

Hill aiming high in his football career

James Hill has a vision. The ambitious, on-loan defender desperately wants to play for England and the articulate player strongly believes Hearts are an ideal stepping stone towards that goal.

The 21-year-old – he signed for Hearts on his 21st birthday, spending the night in his hotel room instead of celebrating with his family and friends, confessed to loving life in Edinburgh.

And the Bristol-born rising star told a media briefing at The Oriam that he has been on a number of walks with his dogs, exploring Scotland's capital city.

The England under-20 (four games, one goal) and under-21 (one appearance) international admitted: "It's a nice place to be. The team around me have been amazing and they have welcomed me in and it has been really easy for me to settle in and to try and produce my best on the football pitch.

"You need to add different parts to my game and obviously getting more of this experience, playing against top teams like Rangers and Celtic, they are the teams we are trying to compete against, and being able to get that experience can hopefully benefit me when I go back to Bournemouth."

Hill, son of ex-professional footballer, Matt Hill, now a manager, said he had been impressed by the quality of players in the cinch Premiership and he has also been surprised at the speed of the game north of the Border.

The transition between attack and defence, he said, happens really quickly and you have got to switch on all the time. Hill added: "You can't switch off as it can be one ball and they are in.

"When that ball goes over the top you have players who can stick it in the back of the net. It is important to stay focused all the time."

Hill (pictured during the press conference *by Nigel Duncan*), who made his senior debut for Fleetwood Town, now managed by former Celtic and Scotland midfielder, Scott Brown, against Leicester City in 2018 in the EFL Cup aged 16.

And he made his first league start against his father's former club, Blackpool. He said: "I am on loan from Bournemouth and if I want to step into that team and play at the top level against Manchester United or Manchester City in front of 80,000 people and hopefully, one day play for my country, I have to deal with the big crowds.

"This is a great stepping-stone for me. At Fleetwood Town it was introducing men's football to me. My first league start was against Blackpool and they got all their fans back in (after a protest against the owners) and I had to deal with the pressure of the crowd then. Getting more of this can benefit me in the future and help me get more composed on the ball."

Hill, who joined Bournemouth in early January 2022, said to be a club record for Fleetwood and estimated at £1m, admitted: "I am going to make mistakes, I am still young. The night before I get goose bumps because I want to do so well and give my everything and you expect nothing less from a

Hearts team. Every single one of us gives everything.”

Playing in the Premiership, he said, remains a dream and when he returns to Bournemouth he wants to go in to see the manager and say: “Look, I am here, I want an opportunity and i won’t let you down.

“The gaffer here (Robbie Neilson) believes in me and he believes I can play in his team and we are doing really well. We want to keep this going and this is the moment I need to keep the momentum going and keep the consistency and I then I will have a fighting chance of saying: ‘Look at me.’”