

Naismith pride at stepping into interim role

Steven Naismith described taking over from Robbie Neilson as a fantastic opportunity and he declared: "I feel that I'm well-equipped for the upcoming couple of months."

The biggest thing the former Scotland international striker has learned since joining Hearts is that the fans demand and they want attacking football.

Irvine-born Naismith (pictured) told Hearts TV in his first interview in the job: "The supporters) want a team that goes into every game trying to win it. Not one that's going to defend and hold out for a draw or a 1-0 lead.

"I was like that as a player. I wanted to be on the front foot and enjoyed having the ball and creating opportunities. I want to play entertaining football. That's easy to say and harder to implement."

The 36-year-old, who retired from playing in 2021, added: "I'm not naïve enough to think that this is going to be easy, but I want us to be a team that takes games by the scruff of the neck."

His first taste of being in charge in the dugout comes on Saturday when the Tynecastle team visit arch rivals Hibs and the new boss believes it is a fantastic game to start with.

The former Kilmarnock, Rangers, Everton and Norwich City forward added: "The response we've had from the squad has been really good. It's been a long couple of days but there's still a lot more work to go into this. The change around the training set-up, the preparations for the game, the enthusiasm to learn. They've shown a real willingness to work hard.

“This is the best Hearts team that I’ve been involved with. A lot of the players know me personally from my time as a player, which helps. They understand my character, what I do.

“We’ve had two really good days of training. We’re working on the dos and don’ts to start with, and then we’ll progress from there.”

Of course, during the last two years Naismith, who was capped on 51 occasions by Scotland and has also played for Scotland under-21 and the Scotland B team, has worked with the club’s young players and he said: “We’ve got to give these guys an opportunity to play in the first team.

“The focus is first on the game on Saturday and then the six games after that. We need to get back to enjoying it, back to playing good football and back to getting points on the board.”

Robert Snodgrass is nearing the end of his career and Naismith revealed that the former Scotland international is probably not going to get many minutes.

He added: “Snoddy’s family are still down south and the best outcome for everybody would be that he gets time to spend with his family and I focus on a group that’s going to go forward.”

Naismith has good relationships with his coaching team of Frankie McAvoy and Gordon Forrest and he knows McAvoy knows Frankie well as was assistant manager during the interim manager’s spell at Norwich City.

He added: “Gordon and I are very similar in loads of aspects. Preparation, training, set-up, and delivery. How we want the game to be played. Gordy’s got a real enthusiasm for the game and I’m learning from him. It’s a very good combination for us

all and we'll do all we can."

And Naismith said the fans are demanding but that can't be seen as a negative. He added: "It took me time when I first joined Hearts on loan to hit my stride, but when I did, I reaped the rewards. The backing they gave me meant my performances just got better and better.

"It got me back in the national set-up, so I've got a lot to thank them for. All I want is for them to give us everything. Hopefully, over time we'll give them as much back.

"We all need to be one, pulling in the same direction, and we all need to know that everyone wants what's best for the club."