

# Hibs take all three points in Firhill 'smash and grab raid'



A Liam Craig wonder goal midway through the second half, coupled with some top class saves from Ben Williams earned Hibs a valuable three points in a hard fought encounter with Partick Thistle at Firhill last night; a result which even the Hibs manager admitted was something of a 'smash and grab' as Thistle dominated possession throughout.

Pat Fenlon kept faith with the same starting XI despite last weekend's poor performance against Inverness, with Lewis Stevenson retaining right back spot instead of the injured Alan Maybury and Tim Clancy.

Thistle started brightly and forced several early corners in the wet conditions before they spurned a great chance to grab the lead when skipper Williams had to pick up a pass-back from Ryan McGivern to gift Alan Archibald's side a free kick just six yards from goal, but former Hibs' midfielder Sean Welsh's strike was blocked by Kevin Thomson.

Partick dominated possession and Williams produced a fine save from an Aaron Sinclair effort, before Hibs fought back with long range shots from Scott Robertson and Paul Heffernan.

Just before the break, Kris Doolan connected with a Stephen O'Donnell cross but his header went just over the bar.

Thistle started the second half as they had ended the first, and Doolan beat McGivern before sending a dangerous shot across the face of the goal.

Williams then produced a fine save after Doolan evaded the Hibs defence and found himself clean through on goal, then the

Thistle striker missed another chance after a mistake by Paul Hanlon, but he couldn't hit the target.

Michael Nelson then did well to block a dangerous strike from Sinclair and Higginbotham should have opened the scoring but his effort flew inches past the post.

The large travelling contingent were calling for the introduction of new fans' favourite Abdellah Zoubir and Pat Fenlon obliged on 65 minutes, replacing James Collins, whilst Owain Tudur Jones came on for Tim Taiwo.

The substitutions paid immediate dividend when Tudur Jones found the young Frenchman who drove at the home defence before looking up and expertly finding Liam Craig on the edge of the box. Craig's first time effort from his weaker right foot flew in to the top corner of the net to the delight of the Hibs' fans.

The goal gave the Hibs' players added confidence and looked to be in control, however Williams was required to produce two world class saves in the closing stages to ensure that the three points headed east along the M8 back to the capital.

Elliot's close range effort was blocked by his legs before he was quickly back to tip a powerful Forbes' effort which appeared destined for the top corner.

In time added on the Hibs fans' held their breath after Stevenson conceded a free kick on the edge of the penalty area but Forbes' shot was cleared and Hibs held on to claim three valuable points which moves the team into fifth – level on points with Aberdeen.

Afterwards Pat Fenlon told BBC Scotland: "It was a smash and grab for us. In fairness to Thistle I thought they were excellent in the first half, they passed the ball really well. They probably had more chances in the second half, but we showed character and once we scored we settled down a bit and

played football. Up until then we were bitty and all over the place. However, if you can win games when you're not playing well, it's a good trait to have."

"I think from our point of view we'll say it was good goalkeeping. Partick Thistle might think they should finish them. I've seen them in a fair few games and they've created chances and maybe not taken as many as they would like. I thought Ben was fantastic. He took a little bit of flak after the game last week in Inverness, for one of his only mistakes since he's been here. I thought tonight he was first class and his reactions to the saves were brilliant."

Hibs now have three home game in a row, with champions Celtic visiting Easter Road on 19<sup>th</sup> October and Aberdeen a week later before the eagerly anticipated League Cup quarter final tie with Hearts.

Partick Thistle: Fox, O'Donnell, Balatoni, Muirhead, Sinclair, Welsh, Osbourne, Lawless (Elliot 63'), Bannigan (Baird 72'), Higginbotham (Forbes 79'), Doolan. Subs not used: Gallagher, Craigen, Piccolo, Fraser.

Hibs: Williams, Stevenson, Hanlon, Nelson, McGivern, Robertson (Stanton 89'), Taiwo (Tudur Jones 61'), Thomson, Craig, Collins (Zoubir 61'), Heffernan. Subs not used: Murdoch, McPake, Vine, Mullen.

Referee: Kevin Clancy.

Attendance: 4,521.

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