

McKinlay 'concerned' at Hearts league position

Andrew McKinlay, Hearts' chief executive officer, admitted that the club's position in the William Hill Premiership is 'concerning', but he firmly believes the Jambos will start to climb the table.

The Tynecastle team, who finished a strong third last season, currently prop up the rest in the 12-strong division with ten points from 15 games, two behind Hibs and three adrift of fellow-strugglers, Kilmarnock and St Johnstone.

Speaking after the annual general meeting, McKinlay said that the way the fixtures have fallen hasn't been kind to the club and Hearts' new head coach, Neil Critchley, went straight into an intense run of games.

Looking ahead, McKinlay added that Hearts now go into seven games, four at home, three away, which takes the Capital combine up to the end of the second round of fixtures. He stressed: "We need to do well in those fixtures."

Scoring goals has proved difficult this term with skipper Lawrence Shankland misfiring after two prolific seasons and McKinlay acknowledged that a lot of fans felt Hearts should have signed a striker during the summer.

The forward player recruited was 23-year-old, Spanish-born, Musa Drammeh, and McKinlay said: "Musa, it's fair to say, has taken a little bit of time to settle, but I am now quite

excited by what I'm starting to see."

The January transfer window is not far away and McKinlay confirmed that Hearts are looking at options with the aid of analytics to recruit a goal grabber. He said: "We're all aware that the priority would be a striker.

"We forget as well, hopefully we'll see him soon, we've got Calem Nieuwenhof coming back who will help in the midfield."

Sunday's injuries to defenders Stephen Kingsley, he was carried off with hamstringing issues against Aberdeen, and Frankie Kent (pictured by **Nigel Duncan**), who hobbled off with a quad muscle problem, have caused McKinlay concern, but he said: "You just never know what's going to come.

"The striker is the priority. January tends to become a bit of an ebb and flow. It depends on markets, because different countries have different seasons and some people's contracts actually might be out.

"January is never an easy time to do business. Good players are not generally available in January but finances are available. There is a particular striker we're looking at, but not just one.

"Often you don't get your first choice. Other positions and other things that we do, I think, might depend on what might go out."

He was asked about a possible investment from Brighton owner Tony Bloom and McKinlay said: "Again, all I can really say about Tony Bloom is that he has expressed an interest in investing.

"He has said he would like to take a minority stake in the club and we have on-going discussions about that. Obviously it's quite complex."