

# Hibs stage dramatic comeback to reach Scottish Cup Final



Hibs staged perhaps the greatest comeback in their 138 year history on Saturday to beat Falkirk 4-3 and secure a place in next month's William Hill Scottish Cup Final.

In doing so however, the players took the fans from the depth of despair to absolute delirium in a pulsating 120 minutes of football from both teams.

Three goals down in 30 minutes, Hibs were loudly booed off the park at half time, but the players responded with a fantastic second half performance to take the game to extra time before Leigh Griffiths sealed the win with a stunning 30 yard drive near the end.

The result creates a little bit of history for the manager and players who now become the first Hibs side in almost 90 years to reach back to back Scottish Cup Finals.

Over 17,000 Hibs fans made the pilgrimage to the national stadium in confident mood, despite the poor form displayed this year, but their journey was rewarded by a dismal Hibs first half performance which saw them 3-0 down within half an hour.

The supporters were in good voice and produced a spectacular display when the teams emerged from the tunnel, including a large banner to commemorate Canon Hannon.

Fenlon had a full squad to pick from and made two changes to the team who lost to Celtic last weekend, with Paul Cairney and Scott Robertson replacing David Wotherspoon and Gary Deegan.

The Bairns took the lead in the 6th minute when Craig Sibbald latched onto the end of a Lyle Taylor cutback and slotted the ball into the bottom right hand corner of the net from 15 yards.

Hibs should have equalised three minutes later when Leigh Griffiths cross found Scott Robertson unmarked at the edge of the six yards box, but the former Dundee United midfielder's mishit his shot badly.

Sibbald took a free-kick from just inside Hibs' half, which was headed on by Flynn to McGrandles whose cross was headed into the net by Jay Fulton to the delight of the Falkirk fans including dad Stevie who was the man of the match for Celtic the 1989 Scottish Cup semi-final win over Hibs.

In the 28<sup>th</sup> minute, another Falkirk attack resulted in a third goal, when the ball fell to Taylor whose early shot was parried by Williams into the path of Blair Alston who slid it into the empty net.

Pat Fenlon immediately replaced Robertson with Danny Handling as some Hibs fans started to leave the stadium to the chants of 'Cheerio Cheerio' from the jubilant Falkirk fans.

Hibs left the field to a chorus of boos and Fenlon replaced Cairney with Chesterfield bound Eoin Doyle but it was the Bairns who started brightly with both Taylor and McGrandles going close in the first two minutes.

Hibs almost pulled one back in the 49th minute when Doyle found Harris but his volley was well saved, then from the resulting corner Hibs were denied a penalty when Clancy was upended in the box, but the constant pressure finally paid off and a goal came one minute later. Alex Harris picked up a loose ball in midfield and sent a sensational 30 yard shot into the top corner to give the Hibs' fans some hope.

Hibs missed the chance to score in the 71<sup>st</sup> minute when Danny Handling was brought down in the box by Stewart Murdoch, but McGovern saved Griffiths' penalty then did even better by saving at the feet of Doyle who was following up.

With 13 minutes remaining, Hibs pulled back a second when McGovern split the Bairns defence and found Harris who cut the ball back for Griffiths to score to set up a breathtaking finish.

A minute later, Doyle found Griffiths with a long ball, but he was crowded out by three defenders, then Hampden erupted when McGovern's long ball was chested into the path of Eoin Doyle who ran 20 yards with the ball before unleashing a sensational shot into the bottom right hand corner of the net.

Hibs should have had a penalty with two minutes left when Dods clattered into Griffiths, but referee Brines waved away the appeal.

Extra time was delayed as the stadium announcer asked for replacement official for Brines who was replaced by 4th official John Beaton.

The first period of extra time finished all square, although Hibs were the more likely to score, and sure enough, with six minutes remaining Griffiths scored a wonder-goal. He took a corner on the left wing which was cleared by the former Hibs' defender Darren Dods. The ball returned to Griffiths who took a sensational first touch before smashing the ball into the top corner of the net from 30 yards, causing mayhem in the Hibs end.

With two minutes left, Taylor was wrongly adjudged to be onside and found himself one on one with Williams, but the big keeper made a fantastic save to deny the striker and Hibs held on for a famous victory.

At the final whistle, the players, management and fans

celebrated as Sunshine on Leith blared out of the Hampden PS system.

After the game a delighted Pat Fenlon said: "The first-half performance was very poor and I apologise to the supporters for that because it's not good enough. We put everybody through the wringer today but have shown tremendous character. The players themselves had plenty to say at half-time, but it was a tremendous comeback."

"It was a horrendous first half, but we showed tremendous character and played really well after that. It wasn't much of a team talk and more of a rant, but it worked. But, in fairness to the players, they knew they'd let themselves down and the fans. I felt like leaving myself at half-time. It was difficult to watch and difficult to take and I apologise to the supporters for that first half – and that's down to me."

"But what they have shown is that there's massive, massive character within the group and they've shown that in spades – and that end of the game was different class."

"Young Danny (Handling) and Alex (Harris) were different class for us and it was difficult for them to come on when we were chasing the game. Leigh Griffiths doesn't miss too many penalties, but we just got back to passing the ball after that. Today wasn't Leigh's best game for us, but the finish for the goal, that's him. He doesn't let things like that bother him and he's got a great attitude. I'm delighted for him too because he's Hibs-daft and wanted to be in the final; we're there now.

"We put everybody through the wringer today but have shown tremendous character. We've got five big league games to show that desire again too. We've had some tremendous games this year: Hearts in the first round and Aberdeen, Kilmarnock and now Falkirk; we'll worry about the final and see what happens then."

Eoin Doyle and Danny Handling spoke to the Edinburgh Reporter after the final whistle. Handling said: "I thought at half time we still had a chance and we proved it in the second half and after extra time. I didn't expect to get on so quick but Liam called me over and I went on. At 3-0 I didn't think there was a lot of pressure. I had a good chance on my left foot and thought I should have scored with that, but we got the result and that's what matters."

Doyle said: "My goal was a bit of a shank. I'm glad I didn't hit it clean because when I hit the ball clean it normally goes into the keepers hands. I'm delighted to get a goal. At 3-0 down the manager had a few strong words and the players did as well, and he wanted to change things so he put me on and I managed to play a part. He came up with a plan and we deployed it in the second half and it worked. It was nice to get back on the score sheet, as I haven't scored since Christmas. There's a lot of games between now and the final and we are looking forward to next Monday night and we'll see what happens."

Hibs: Williams, Clancy, McGivern, McPake Hanlon, Claros, Cairney, Robertson, Harris, Thompson, Griffiths. Subs Murdoch, Doyle, Stevenson, Taiwo, Handling.

Falkirk: McGovern, Duffie, Kingsley, Dods, Flynn, Murdoch, Sibbald, McGrandles, Taylor, Fulton, Alston. Subs Bowman, Grant, Higgins, Dick, Weatherston.

Attendance 22410

And of course the fans were in good voice...