

Guessing game over Salazar debut for Hearts

It's no surprise at Hearts' head coach Steven Naismith predicts a tough game at Falkirk in the Premier Sports Cup and he declared that his latest signing, Columbian defender Andres Salazar is fit. The question is, will he play.

That will be answered minutes ahead of the 3pm kick-off time, and Frankie Kent is sidelined due to a toe injury, but Naismith is excited by what he has seen of the player on the training pitches at Riccarton.

The 21-year-old, who has arrived on a loan deal from Atletico Nacional, is, according to the coach, "quality" and he said: "He is not one that is going to need to be built up, he is ready to play, and I will expect him to contribute in the coming weeks, for sure.

"He is a really good guy to get signed and in the building and, from the small amount of time we have seen him on the pitch, you can see he is quality. I am excited to work with him."

Moving on, Naismith admitted that the defeat at Dens Park to Dundee was disappointing and, from looking back on it, he said he got some things wrong but added: "The energy levels and the intensity was the bit that I was putting on the players and that has not changed.

“This weekend, with it being a different competition. Last season we got to two semi-finals and you want to see us taking the steps to give us a chance of getting back to at least that stage. It will be a tough game.”

The pressure intensifies now that Europe looms, bringing with it two games every week, Thursday and Sunday, and the coach said: “We have changed the squad and I do not think the squad is that much bigger. The competition for places is much stronger, I believe, and there will be times we will change the team.

“One of my biggest experiences from the intense schedule as a player was that you only need to be five or ten per cent down from your maximum and that is enough to impact the game, and we will take that into consideration, but we expect them to go into every game to put on a performance to get the result we want.”

PICTURE: Steven Naismith at the pre-match press briefing at The Oriam by *Nigel Duncan*