

# Kevin Nisbet pays emotional tribute to father who passed away last week

Hibs' striker Kevin Nisbet has paid an emotional tribute to his father Thomas who sadly passed away last Wednesday having been diagnosed with terminal liver cancer towards the end of Scotland's lockdown period.

A hero and mentor to a son who cherished his support – in good times and bad – Kevin honoured his Dad's last request for him to put his sorrow to one side and take his place in Saturday's Scottish Cup semi-final.



PHOTO Alan Rennie

Kevin explained: "We'd known about Dad's condition for, maybe, the last three months, before I signed for Hibs.

"Terminal liver cancer. The words hit you. Unfortunately, his health deteriorated in the last week. It all happened very quickly. We hoped we'd have had another couple of weeks with him, but it wasn't to be.

"I had to leave training quickly on Tuesday to be at his side. There are all the obvious precautions for everyone just now and, like a lot people, I've had to say goodbye to a loved one in difficult circumstances. It's been a tough time for so many people.

"I'd been visiting him in the garden for the last wee while,

at his insistence. More than anyone he was making sure I was following all the proper protocols.

“I’m grateful for that time we had but it has been hard.

“Dad’s been the driving force behind how I’ve been playing in the last few months. Not just because he’s my hero and I wanted to do it for him, but because he’s always believed in me. Ever since I first kicked a ball.

“Dad was one of those ‘football Dads’, in terms of giving up his time to drive me about from an early age.

“When I had a couple of setbacks earlier in my career and things weren’t going to plan, he never lost faith in me. He never stopped encouraging me.

“He wasn’t one of those pushy types trying to live their dreams through their kid. He just wanted me to be happy and make the most of myself.

“In the last few months it hasn’t been easy in terms of worrying about him and juggling that with football, but he was adamant that I – as best as I could – stayed single-minded when I was at training and playing games.

“Anything I do now will be for him.”

Thomas played a big part in Kevin’s decision to opt for Hibs over alternative offers north and south of the border – offering guidance whenever his opinion was sought out.

Kevin added: “Dad was adamant that I should come here. It was in my head to do the same, but he really was set on it. He was convinced this was the best place for me to come at this point in my career.

“It’s worked out that way and I like to think I made him proud.

“With the way I’ve started the season, and the way the team has been playing, I think it’s helped keep him going and been a welcome distraction. Every week he’s looked forward to the games and watching me play. He loved to see me score.”

The club and dressing room have rallied round Kevin since he broke the news in the players’ WhatsApp chat.

Others have been a quiet source of support along the way.

He said: “At the start, I didn’t tell anyone. I wanted to come to Hibs and be myself, at least initially.

“I let the gaffer and Potts know. They’ve been so good with me. Beyond that, with so few people knowing, I had the breathing space to come in, work hard and escape from all of it for a few hours every day.

“The gaffer and Potts were always saying that I could take time off, but I’ve not missed a session or a game. This was somewhere I could come in and feel comfortable.

“Again, the gaffer said I didn’t have to play on Saturday, but it was something I’d actually discussed with Dad before he passed away.

“He told me that he wanted me to play and that he thought I should play, whatever happened. I would probably have done the same, but it made it a lot easier hearing him say that.

“I like to think I played my normal game. The penalty miss was a real disappointment, but my own situation had no bearing on that.

“Better players than me have missed penalties in the biggest games, and I could just as easily have hit the bar if I was playing without a care in the world. I wouldn’t stand for anyone trying to make any excuses for me.

“My reason for speaking out was to thank people who have

offered their support, to me and my family in the last week.”

Kevin has the love and backing of his Mum, Karen, and siblings Thomas and Emma, in addition to an extended family at the Hibernian Training Centre.

He said: “It’s hard to lose my Dad at such a young age but these things happen. I’m no different to anyone else.

“Darren McGregor has been there for me. He lost his own Dad at a young age and knows exactly how I feel and how to juggle that with football. I have to thank Darren and the rest of the lads because they’ve all been great with me. The same for the gaffer and Potts.

“My Dad meant the world to me. It gives me comfort knowing he was watching the games every week in hospital and that it put a smile on his face.

“I’m sure he must have been kicking every ball from the bed and the nurses must have been sick of him.

“But that’s who he was. Someone who always wanted the best for me and who was always there when I needed him.

“Anything I do from here on in will be for him.”