

Fenlon and Caldwell praise the unseen contribution of Shefki Kuqi



Hibs boss Pat Fenlon and teenage striker Ross Caldwell have both praised the off field contribution of giant Finnish striker Shefki Kuqi, ahead of Saturday's top of the table clash with on-form Inverness Caledonian Thistle.

Ironically, Kuqi's assistance and advice to Caldwell and youngster Danny Handling behind the scenes on the training ground has contributed to him dropping down the pecking order at Easter Road, and with the SPL's top goal scorer, Leigh Griffiths, a major doubt following an ankle injury sustained in last weekend's derby victory, it is Caldwell who is the favourite to start.

The former Blackburn Rovers and Newcastle United striker arrived at Easter Road in August having been released from Oldham, and great things were expected from him by the fans, due to his experience of playing at the highest level.

At the time Kuqi insisted that he joined Hibs for the prospect of regular first team football, but the form of Leigh Griffiths and Eoin Doyle has limited his chances. Despite that, he has continued to train hard and pass on his experience to the promising youngsters at the club.

Speaking at the weekly press conference, Ross Caldwell was quick to pay tribute to the Finnish international, saying:- "You learn a lot from everybody. Shefki is really experienced and he's probably helped me most off the pitch and on the pitch as well. He does a lot off it that the fans don't get to see, but you take a wee bit from everybody's games.

"We play wee games in training and he shows you how to get your body in and how to hold the ball better. It's all the little things. He takes me and Danny (Handling) aside as we are the youngest. He's a really friendly guy. He takes you aside and doesn't criticise you. He's just trying to help you out."

His comments were echoed by Pat Fenlon who said: "In fairness to Shefki, it's been difficult for him as we haven't played him a lot. He's a senior player and he wants to play, and I understand that, and he's disappointed at that but I have to add that he's been first class around the place.

"His attitude and his application to training and to the younger players have been second to none. I've never seen a senior player take the younger players under his wing as much as Shefki. He's been different class.

"He knows that he's got a lot to offer the younger players as well, and that's maybe the road that he going to go down eventually, but I have to say that you could get some senior players who haven't had a lot of games like he hasn't and they would not be interested, but he's been really helpful with them. The likes of Danny Sammy (Stanton) and Ross see him as a kind of a father figure. The reason Shefki is still playing at the level he is, is due to how he has looked after himself over the years, and prepared for games and looked after himself.

Inverness are currently on a high and the Highlanders did a clean sweep of awards with Terry Butcher receiving manager of the month, Billy McKay winning player of the month and Irish midfielder Aaron Doran winning young player of the month. The awards follow Cally's 3-0 League Cup win over Rangers at Ibrox and the 1-0 victory over Celtic at Parkhead.

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