

Griffiths' double secures three points for Hibs



Hibs' boss Pat Fenlon has praised the contribution of Leigh Griffiths whose two goals helped secure a well-deserved three points at New St Mirren Park today. The Easter Road men dominated a hard fought encounter which saw Ben Williams save a first half penalty before Steven Thomson pulled one back for the Paisley side to ensure a nervous end to the game.

Fenlon made one enforced change to the team that drew with Hearts last Sunday with Lewis Stevenson who broke his toe in that game replaced by Jorge Claros. New signing Shefki Kuqi had to settle for a place on the bench.

St Mirren captain Jim Goodwin who was a transfer target for Hibs last season returned to the first team after his two game suspension.

Just under one thousand Hibs fans travelled through to Paisley in a confident mood after last week's performance despite the fact that St Mirren were top of the league.

Hibs kicked off in windy conditions wearing green shorts and socks to add to their traditional green and white top.

Fenlon returned to the dug-out alongside assistant manager Liam O'Brien after his two game ban for gestures to Hearts fans during the cup final.

After five minutes, Paisley born Paul Cairney had a long range shot which went narrowly past the post, as the visitors started to dominate possession. Tim Clancy in particular was causing problems for the Saints defence down the right wing.

Following a spell of pressure, Fenlon's men took a well-

deserved lead after 15 minutes, when Leigh Griffiths latched onto a superb through ball from David Wotherspoon. The on-loan star beat Darren McGregor on the outside and hammered the ball into the corner of the net past Craig Samson to the delight of the travelling support.

Three minutes later, Clancy went close with a free kick and Griffiths hit the side netting with a well struck shot from inside the box.

The Hibs players were hunting in packs and refusing to allow the Saints' players any time on the ball, and Clancy again went close with a flicked header from a Wotherspoon corner.

Two minutes later however, St Mirren were awarded a penalty against the run of play when the ball struck James McPake's arm, but 'Big Ben' Williams spared his captain's blushes with an excellent diving save to deny Paul McGowan.

Samson kept his side in the game with a stunning save from a Gary Deegan header as Hibs pressed at every opportunity. Just before halftime, good interplay between Wotherspoon and Deegan resulted in Maybury sending over a cross which just eluded Eoin Doyle with the goal gaping.

St Mirren replaced Irishmen Graham Carey and Jim Goodwin with Gary Teale and Jon Robertson at half time as Fenlon understandably kept with the players who had done so well in the first half.

Lennon's men came out with a more determined attitude and McGowan was unlucky with a long range shot which flew just past Williams' post, but Hibs responded with a Doyle snapshot which went narrowly over the bar after a Cairney tackle rebounded to the former Sligo player who was unmarked in the box.

The Buddies responded and were given an undeserved free kick when Clancy was wrongly adjudged to have fouled Dougie Imrie.

From the free kick, Williams clashed with McGregor which resulted in the Saints' being stretchered off and replaced by David Barron.

Hibs doubled their lead on the hour mark after great skill by Eoin Doyle who beat his marker and found Griffiths in the box. The on form striker made no mistake, spinning round 180 degrees before striking the ball low into the right hand corner of the net for his third goal of the season.

Both Doyle and Griffiths were booked for jumping over the advertising boards to celebrate with the ecstatic Hibs fans, but their joy was short lived however as St Mirren replied immediately when a Dougie Imrie pass found Steven Thomson at the back post and the former Scotland striker hammered the ball low into the centre of the goal catching the Hibs defence sleeping.

Referee Stevie McLean managed to keep his cards in his pocket as both teams were guilty of some robust challenges. St Mirren desperately tried to get back into the game as Hibs were having problems getting out of their own half.

Cairney was brought down by Imrie and Griffiths smashed the resultant free kick against the crossbar. This was Cairney last part in the game as he was replaced with Ivan Sproule with fifteen minutes remaining.

Williams then made a great save to deny Thomson, and Imrie's corner went harmlessly out of play for a goal kick to relieve the pressure.

Hibs hit on the counter and Sproule was brought down by Kenny McLean who received a yellow card for the incident.

With eight minutes remaining, Doyle was replaced by new signing Shefki Kuqi who was in the action immediately, closing down the St Mirren defenders.

With St Mirren pressing for an equaliser, Kuqi did well to hold the ball up before finding Sproule. The flying winger found Griffiths through on goal, but he was unable to get his hat-trick, and just missed the target.

Ross Caldwell replaced the tired Griffiths who received a standing ovation from the travelling support.

The fourth official indicated six minutes of injury time which was greeted by a loud cheer from the Paisley fans, as Hibs desperately tried to hold on for the three points.

St Mirren had three corners in this period, but the defence held firm, with McPake and Deegan both making last ditch blocks to prevent the Buddies getting a point.

After the game, a delighted Pat Fenlon told BBC Scotland Sportsound: "We passed the ball really well in the first half and could have went in at half time a little bit more ahead.

"We dug in and we hadn't had that before. We've showed a lot of character in the last couple of weeks."

When asked about Leigh Griffiths' performance, Fenlon said:

"Leigh's a player all right. I haven't seen a better finisher than him. He was a live wire today. If he keeps playing like that it will be hard to keep him. He's got potential, there's no doubt about that, we all know that. He's working hard on the other stuff off the pitch and once he's gets rid of that, he's got more ability than a lot of players I've seen.

"His work rate is fantastic and that's the annoying thing. He's a great kid, but he gets himself into a little bit bother off the pitch, but on it and in training he's fantastic.

"We got a bit of luck today that we haven't had before. We could have won the game last week against Hearts. We've seen today they type of team we have. We can pass it and we can play and we can defend and be difficult to beat. The leagues

very competitive as we seen today but we still need a couple more. Today we didn't have a midfielder on the bench so we are a little bit short.

"The supporters have been fabulous since I've been here and I've said it before that it's up to us to get the ones that have lapsed and gone away to get them back in. I've been talking to supporters since last week and they have seen a bit of fight and desire and drive and they feel that's been lacking over the last few years."

St Mirren: Samson, McGregor, Mair, McAusland, Goodwin, McGowan, Carey, Mclean, Imrie, Thompson, Parkin. Subs Smith, van Zanten, Barron, Robertson, Teale, Smith, McGinn

Hibs: Williams, Clancy, McPake, Hanlon, Maybury, Cairney, Claros, Deegan, Wotherspoon, Doyle, Griffiths. Subs: Antell, Caldwell, O'Hanlon, Stanton, Sproule, Kuqi, Handling.

Attendance 5039

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