts' summer business starting to take shape

Most football managers would tell you that June is an early stage of the summer transfer window where not much happens, but Hearts have already managed to complete the signing of five players.

Alan Forrest arrived at Tynecastle to sign a two-year-deal following the expiration of his Livingston contract. Lewis Neilson joined on a free transfer from Dundee United on a three-year-deal. Alex Cochrane returned to Tynecastle, this time on a permanent deal having spent last season on loan from Brighton. Jorge Grant eventually agreed a three-year-deal for an undisclosed fee from Peterborough United and from slightly further afield, defender Kye Rowles joined from Australian side, Central Coast Mariners, also on a three-year-deal.

Early transfer window business is always a good sign, for a lot of different reasons. The transfer market in June is often very quiet, normally because a lot of people are enjoying some holiday time after a hectic season.

From Hearts' point of view however, it shows that those in the recruitment department and manager Robbie Neilson have a clear vision of the types of players they want to bring to Tynecastle.

The Hearts boss said this time last year, that he wanted to bring down the average age of the squad, so it is no surprise

to see the summer signings with the exception of Grant (28) are all 25 or younger. The key to this is that Hearts hope they can develop these types of players and then potentially sell them on for a fee.

At a Foundation of Hearts open meeting in April, sporting director Joe Savage acknowledged that Hearts are a selling club, so it is important to recruit shrewdly. So far so good on that front.

Hearts have an edge on the likes of Hibernian and Aberdeen this year in terms of what they can offer a player and that is the carrot of European football.

The Jambos are guaranteed at least eight European matches in either the Europa League or the Europa Conference League.

For Hearts, next season is all about trying to compete in Europe but also consolidate their position domestically in order to continue progressing as a club.

That is not going to be easy. To do this, Hearts will need to have a bigger squad, therefore it is perhaps no surprise to see the Tynecastle side active early on in the window.

With five signings already made, attention now turns to the rumoured sixth. The priority for Hearts now is a striker, and one forward who has been linked is Lawrence Shankland. The 26-year-old ticks a lot of boxes. He has already worked under manager Robbie Neilson, and he knows the Scottish Premiership having played with Dundee United prior to his move to Belgian side Beerschot in August 2021.

The asking price of £500,000 is something Hearts are not expected to cough up, but all parties appear to be keen on the move, so it is a transfer to keep an eye on.

If Hearts can secure the services of the striker it would send out a message of intent to the rest of the league because

above all else there is no doubting Shankland's ability in front of goal.