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Gary Caldwell: aiming for top with Hibs.
Picture: Kenny Smith

Caldwell reaps the rewards of Thai therapy

RICHARD MOORE

MEMORIES of the first Edinburgh derby of the season remain painful for Hibernian supporters, but the pain was real for Gary Caldwell, who still winces in recalling the 26th minute collision with his own goalkeeper, Zbigniew Malkowski, which left him feeling like he'd been stabbed in the chest.

"I saw the ball coming over my head, and I knew the goalie would be coming," recalled the club captain as he looked ahead to today's derby.

Caldwell was clattered by his Malkowski and instantly felt "whatever it was in my ribs". For the first minute he found breathing difficult. He left the pitch then, remarkably, returned, only to depart again when he "felt something moving around in my chest." That was the two broken ribs; the punctured lung was diagnosed later.

In the hospital, as he lay in bed, Caldwell was told that his team was 3-0 down and, in the time it took him to move wards, Hearts scored another to complete the humiliation. Yet Caldwell's return was Larsson-esque in its swiftness. The doctors told him he'd be out for eight weeks, but he was back in just four. And he puts that down to extra sessions with his Thai therapist . . . his what?

"Ken Anderson, my Thai therapist," says Caldwell, a wry smile forming on his lips. "I've been seeing him for a year and a half on a weekly basis. He stretches me, keeps my body right throughout the year, but when I had the injury it became apparent how good he could be, and he did lots of things that speeded up the recovery."

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Caldwell is vague on details, but convinced in his belief that the weekly sessions are beneficial. And he is not the only footballer to think so. Jackie McNamara is another believer, as was Henrik Larsson when he at Celtic. Some of the other Scotland players, including Caldwell's brother Steven, will also avail of the services of one of the country's only practitioners in the 6,500-year old art of Thai therapy, with Anderson a regular visitor to Cameron House when the international team is in residence. "You'd need to ask him exactly what he does," says Caldwell. "But it works. The doctors were telling me I'd be out for eight weeks, but I saw him the next day and he assured me it would be nowhere near that."

Many were surprised that Caldwell was back so soon, including the player himself. "When the doctor said punctured lung all sorts of thoughts go through your head. But he reassured me that once the lung re-inflates itself it's fine, so it was just a case of putting up with the pain from my ribs."

While he convalesced he was visited regularly by Anderson, who is based in Fife. The treatment administered by a Thai therapist involves the application of gentle pressure - in the form of massage, stretching, yoga, reflexology and acupressure - to points in the body which are located along channels of energy called sen lines. This is intended to cleanse the body of harmful toxins through the lymphatic system; and in the process it also releases what the Thais call 'prana,' the body's "natural healing energy."

"If it works, then I'll do it," shrugs Caldwell. "I think there are psychological benefits too - he's spoken to me about focus, and having my mind tuned in. People might think it's rubbish but he's worked wonders."

Caldwell was more direct on the subject of today's game. "It's a great opportunity for us to cut the gap at the top and keep us in there, fighting," said Caldwell, whose Hibs side will sit just four points behind Hearts if they win today.

Unlike his manager, Tony Mowbray, Caldwell is bullish about their prospects of mounting a serious assault at the top of the league. "The manager's got to say that, hasn't he?" he observed. "But we want to win this league, as does everyone else."

Hearts are in the spotlight because they're top of the league, but I'd like to be in that position. I think if we win it will be Hibs in the spotlight for the next couple of weeks."

Meanwhile, Caldwell's defensive partner Chris Hogg - who came off the bench to replace the Scotland international in the August derby - last night signed a new deal at Easter Road which will keep him at Hibs until 2009.

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