

Kuqi not concerned about Paataleinan comparison



Shefki Kuqi has only been in Edinburgh for one week, but already he has been reminded about the antics of another robust Finnish centre forward who graced the Easter Road turf, and in particular a certain game in October 2000.

Speaking at the weekly press conference, the man of many clubs also eased the minds of supporters who worried that the club had signed yet another journeyman pro who was merely looking for a final pay day, when he revealed that he almost arrived north of the border five years ago when Gordon Strachan tried to sign him from Blackburn.

He said:- “I’ve heard lots of things from people inside the club and people I have met about Mixu obviously. Everybody mentions to me the hat trick he scored against Hearts, but listen, I am who I am. I just want to be myself and do my best for the team and whoever has done something before and after me. If things go the way I want them to go, I feel I’ll have good fun with the Hibs fans here.

“I am looking forward to the challenge and I’ve been involved in the first game away and the game I watched here against Hearts the fans are pretty good and noisy.

“Let’s hope we have success as a team and the fans get back to the stadium because I’ve heard they had bad feelings last season. I think as a player you want to perform as good as you can and get the fans home happy on Saturday afternoon.”

The former Blackburn Newcastle and Oldham player also hit back at suggestions that he changed clubs for financial reasons and insisted that there was more behind his thinking than money.

He continued: "I've been down in England for so many years and played at almost every level down there. I played in League one last season and when Hibs came along this season I kind of wanted to have a test of Scottish football as well. It was something that interested me.

"It's sad to see clubs like Rangers who are one of the biggest clubs in Europe, but at the end of the day, that's football and if you don't take care of other things off the pitch it can happen but it's good news for other clubs like Hibs, Hearts and Dundee. It kind of opens the door for them.

"In my opinion it levels it up, and every footballers dream is to play in Europe, either the Champions League or Europa League or whatever and that gives them a chance.

"I had a decent career down in England but the reason I was at so many clubs in England is that I was not happy to be on the bench and get paid and not care what's going on. For me the team mean a lot,

"As everyone knows football is a very short career or you can make it as long as you want. For me it's been a case of I want to play football. There's nothing better. You train all week and get ready for Saturday."

For weeks, Hibs fans have been desperate to see a new centre forward at Easter Road, and manager Pat Fenlon has been searching, not only for the right type of player, but also for the right type of character who can help his young stars. Kuqi fits the bill for both requirements.

"I'm here first and foremost to do a job and if I do that job well, everything else will come behind but I've been fortunate to play for some big clubs and with some good players and I have that experience so hopefully I will be able to help the rest of the team and especially the forwards. There are some good young players and with a little bit help I think they can have a good future.

“Leigh (Griffiths) is very lively and has a good left foot and every time he has the ball something happens. He’s done very well and as a centre forward you need a goal and that gives you confidence.

“The dressing room is pretty good. We have some good young players and also some older players. The spirit in the dressing room is pretty good and that helps everybody. As I said if first and foremost I have to do my own job but if anybody needs help or advice I will be there.”

Hibs play St Johnstone on Saturday, and the following week they go to Parkhead to play champions Celtic, but Kuqi is looking no further forward than this weekend’s fixture, even though he had the chance to sign for the Glasgow giants.

“When I was at Blackburn there was interest from Celtic, but Blackburn wouldn’t let me go so that was the end of it. Gordon Strachan was interested but after that he signed Jan Vennegoor of Hesselink. We have to look at Saturday and get a result before we think of Celtic.”



Although the giant Kosovan born striker has only been at the club for eight days, boss Pat Fenlon has already been impressed by his professionalism on and off the pitch. He said: ““From a playing point of view we know what Shefki is capable of, doing, but obviously training wise he needs a little bit more. He’s been great since he’s come in. He hasn’t played a lot but he’s been helpful. He’s talked to the younger players and helped them out. He’s exactly what we wanted. We wanted the right type of character in the club and we felt that we didn’t have that last season. It’s important that as well as getting decent players we get the right types into the club which will help develop the younger players as well.

“It’s important that the young players learn their trade by looking at good professionals. Shefki is more than a good

professional. He's obviously played at a massive level. With James, (McPake) Tim, (Clancy) Ben, (Williams) Alan Maybury and (Gary) Deegan coming in, they are all experienced players, and good players in their own right. They are also very good professionals. Again Shefki adds to that as well.

Despite the praise for Kuqi, Fenlon insists that none of his forwards are guaranteed a starting place in the team. He continued:- "Shefki knows that as a senior player. Obviously he's here to play; he's not here to sit on the bench which is good because we got a reaction from Doyler last week. He knows he has to step up, but competition is healthy.

"I was excited last week with Doyler and Leigh, but Shefki has come in. It's not set in stone that people will play, but we felt he could give us something different. If we want to change the way we want to play we have to get different players in. I think we have that. We have Doyler, who likes to play a little bit higher and off the shoulder, and Leigh is a little bit similar. Shefki can hold the ball up for us and Danny is probably a bit different and can drop in and Roscoe is different again. It's a good combination we have with the five of them. The two young boys will get an opportunity over the season."

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