

Hibernian 0-0 St Johnstone: Fans' fury at referee's performance



Not for the first time this season did the Hibs' players leave the field with boos ringing in their ears, but this time the abuse was directed toward referee Alan Muir following an inept performance which brought criticism from both sets of supporters at Easter Road today.

Manager Terry Butcher who had to watch from the Director's box following a touchline ban, made just one change to the side following last weekend's narrow defeat to champions Celtic with prolific youngster Jason Cummings taking over from Danny Handling who dropped to the bench.

Hibs started brightly and right back Jordon Forster headed narrowly over from Liam Craig's corner kick before a well struck effort from Paul Cairney was beaten away by Mannus.

After 25 minutes, Hibs were awarded a free kick 25 yards from goal after Cummings was brought down, but as Craig waited for the St Johnstone wall to retreat, referee Alan Muir instructed him to take the kick.

Scott Robertson paced out the distance and reached the wall after only six steps, but instead of moving the wall back, Muir furiously flashed a yellow card to the former Dundee United star, before again demanding that Craig take the free kick to the fury of the Hibs supporters.

The Hibs skipper then moved the ball back a yard, but the wall just moved forward and eventually Craig struck the ball which cannoned off the St Johnstone players and was cleared.

This led to constant booing of the referee from the home end, but five minutes later it was the Saints' fans who felt aggrieved.

Murray Davidson limped off and was replaced by former Hibs' midfielder Patrick Cregg, but just seconds after coming he on lunged into tackle on Cairney and was shown a straight red card.

Hibs continued to dominate possession, but with half-time approaching Wotherspoon skipped past McGivern and Hanlon before finding May with his cut back. The striker's first effort was blocked by Ben Williams then the rebound was kept out by Robertson.

After the break Hibs almost took the lead after Forster found Robertson with an inch perfect through ball and his low cross was deflected by McDonald bringing out an instinctive acrobatic save from Mannus.

McGivern then went close from a Craig free-kick but his first-time effort was deflected just over by Wotherspoon.

Seconds later a cross from Craig was almost turned in by Collins and then a powerful strike from Craig was held by Mannus.

Substitute Kevin Thomson went close with a powerful strike as Hibs pressed for a winner, then in time added on Collins got on the end of a fine cross from Forster only for Mannus to deny him with a superb save.

In the closing seconds Collins was brought down by Saints' sub Easton as he shaped to shoot however, but to the fury of the Hibs' fans, referee Muir waved away his appeal then wrongly awarded a goal kick after Collins shot was deflected past the post.

The final whistle brought a crescendo of boos directed

exclusively at the referee.

After the game Terry Butcher said: "As soon as the red card came out it was St Johnstone's best spell in the game. We sat off and you could see the lads thinking 'we're expected to win this' – it's a fear."

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"The boys worked hard and got into some good positions, it's just the confidence to take the ball into the box or to take shots – you can see it's just not there.

"Not having had many wins at Easter Road this year or scored many goals, it's the same old story. You can't repair what's been going on for quite some time here in four or five games. If I did that, it would be miraculous.

"We need that bit of quality around the box. We didn't work them enough, so I'm disappointed with just the point.

"When the fans see a team go down to 10 men they expect a cricket score but that seldom happens because the 10 men defend like mad and St Johnstone, to their credit, defended heroically.

"And when we did get through there was Alan Mannus throwing himself around left, right and centre. But we didn't test him enough and that's something we need to work on. We'll just crack on. We have three or four matches before we can do anything in the window.

"What we are looking at is taking steps forward and trying to increase confidence through a good run of games."

"I've looked at it a couple of times and I'm not so sure. It

probably could be given but [referee] Alan Muir had a good view of it."

Hibs: Williams, McGivern, Hanlon, Nelson, Robertson (Thomson 62'), Craig, Cairney, Collins, Stevenson (Zoubir 75'), Forster, Cummings. Substitutes not used: Murdoch, Maybury, Handling, Stanton, Caldwell.

St Johnstone: Mannus, Mackay, Scobbie, Wright, Millar (Miller 36'), McDonald, Wotherspoon, Edwards (Easton 85'), May, Davidson (Cregg 29'), Jahic. Substitutes not used: Banks, Hasselbank, Croft, Kane.

Referee: Alan Muir.

Attendance 8776