

# St Johnstone our full focus, McAvoy

Hearts fans may have their eye on European football next week, when the club travel to Norway to face Rosenborg BK in the first-leg of the third qualifying round of the UEFA Europa Conference League, but the full focus of the players is on earning a road win at struggling St Johnstone in the cinch Premiership on Saturday.

That's the word from head coach Frankie McAvoy (pictured by *Nigel Duncan*) who told the pre-match media briefing at The Orium that Beni Banningime and Liam Boyce are both in contention for a place in the side which travels to Perth (kick-off 3pm) in the cinch Premiership.

And he confirmed: "I make the final decision."

McAvoy said he was looking forward to the games week by week and the start of the competitive season. He added: "We have had five or six weeks of pre-season and the work starts tomorrow (Saturday)."

The 56-year-old also addressed the much-discussed partnership of himself, technical director, Steven Naismith, and first team coach Gordon Forrest, and said: "The club announced this

a few months ago and we work closely together.

“If we go through the team selection, if there is a bit of a disagreement and difference of opinion, I make that final decision. It is as simple as that. We worked really well together last season and we are happy with how we did it, and it will continue as it has done this week.

“We prepare as best we can for tomorrow (Saturday) and we concentrate on that. The most important thing for us is to look forward to the matches and that starts tomorrow (Saturday) at St Johnstone.

“We work together as a team, Naisie, myself, Gordon and Paul Gallagher (the goalkeeping coach) and we do what we feel is the best system ahead of the game tomorrow and we are ready to go.”

Bellshill-born McAvoy, a former head coach at English side, Preston North End, added: “The guys in the dressing-room, they are the most important people and they understand exactly the message that we are trying to put across. They know exactly how we are doing it at the club and I am part of the team and I will decide who is in the starting XI and who is on the bench.”

McAvoy, who joined the Jambos as Academy Director in February 2002, said it had possibly taken longer than anticipated to get players through the door but it is a process. Hearts, he said, worked in the background looking at the character of the players then want.”

That included doing their homework on 24-year-old Japanese striker Kyosuke Tagawa, signed on Thursday for an undisclosed fee from FC Tokyo, and McAvoy added; “We are delighted that we have been able to get him through the door.

“We await international clearance as regards tomorrow (Saturday) but he is an exciting prospect and one who we are

looking forward to seeing in action.”

The club hope to get word on another new recruit early next week and he added: “This is another exciting prospect. He can get in behind defenses and we are happy with the business we have done.”

He admitted that last season’s fourth place finish was disappointing but added: “We are trying to get European football next season. That’s the biggest and most important thing.”