

Boyce close to move as Hearts prepare for Aberdeen trip

Laim Boyce, who has returned to the Hearts starting squad in recent games, is in talks to leave Hearts, with reports indicating that a move to Derry City for the 33-year-old forward is imminent.

Neil Critchley, Hearts' head coach, revealed he expects the move to be completed and told a news briefing that the move was something Boyce, who joined the Tynecastle club from Burton Albion five years ago, wanted to do for his family.

The experienced player has, recently, dovetailed well with 17-year-old striker, James Wilson.

There is no news, however, on Aussie defender Kye Rowles who has been linked with a move to DC United. The 26-year-old, who made his 100th appearance for the Gorgie side in the Capital Derby with Hibs on Boxing Day, has, said Critchley, been a great servant to the club and he added: "We don't want him to go."

However, the Englishman refused to discuss speculation regarding a move for another Aussie, midfielder Cammy Devlin.

However, Critchley argued that it is not possible to secure all the players he wants in one transfer window.

Belgian-born newcomer, Elton Kabangu, is, however, in the squad to face Aberdeen on Sunday at Pittodire (15.00) after

his work permit was secured and the coach cautioned fans over too much optimism following Aberdeen's recent loss of form.

The Dons started the season in blistering style but have slipped up in recent weeks and have now gone ten games without a win. They have lost five in a row.

This fixture is considered by some as the game of the weekend with Aberdeen in fourth spot with 34 points from 21 games. They have won ten games, drawn four and lost seven, scoring 32 goals and conceding 30.

Hearts are second-bottom with 23 points from 22 starts having won six games, drawing five and losing 11. They have scored 25 goals and let in 31 but have secured back-to-back wins over Motherwell (1-0) and Dundee United (1-0).

The last time the Jambos met Aberdeen in the North-East was in October when The Dons were flying high in the William Hill Premiership, but they have now slipped to fourth. Frankie Kent and Blair Spittal (picture in training by **Nigel Duncan**) put the visitors 2-1 ahead after 63 minutes but Scottish international Nicky Devlin hit back with a strike after 65 to level and Ante Palaversa netted with two minutes left of normal time.

Jimmy Thelin, Aberdeen's manager, conceded in post-match interviews, following the 2-0 defeat at Motherwell, that his men have "problems to solve", but statistics reveal that Aberdeen have not lost to Hearts in the Granite City since May 2017.

His side has been bolstered by the addition of Kristers Tobers from Swiss Super League combine, Grasshoppers Club Zurich, on a three-year-plus deal, and Jeppe Okkels on loan from English side, Preston North End, but Gavin Molloy and Ester Sokler have long-term injuries.