

Fenlon vows to make changes as Hibs lose to Dundee United



Goals by Johnny Russell, Jon Daly and substitute Michael Gardyne were enough to secure all three points for Dundee United against a disappointing Hibs side at Tannadice yesterday.

Pat Fenlon kicked off the campaign with one change from the eleven who started last week's friendly against Huddersfield, with summer signing Paul Cairney replacing Honduran international Jorge Claros in midfield. Dundee United kept faith the team who drew 2-2 against Dynamo Moscow in midweek.

Goalkeeper Ben Williams made his competitive debut in Scotland and found himself up against a familiar face in John Rankin. Both were at Manchester United together and have remained friends ever since.

Surprise package David Stephens who hardly figured in the team last year partnered captain James McPake in the centre of the defence, leaving Paul Hanlon at left back and new signing Tim Clancy on the right.

Ivan Sproule, David Wotherspoon, Lewis Stevenson, Paul Cairney and Eoin Doyle completed a five man midfield with Leigh Griffiths up front on his own.

Youngsters Ross Caldwell and Danny Handling who both scored during the pre-season tour had to be content with a place on the bench.

Manager Pat Fenlon was missing from the dugout after being suspended following a gesture made at the cup final and his place was taken by his assistant Liam O'Brien. .New signing

Gary Deegan was ineligible for the game and will join his new team-mates on Monday at the East Mains Training Ground and should feature in the derby against Hearts next Saturday.

During the warm up, referee Craig Thompson wisely kept away from the large Hibs travelling support who continued to subject him to abuse throughout the game following his performance in the cup final when he wrongly awarded a penalty following a dive by Hearts winger Santana.

United started brightly and had a penalty claim turned down in the first minute when Johnny Russell latched onto a poor header by Stephens but Williams cleared the danger.

Two minutes later, United took the lead as the Hibs defence failed to deal with a Barry Douglas cross. Jon Daly won the header which fell to Rankin. The ex Hibs man nodded the ball to Russell on the edge of the six yards box and the striker made no mistake and smashed the ball into the net. The visitors protested that Rankin had blocked Clancy in the run up to the goal, but Thompson ignored the appeals.

On eight minutes, Russell went close again with a long range shot was well saved by Williams, and Hibs struggled to get a foothold in the game.

Young winger Gary McKay Stevens was causing problems down the left wing, and the former Airdrie star went close with a long range effort which went narrowly past the post.

Wotherspoon did well to win a corner which fell to Griffiths but the strikers shot was blocked as Hibs fought back. Doyle then latched onto a long ball from Hanlon which he controlled on his chest his well struck shot went just past the upright. Wotherspoon sent Sproule clear, but no-one was in the box to meet the flying wingers cross.

Williams then showed why Pat Fenlon has so much confidence in his ability with a superb save from a Jon Daly header, turning

the ball round the post for a corner.

Good work between Griffiths and Wotherspoon found Sproule free on the wing, but once again the wingers cross failed to find a green jersey.

Peter Houston was the happier manager when the half time whistle blew although he would have wondered why his team were only one ahead given their dominance. The touch line ban for Fenlon extended to the dressing room and it was left to O'Brien to give the half time team talk.

United replaced the injured Sean Dillon with former Preston player Brian McLean whilst Hibs kept the same eleven.

Johnny Russell should have doubled the home side's lead shortly after the break when a great run and pass from McKay-Steven found the youngster unmarked in the box, but he rushed his shot and Williams was relieved to see the ball whistle past the post. Daly then went close with a shot which Williams did well to hold.

Mackay-Steven then showed some neat touches to dribble past Stephens but his cross failed to find the target.

Hibs fought back with some good interplay between Griffiths and Doyle but the Irishman's through ball to Cairney was cleared for a corner. Despite the odd counter attack from Hibs, United continued to dominate possession. On 58 minutes youngster Danny Handling replaced Lewis Stevenson as Hibs changed to a more traditional 4-4-2 system with Handling joining Griffiths up front.

Griffiths was booked for a trip on Mackay-Steven, before United secured the points on 73 minutes with a Jon Daly header. Hanlon cleared a United free kick, but his header fell to the man of the match Mackay-Steven, and his cross was met by the giant Dubliner who nodded the ball into the net.

Mackay-Steven left the field to a standing ovation with ten minutes remaining and United claimed top spot in the league table when substitute Michael Gardyne found himself one on one with the keeper and calmly slotted the ball into the net.

Afterwards a dejected Pat Fenlon told BBC Scotland: -"I'm disappointed more than angry. We'll make changes after that performance, but there's key areas in the team that we need to strengthen."

"You spend days preparing your team and organising and you concede a goal after two or three minutes, It gives you a mountain to climb. I'm disappointed that they didn't carry out what I asked them to carry out. That's the major disappointment.

"The frustration of not being on the bench doesn't help as well. We've released a lot of players since the end of last season and we need to bring players in. We're a little bit short. .If you look at the striker options we had on the bench. We were able to bring on two kids and that's really it. You need competition for places within your squad as well."

Overall, a disappointing ninety minutes for Pat Fenlon's men with only Williams, Cairney and Doyle gaining pass marks.

Hibs next fixture is against city rivals Hearts next Saturday, and judging by today's performance Pat Fenlon will be a busy man this week,

Dundee United: Gierzniak, Watson, Dillon, Douglas, Flood, Rankin, Ryan, MacKay-Stevens, Russell, Daly. Subs Banks, McLean, Robertson, Millar, Armstrong, Gardyne, Dow

Hibs: Williams, Clancy, McPake, Stephens, Hanlon, Cairney, Stevenson, Sproule, Wotherspoon, Doyle, Griffiths. Subs: Antell, Caldwell, O'Hanlon, Booth, Pa Kujabi, Cairney, Handling.

Attendance 7267