

St Johnstone 1-2 Hibernian



Goals from new striking partners Paul Heffernan and James Collins secured the three points for Hibs against St Johnstone in Perth yesterday, but for the second away game in succession, Pat Fenlon's men had to come from behind for the victory.

Hibs made four changes to the side that drew 0-0 with Ross County last week, with Kevin Thomson returning from suspension, and Paul Heffernan making his first start. Player coach Alan Maybury took the right back spot from Lewis Stevenson who moved to his natural position on the left, replacing the injured Ryan McGivern.

Danny Handling and Owain Tudur Jones were also missing whilst new recruit Abdellah Zoubir was listed amongst the substitutes alongside former St Johnstone striker Rowan Vine.

Former Hibs midfielders David Wotherspoon and Patrick Cregg started for the Saints.

Wotherspoon created an early chance but his left-foot effort went just over the bar from 20 yards then Michael Nelson received a yellow card after pulling back the on-form Saints youngster Stevie May.

Seven minutes later, May displayed the skills which have brought him to the attention of clubs south of the border when he picked the ball up 25 yards out with his back to goal but spun his marker before sending a sensational strike into the bottom corner past Ben Williams.

Hibs responded immediately and keeper Alan Mannus produced an acrobatic save to deny former team-mate Liam Craig, after his free-kick rebounded off the wall.

Ten minutes before the break, Heffernan grabbed his first goal for his new club after Collins' shot was blocked then Scott Robertson struck the rebound off the post before the Irishman tapped in from close range.

Robertson almost gave Hibs the lead in time added on at the end of the first half, but he just missed Craig's free kick at the back post.

The Saints started the second half brightly and Murray Davidson fired over after a dangerous cross from Wotherspoon, then another dangerous run by May who showed superb strength to hold off Paul Hanlon before finding Cregg but his first-time effort was blocked by Nelson on the six-yard line.

A few minutes later, the Easter Road side took a deserved when Craig lifted the ball over the home defence for Collins, who volleyed into the net from a tight angle for his first goal for the club since arriving from Swindon in the transfer window, to the delight of the 1200 travelling supporters behind the goal.

Hibs continued to dominate and Heffernan forced another good save from Mannus, before Fenlon was forced to reshuffle his defence after Stevenson limped off following a bad tackle from Cregg who received a yellow card.

Paul Hanlon was moved to left-back to allow substitute James McPake to partner Michael Nelson in the centre of the defence.

New signing Abdellah Zoubir replaced Collins for the final ten minutes and impressed the Hibs faithful with his trickery, and twice in quick succession caused the Saints defence problems. His cut-back to Craig almost brought about a third goal but the midfielders strike was blocked, but in any case, Hibs held on to take all three points which moved them up the table to sixth.

Afterwards Pat Fenlon said: "I'm delighted. It was a big tree

points for us. The second half performance is the best we have played this season, and we probably deserved to win the game. The first half, there wasn't a lot in it, but the second half I thought we played tremendously well. I'm delighted for the players but we have to keep it going next week with a home win. It wasn't James' (Collins) best game but he worked tremendously hard and he's got a break with the goal and Heffernan's a natural finisher, he's calm in front of goal."

Hibs take on St Mirren at Easter Road next Saturday.

St Johnstone: Mannus, Mackay, Scobbie, Cregg, Wright (Miller 55'), Anderson, MacLean (Fallon 66'), Wotherspoon, Hasselbaink (Edwards 66'), May, Davidson. Substitutes not used: Banks, Millar, McDonald, Easton.

Hibernian: Williams, Hanlon, Nelson, Robertson, Craig (Stanton 90'), Collins (Zoubir 79'), Stevenson (McPake 68'), Taiwo, Maybury, Heffernan, Thomson. Substitutes not used: Murdoch, Vine, Forster, Caldwell.

Referee: Bobby Madden.