

# Hibs face uphill struggle in Europa League quest



Hibs face an uphill struggle to progress to the Europa League group stages after a two goal defeat to Malmo in Sweden last night.

It could have been much worse however, as Malmo scored two early goals inside two minutes but a resilient performance coupled with some heroics from Ben Williams kept the tie alive.

Pat Fenlon was forced to play a makeshift defence following injuries to both first choice full backs; Tim Clancy and Ryan McGivern. Lewis Stevenson played at right back whilst Paul Hanlon moved to left back with Jordon Forster taking over in the centre of defence alongside James McPake.

New signing Rowan Vine led the line and Alex Harris started on the bench after suffering a thigh injury against Raith Rovers last week.

Hibs started brightly, and summer signing Owain Tudur Jones, making his competitive debut went close with a header from a Liam Craig free kick in the sixth minute. The Swedish club went ahead three minutes later, when James McPake was booked for a foul just outside the box and Malmo's captain Jiloon Hamed sent the resultant free kick into the top corner of the net, leaving Ben William helpless.

Malmo doubled their advantage a minute later when Emil Forsberg cut the ball back from the left flank and found Magnus Eriksson who slotted the ball home.

Hibs fought back and continued to create chances, with Tudur

Jones going close with a header from a corner while fellow debutant Rowan Vine saw his well struck effort cannon off the inside of the post.

In the second half, Williams produced a series of top-class saves to keep Hibs in the tie whilst at the other end Pat Fenlon's men looked dangerous on the break.

For the last twenty minutes, the 600 plus Hibs fans in the Swedbank Stadion were in full voice trying to encourage the players to score an away goal, but despite two late corners the Swedes were content to see the game out at 2-0.

The supporters continued to chant long after the full-time whistle, and the players and manager showed their appreciation.

The return leg will take place at Easter Road next Thursday.

Hibs will find out their potential opponents should they make the next round, when the draw is made today.

Hibernian: Williams, Stevenson, Forster, McPake, Hanlon, Taiwo, Tudur Jones, Thomson, Craig, Handling, Vine

Subs: Murdoch, Harris, Cairney, Robertson, Horribine, Mullen, Caldwell