

Maurice Malpas happy with Hibs' progress so far



Hibs' assistant manager Maurice Malpas admits that he was pleasantly surprised by the fitness levels of the players he inherited at Easter Road following his move from Inverness Caledonian Thistle five weeks ago. After watching his Caley side easily beat his new charges at Easter Road, he could have been forgiven for thinking that the Easter Road players were lacking fitness compared to the highlanders, but that turned out to be wrong.

Speaking at the weekly press conference, Malpas insisted: "There is no problem with fitness. The Hibs lads are fit but the way they were asked to play made it look as though they weren't."

The former Scotland international full back also claimed that observers who suggest that Hibs have become a team who punt the ball forward at every opportunity are mistaken. He continued: "We're looking to get the ball forward quicker and a lot of people are saying we're back to front. I've never played in, or been involved in, a back-to-front team. I have never asked a team to play back to front. We want to get the ball forward quicker and get in the last third and see what happens. That's where you earn your corn, in the last third of the pitch.

"There's nothing more frustrating for a striker if the ball doesn't come into the box. We're trying to drum that into them. It's maybe different to what Pat did, but that's our philosophy. We want to get the ball into the box. If you do that you score goals. If you score goals, you win games."

Malpas will take charge of the team against St Johnstone on

Saturday as Terry Butcher is banned from the dugout and tunnel area for an hour before that game, but he is adamant that the players' preparation will not be affected.

"It will make no difference at all. That last time I was in the other dugout, I was by myself as well. It's a common occurrence. Terry sometimes sits in the stand anyway, and it's not the first time he's been banned. We just get on with it. We know what we want to happen on the pitch. We work together closely, so it's not the case that I'll be worrying that I have to change anything.

"I'm sure we'll have communication between us. One time we tried phones and someone's mum phoned. The last time we tried walkie-talkies and I couldn't hear him because he was shouting.

"The best thing we did in the past was we had a young kid at Inverness who ran up and down the stairs and he said that was harder than a day's pre-season. I tend to do all right when I'm on my own."

This will be the pair's fourth game in charge, having drawn with St Mirren and Partick Thistle and beaten Ross County before last week's narrow defeat to high flying Celtic at Parkhead and Malpas is happy with the progress to date: "We're pleased with how things are going. We have improved in every game. Last Saturday against Celtic, when everybody thought we were going to get smashed because that was what they did the two previous games, if we had had a bit of belief or our shooting boots had been on, we may have got a goal or two. We have to keep battling away, getting the ball in the box. Against Partick we had a few chances: we had loads of balls in the box but it didn't fall to us. We'll keep on encouraging the players to do that, and goals will come, that's a certainty."

Photo by John Preece

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