

Hibernian 1-1 Celtic Hibs Hold League Leaders at Easter Road



Hibernian and Celtic today contested a thrilling match at Easter Road, with plenty of action and a share of the points going to both sides in this exciting encounter. It was Hibs striker Paul Heffernan who put the home side ahead after 18 minutes before a James Forrest goal just under 15 minutes from the end saw Celtic get back on level terms. Celtic were dominant for large periods of the game and had many chances, but Hibs put in a spirited performance to hold their own against the league leaders and came away with a point.

The tempo for this game was set in the opening few minutes, with Celtic starting brightly and winning a corner almost immediately. The away team were getting forward in numbers at every opportunity, and Hibs had to weather an early storm before they could begin to assert themselves and impose some of their own play on the game. Kris Commons had a couple of opportunities which he could not direct on target, and instead it was at the other end of the pitch that the first goal came, against the run of play. Kevin Thomson managed to dispossess his former Hibernian team mate Scott Brown and threaded a ball through to Heffernan. The Hibs striker was perhaps in an offside position but managed to take full advantage of his bit of luck and calmly slotted the ball past Fraser Forster into the back of the net.

The home side seemed to take encouragement after this early and unexpected lead, and began to play more comfortably on the ball, keeping possession and moving forwards. Thomson had a shot saved from a distance, while at the other end Commons

squandered a great opportunity for an early equaliser when he put the ball over the bar with only Hibs keeper Ben Williams to beat. The Celtic player's misery was compounded when he had to leave the pitch soon after, a suspected hamstring injury seeing him substituted for James Forrest. Forrest made an immediate impact, drawing Williams away from his goal and setting up Teemu Pukki, but the Finn's shot was well-blocked by Ryan McGivern. The away side continued to press up until half-time, but their attempts were not enough to get back on level terms.

Celtic continued to look for a goal at the beginning of the second half, with Hibs once again having to rely on defensive heroics to survive the onslaught. Williams made a great save from a Berman Kayal strike before being called upon shortly after to deny Anthony Stokes. After surviving that early wave of Celtic attack, Hibs once again grew into the game and made use of the ball on the break to create a few chances of their own. Abdellah Zoubir managed to slip the ball into the path of Owain Tudur Jones, who was making a late run to the edge of the box, but the Welshman couldn't find the necessary power to take his effort past Forster. Liam Craig then won a corner as Forster pushed his stinging shot past the post, but the home side failed to double their advantage.

Celtic's equaliser came after McGivern clattered into Darnell Fisher, the Hibs player earning himself a yellow card and an injury in the process. With McGivern having left the field to receive treatment, Celtic took full advantage of the gap at left-back, and Forrest drove in through the space vacated by the Northern Irishman to curl his shot past Williams into the bottom-left corner of the net and put Celtic back on level terms at 1-1. McGivern could no longer continue, and was replaced by James McPake for the remaining 12 minutes. Celtic were full of renewed vigour after their equaliser and were looking to press for the winner, but a tenacious performance by Hibs saw the home side hold on in the closing stages. They

were aided by another stunning save from Williams, who denied Forrest with only a few minutes remaining. The game ended 1-1, with a share of the points for both sides in what had been a frantic, action-filled game.

After the game, Hibs manager Pat Fenlon said:- "I suppose it's mixed feelings. We scored so early and led for so long so against anybody you are always disappointed to lose a lead. We defended so well, particularly in the second half when they put a lot of balls into our box and got a lot of bodies forward. At the start of the game when you play Celtic you may be happy to pick up a point, but when you are leading for so long you are disappointed not to have picked up the three points."

When told that Neil Lennon had complained about a few of the challenges from the Hibs players, Fenlon responded: -"Good, that means the message is getting across to my players that we want to compete and get into peoples faces, but Lennon is entitled to his opinion. Our shape was good today. We changed it a little bit with James Collins out and Owain Tudur Jones sitting in front of our back four because we knew Celtic would get a lot of players central which they do and even their wide players come in and play a lot, so we had to nullify that. I think most of the tackles were fair. I think there was one in the first half that they moaned about, but it was a good tackle. When you watch it, it's a real good challenge. That's part of the game and you just have to get on with it. Everyone has different opinions. I am delighted with my team. We worked tremendously hard, we've been at Celtic and made sure they knew they had been in a game and we also played some decent football as well."

This valuable point means that Hibs have lost only one of their last nine matches, and the Easter Road side will be looking to build on this form as they welcome Aberdeen next weekend followed by a midweek League Cup tie against rivals Hearts.

Hibernian: Williams, McGivern (McPake 78'), Hanlon, Nelson, Robertson, Craig (Vine 88'), Stevenson, Tudur Jones, Heffernan, Zoubir (Taiwo 90'), Thomson. Substitutes not used: Murdoch, Collins, Handling, Mullen.

Celtic: Forster, Ambrose, van Dijk, Brown, Samaras, Stokes, Commons (Forrest 27'), Pukki (Balde 85'), Mulgrew, Kayal (Ledley 67'), Fisher. Substitutes not used: Zaluska, Biton, Henderson, Rogic.

Referee: Calum Murray.