

50 years since Jimmy O'Rourke's debut for Hibs

☒ Last week, The Edinburgh Reporter took a trip down Memory Lane with Hibs' star John Brownlie on the 40th anniversary of the Easter Road club winning the Scottish League Cup against Celtic at Hampden Park. This week, we go back a further 10 years to mark the 50th anniversary of another famous game in the club's illustrious history, which saw the debut of another Hibs legend.

On Wednesday 12 December 1962, Hibs played Dutch side Utrecht in the second leg of the Inter Cities Fairs Cup at Easter Road, and manager Walter Galbraith sprang a surprise by handing the number 10 jersey to 16 year-old Jimmy O'Rourke, who, only a few months before, had been playing schoolboy football for Holy Cross, and travelling to Hibs' away games with the St Giles Branch. In fact, the previous season, the Hibs mad youngster had approached Tommy Preston in the train back from Kirkcaldy to ask for his autograph, and now he found himself lining up alongside his heroes.

At that time, Hibs had built a reputation as being one of the top sides in Europe, having appeared in two major European semi-finals, and they had already beaten Utrecht 1-0 in Holland, but if they thought the tie was as good as over they were mistaken.

Early in the first half, Jimmy hit the bar with a header, before the Dutch side, using roughhouse tactics levelled the tie on aggregate in the 23rd minute when a cross from Van Der Linden was met by Geurtsen, and the striker's powerful header beat keeper Ronnie Simpson.

Two minutes later, Hibs regained their advantage when Gerry

Baker slammed a superb shot past Van Zoghel from the narrowest of angles. Just after half time, Eric Stevenson scored Hibs' second of the night when he struck a fierce shot through a wall of defenders into the net.

Sports reporter Tom Nicholson of the Daily Record praised Jimmy's contribution, stating: "Sixteen year old O'Rourke, in his first big game of his life was another frequent victim of Utrecht's untidy tackling, but nothing they could do could hide the promise of this sturdy youngster. He looks to have the lot, sturdy build, speed and brains, PLUS abounding confidence."

Jimmy's first goal arrived three days after his debut, when he scored in a 3-2 defeat at Dunfermline, and the Hibs fans expected great things from their new hero. They would not be disappointed, although a broken leg against Dundee United in his first full season hindered the teenager's progress.

In 1965, Jimmy took part in a match which is still fondly remembered by Hibs supporters of that generation.

The fixture coincided with his 19th birthday and after learning that he had not been picked for the reserves, he decided to spend the weekend in Blackpool, unaware that he would be replacing Neil Martin against Hearts at Tynecastle.

In an amazing game, Jimmy and Eric Stevenson both scored twice inside the opening 10 minutes as Hibs ran their neighbours ragged.

Recalling the game on Hibs TV, Jimmy joked:- "We scored 4 in ten minutes, and I thought I could then pretend to be injured so I could get down to Blackpool, but seriously it was a memorable birthday. Those two goals – one with my right foot and one with my left from 20 yards – were pretty special."

Jimmy concedes that it took four years to fully recover from his injury, and the standard of players in the team during the

sixties, including Colin Stein, Willie Hamilton, Neil Martin and Peter Cormack, meant that he found himself playing in virtually every outfield position, without being able to make one jersey his own. Others would have considered moving to achieve first team football, but Jimmy's love for Hibs persuaded him to remain in the capital.

Jimmy served under Jock Stein, Bob Shankly, Willie MacFarlane and Dave Ewing, before the arrival of Eddie Turnbull whom Jimmy used to cheer from the terracing.

Under Eddie Turnbull, Jimmy teamed up with Alan Gordon to form the most potent strike force in the country, scoring a career best 15 goals in his first season.

Jimmy said:- "I was in and out of the team for many seasons and, all of a sudden, I got played in a position where everything clicked into place.

"Eddie Turnbull takes the credit for that. I don't think we knew the game until Eddie came. it was a totally different dimension. For me, Eddie's way was the best."

Unfortunately, that season ended in disappointment at Hampden when Hibs were beaten 6-1 by Celtic in the Scottish Cup Final. The manager and every member of that team vowed to make amends, and they had the chance in August when they returned to Hampden to face Celtic in the Drybrough Cup Final. Hibs played some stunning football and led three-nil before Celtic fans invaded the pitch, causing the game to be held up. The delay affected Hibs and Celtic managed to score three goals and take the game into injury time.

Most fans thought that Hibs had blown their chance, but a wonder goal from Jimmy gave the Edinburgh side the lead. He received a short pass from Pat Stanton before smashing a 35 yard screamer into the top corner. An Arthur Duncan goal in the last minute killed off Celtic and the trophy headed east along the M8.

That goal opened the floodgates, and by November, Jimmy had scored an incredible 25 goals, including five hat-tricks against Dundee United, Sporting Lisbon, Airdrie, FC Besa and Morton.

Hibs returned to Hampden on 9 December 1972 for the Scottish League Cup Final, and Jimmy scored the decisive goal which brought the trophy to Easter Road. With Hibs leading one-nil, Alex Edwards sent Pat Stanton clear on the right wing. Jimmy sprinted into the penalty box, pointing to where he wanted the cross to go. Pat obliged and Jimmy sent a sensational diving header into the net.

He recalls: "I was wee, but I wasn't bad in the air. It was just a wonderful cross and luckily I managed to get on the end of it. I knew where my brothers were in the crowd, so we went over to celebrate with them because if I hadn't been playing I'd have been standing beside them; it was a great feeling."

Jimmy was in prolific form, and added another hat-trick in an 8-1 win over Ayr United before scoring in a 3-2 victory over Aberdeen.

At the time, Hibs were two points behind Celtic in the League, with a slightly inferior goal difference, so when the Old Firm game was postponed due to illness in the Celtic camp, Eddie Turnbull knew that a six goal victory over Hearts at Tynecastle would see Hibs start the year in top spot. Few thought this possible, but what happened next will never be forgotten by anyone who had the privilege of being there.

Jimmy opened the scoring at the Gorgie Road end with a left foot volley after Alan Gordon flicked on an Erich Schaedler long throw. Hibs run riot and scored another four before the half time whistle went.

Midway through the second half, Pat Stanton collected the ball in midfield and drove forward, beating several defenders before sliding the ball past Kenny Garland. Jimmy was on hand

to prod the ball home for the sixth, before Alan Gordon added a seventh.

The following week, 'Turnbull's Tornadoes' title hopes ended when right back John Brownlie suffered a broken leg and Alex Edwards was booked and subsequently received a 56 day suspension in the 1-0 victory over East Fife. Hibs eventually clinched third place with Jimmy finishing with a grand total of 34 goals.

In the European Cup Winners Cup, Hibs were 4-1 up against Hadjuk Split in the quarter final, before the Croatians pulled back a late goal and eventually won 3-0 in the second leg to progress.

After that game, Eddie Turnbull decided to bring in new faces, one of whom was Joe Harper who cost an amazing £120,000 from Everton, the highest fee ever paid by a Scottish team, and at the end of the 1973/1974 season Jimmy was transferred to St Johnstone. Typically he scored the winner for the Saints on his return to Easter Road.

He said: "I didn't want to go, but I was told I wouldn't figure and that I would be in the reserves if I stayed. I loved the Hibs. I wasn't the most gifted of players, but I gave my best. It was my team and I was proud to be part of it."

Jimmy did return to Easter Road as an assistant to Pat Stanton, and played a major role in bringing through a number of youngsters into the first team, including John Collins, Micky Weir, Paul Kane and Gordon Hunter.

In his twelve years at the club, Jimmy played 223 games, scoring 81 goals. He also scored 23 goals in 68 games for St Johnstone and 14 goals in 46 games for Motherwell.