

# **Shankland is a contender for Tuesday's match against Dundee**

**Lawrence Shankland, the leading scorer in the Scottish Premiership, missed Saturday's Scottish Cup win over Capital club The Spartans through illness, but the Scottish international is in contention for a place against Dundee in the cinch Premiership at Tynecastle on Tuesday (kick-off 7.45pm).**

Steven Naismith, Hearts' head coach, confirmed at the pre-match media briefing that Shankland, who has been the subject of much media speculation about his future, trained on Monday and will be in the squad.

Dundee were knocked out of the Scottish Cup by Kilmarnock at the weekend and the inclusion of Shankland is a boost as the Jambos look to consolidate third place in the 12-strong division.

Naismith told reporters that the striker has leadership skills and is "probably playing the best football of his life".

Shankland has claimed 13 goals so far this term in the league and has been acting captain of the club since Craig Gordon suffered a double leg break over 12 months ago.

The 41-year-old stopper made his return to the top team in the 2-1 win at Spartans and pulled off a tremendous full-length save during the match to deny the Ainslie Park club.

The coach declined to confirm if Scotland international Zander Clark, who has played while Gordon as been recovering, will be back for the game.

He revealed that the Tynecastle team are in talks to sign former Dundee United midfielder Scott Fraser from London-based League One club Charlton Athletic who are currently 16th in the 24-strong table.

The 28-year-old, who has also played for Ipswich Town, Milton Keynes Dons, Burton Albion and Dundee United, as well as Airdrie, could be available for the Dundee game if the paperwork is cleared in time.

Looking back, the Jambos have beaten Dundee twice in the last five meetings between the clubs but the Dens Park men also have two wins to their credit. The other game was drawn.

Currently, the Tayside team are seventh in the table with 22 points from 18 games. They have scored 22 goals and conceded 28 and have two draws and a win plus two defeats on their record in the last five games.

Hearts are third in the table with 36 points from 21 fixtures and have scored 24 goals and let in 18. They are unbeaten in their last five games, winning four and drawing one. That was against Ross County at Tynecastle on Saturday, December 30 when they came from 2-0 behind to draw 2-2, Kenneth Vargas and Shankland netting two goals in eight minutes deep into the game.

Their only other league outing since then was the hard-earned 2-1 victory at bottom club Livingston on January 2 when the same two players, Vargas after 53 minutes and Shankland after 64 minutes, put them 2-0 ahead only for Andrew Shinnie to net

from the penalty spot with 11 minutes of regular time remaining.

