

Steinwender says he is 'ready' for action

Newcomer Michael Steinwender and long-term injury Calem Nieuwenhof are in contention for a place in Hearts' squad for the tricky trip to Dundee in the William Hill Premiership on Saturday (kick-off 3pm).

Austrian-born defender Steinwender, who has been playing in Sweden, was the player put forward for the pre-match briefing with the media at The Oriam on Friday.

He has not played a competitive game since November before the winter shut-down in Sweden but has been working on his fitness level for the last two weeks. The player says he is ready for action and keen to play his part in helping Hearts move up the table.

Hearts' boss has a decision to make. Lewis Neilson came off the substitutes bench against Kilmarnock after Craig Halkett suffered a hamstring injury in the early part of the narrow win over Kilmarnock.

The 21-year-old, recently recalled from a loan spell with Premiership rivals, St Johnstone, is keen to cement his place in the squad, but 24-year-old Steinwender, signed from IFK Varnamo, could get the nod for the Dundee game if the coaching staff feel he is ready.

Nieuwenhof, who has been sidelined since his last appearance for the Men in Maroon last March against Celtic, played in a closed-doors match last week and has been closely monitored by the club's medical staff as he has upped the tempo of his training.

Neil Critchley, the club's Head coach, would not be drawn on whether the two will play a part in what will be a difficult fixture against a side which qualified for the fifth round of the Scottish Gas Scottish Cup with a 1-0 victory over Tayside rivals Dundee United.

And Tony Docherty's men, who are eighth in the 12-strong table, held long-time league pace-setters, Celtic, in a 3-3 thriller in a William Hill Scottish Premiership clash at Dens Park in mid-January. They have also recruited some fresh blood during the January window. So have the Jambos and Critchley is happy with the acquisitions made so far.

He acknowledged that Dundee have found some form recently, winning two and drawing another two of their last five games, but Critchley argued that Hearts have also found form and are unbeaten since the New Year.

Currently, Hearts are ninth in the table but the boss admitted that the club have left some points out on the pitch in recent weeks. He added: "We could be higher in the table."

English-born Critchley conceded: "We know we are in for a really tough game (at Dundee)."

There was no fresh news on the transfer front with the shutdown deadline set for Monday pm, but Critchley said the Tynecastle club are still working behind the scenes and added: "If we can strengthen then we will, but there is nothing imminent right now."



IN CONTENTION: Calem Nieuwenhof after nearly 11 months on the sidelines. Picture ***Nigel Duncan***

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