

# Rot-Weiss Essen 0-4 Hibernian

## 14 September 1955



On this day in 1955, Hibs made history by becoming the first British football team to play in Europe.

The European Champion Club's Cup was the brainchild of Gabriel Hanot, editor of L'Équipe, and eighteen teams who were considered to be able to generate interest across the continent, as well as having the floodlights necessary to play midweek games were invited to participate.

Hibs were well known throughout Europe due to regular summer tours, and although they only finished in fifth position the previous season, the club were Scotland's chosen representatives. English champions Chelsea were also invited, but declined following 'advice' from the Football League secretary Alan Hardaker.

In addition to Hibs, Milan (Italy), AGF Aarhus (Denmark), Anderlecht (Belgium), Djurgården (Sweden), Gwardia Warszawa (Poland), Partizan (Yugoslavia), PSV (Netherlands), Rapid Wien (Austria), Real Madrid (Spain), Rot-Weiss Essen (West Germany), Saarbrücken (Saar), Servette (Switzerland), Sporting CP (Portugal), Stade de Reims (France), and Vörös Lobogó (Hungary) all agreed to participate.

The Easter Road side were drawn against German champions Rot-Weiss Essen, with the first leg to be played in Germany, and Hibs' legend Eddie Turnbull was the hero, scoring two and making another in the historic 4-0 victory.

The game was played in heavy rain which turned the pitch into a quagmire, but the conditions didn't worry the Hibs players who piled on the pressure from the kick off, although it took

until the 35<sup>th</sup> minute before the breakthrough occurred, when Turnbull, renowned for his powerful shot, hammered the ball past German international goalkeeper, 'The Black Panther' Fritz Herkenrath, to the delight of over 1000 Scottish soldiers who were stationed in the country, amongst the crowd.

Just before the goal, Herkenrath had demonstrated his ability by tipping a well struck Willie Ormond effort just over the bar.

Rot-Weiss had a chance to equalise a few minutes later, but outside right Roehrig shot wide, before Turnbull added his second just before half-time with a fine solo effort, beating several defenders then slotting the ball into the net.

Eleven minutes after the break, Hibs made it three after a fine Turnbull pass found Lawrie Reilly who scored one of his best ever goals, running through the Essen defence from the half way line before calmly dispatching the ball past Herkenrath from close range.

The Germans had the chance to pull one back during a rare attack but Arbotmelt shot wide of the post from a good position.

Ormond sealed the win with eight minutes remaining.

Following the game, one of the German national newspapers said: "Last night the Hibernian team from Scotland gave the greatest display by a British team since the war."

The result takes on an even greater significance as Germany had only recently won the World Cup and Essen right winger Helmut Rahn had scored two goals in the final.

The second leg took place on October 12 and Hibs had to play without three of their best players, Gordon Smith, Lawrie Reilly and goalkeeper Tommy Younger were stranded at fog bound London Airport after returning from Copenhagen where the trio

had starred in the Scottish League's 4-0 win over the Danish League, a game which remarkably took place two days before the return fixture. In fact they had played seven games in 16 days, so the rest probably did them no harm, although Smith tried to charter a plane from London, but was put off by the cost and the fact that Hibs' Chairman Harry Swan would be unlikely to stump up the money.

As it turned out, the team managed fine without them, and over 30,000 took their place on the Easter Road terracings to watch the game, with Smith's replacement John Buchanan scoring Hibs' goal in a 1-1 draw, although according to the Daily Record the following day, the score-line flattered the Germans. The match report read: "Don't let the score give you any wrong ideas. Hibs should have wiped the floor with this German team, but the powder puff Germans had about as much punch as ginger pop."

Buchanan's goal was a fantastic effort which was even applauded by the opposition players. Turnbull played a neat one-two with Mulkerrin, took the return pass and slipped the ball to Ormond who sent in an inch perfect cross which Buchanan met perfectly from four yards.

Abromsil grabbed a late equaliser, but Hibs progressed to the next round with a 5-1 aggregate win.



Lawrie Reilly recalled the first game in his book 'The Life and Times of Last Minute Reilly.' He wrote: "There was no lack of motivation in our ranks as it was only ten years since the end of World War II. We were quite happy to accept that the war was over and we had to make a new beginning. Eddie Turnbull had served in the navy and my own uncle Laurence, whom I was named after had been killed in World War I. So we may not have been bearing old grudges, but we were harbouring poignant memories and were, shall we say, very keen to win and

win well.

“As the game progressed, we began to realise that we were a far superior side to Essen. Players like Gordon Smith, Eddie Turnbull, Willie Ormond and myself began to look at each other and say “We are better than this tea, why are we holding back? Let’s go for it. We threw caution to the wind, took control of the game and won convincingly 4-0.”

Hibs beat Djurgården in the next round, and also created history by playing the first European game in Glasgow, as the Swedes were forced to play their ‘home tie’ at Firhill due to adverse weather conditions in Sweden.

Despite a plucky performance, Hibs lost to Stade de Reims in the semi-final, although many football supporters who saw the Famous Five at their peak believe that had the tournament been launched a few years earlier, the first name on the famous trophy would have been Hibernian.