

# Kivilahti expected back for Flyers this weekend

Janne Kivilahti, Fife's third top points scorer with 23 (16 goals and seven assists), should be back in Flyers squad when Coventry Blaze come to Kirkcaldy on Saturday.

Jeff Hutchins, Flyers' associate coach, said the 30-year-old, Finnish-born winger (picture courtesy of Fife Flyers and taken by *Derek Young*), did not feel great on Saturday but played against Glasgow Clan and he felt awful after the game.

He added: "We decided to leave him out for Sunday but the expectation is that he will be back on Saturday." Hutchins said that the player, who has also iced for Coventry, is not leaving the club, knocking speculation on social media.

Glenrothes-born winger James Spence is not expected to ice this weekend because of injury and Flyers have two crucial games in the Viaplay Elite League. The Kirkcaldy club host Coventry on Saturday (19.15) and make the short trip to Dundee Stars on Sunday (17.00) and they are desperate for points in a bid to move off the bottom of the ten-strong table.

Hutchins told a mid-week press briefing that Flyers have set a target of points for the next six games, a target which has not been revealed but which the Lothians-based coach believes is achievable.

And the former Dundee Stars player/coach revealed that the players in the dressing-room are confident they can move up the table.

Hutchins argued that Fife, sponsored by Wolseley, are only one point out of ninth position held by Glasgow Clan, who host Nottingham Panthers on Friday (face-off 19.30), and two points adrift of Dundee Stars who occupy the eighth and final play off spot.

Seventh-placed Manchester Storm are five points ahead but have only iced in 32 matches. Fife have played 34, Clan 36 and Dundee 34.

Coventry are fifth with 43 points from 33 outings and Hutchins said that there are currently two leagues, with Blaze the half-way markers and he reminded success-hungry fans that Fife only lost to the Midlands club on penalty shots last Sunday and Coventry, he added, have been in and around the top five all season.

And the former Great Britain international pointed out that Fife have battled well against some of the heavyweights in the league this term, Sheffield Steelers and Belfast Giants and have a decent record against sixth-placed Nottingham Panthers.

Canadian-born Hutchins admitted that goal scoring is a concern. Fife have netted on 79 occasions so far, that's the worst total in the division with Stars on 84 goals and Glasgow on 87 with Storm having celebrated scoring on 99 occasions.

However, defensively, Fife's numbers are good having only conceded 123 goals, against 134 by Clan and 150 by Stars, the worst total in the table, and 131 by Storm.

The playcaller said he understands that fans will look at the table and be concerned about their club's position, but he said that the players believe in what they are doing and their ability to get results in what is left of the regular season.

Mistakes are, he said, a concern, and captain Jonas Emmerdahl pointed that out in his post-match summary after the home defeat by Clan last Saturday, but Hutchins said the picture would have been different had Fife won the shootout at home to Clan last Saturday and again at Coventry on Sunday.

The club earned two points instead of four, but the entertainment and compete level value on Saturday with a tight game, sudden-death overtime and penalty shots, and again on Sunday, was positive for general ice hockey fans.

Hutchins said Canadian left-wing Kameron Nault was not given his debut against Clan, despite warming-up on the ice, because he had not skated for three weeks prior to the game and that would have heaped pressure on the newcomer.

He underlined that Nault had to return to North America because of red tape to collect his visa but the forward played at Coventry and Hutchins said: "Nault is out of shape but I thought he did well (at Coventry). We had a long discussion about Saturday but thought it best he made his debut away from home."

Both Fife and 27-year-old Nault want to make a good impression on home fans and the former East Coast and American Hockey League player is expected to be named in the squad on Saturday.

---