

Hibernian 2-1 Ross County. Sam Stanton inspires Hibs



Another superb performance from teenager Sam Stanton who scored his second goal in only three starts helped Hibs secure a valuable three points and end a run of four successive defeats against Ross County at Easter Road yesterday.

Manager Terry Butcher made three changes to the side that lost 2-3 to Raith Rovers last weekend with Duncan Watmore injured, Liam Craig suspended whilst James Collins has to be content with a place on the bench.

Ryan McGivern returned to left back allowing Lewis Stevenson to return to his preferred left midfield slot whilst Danny Haynes and midweek goal scorer Danny Handling started up front.

Scott Robertson who had been expected to replace Craig missed the game through injury sustained in the mini derby win over Hearts on Tuesday night.

Michael Nelson took over as captain.

Hibs started brightly in front of a disappointing crowd of just under 8500 and a fine run by Sam Stanton ended when he was brought down 25 yards from goal. McGivern looked set to send in a pile driver however instead Stanton curled a delightful finish into the top corner of Mark Brown's net.

Hibs almost doubled their lead a few minutes later when Haynes beat Brown from a tight angle only for Erik Cikos to clear the ball off the goal line.

Jordan Slew almost equalised against the run of play with a fine header which came back off the bar before Hibs doubled

their advantage midway through the first half when Haynes cut the ball back to Tom Taiwo, who slotted the ball into the net from close range.

Paul Hanlon did well to block a Slew effort then Ben Williams did well to deny Michael Tidser and Graham Carey.

Hibs should have wrapped the game up in the 55th minutes after a scramble in the County box saw McGivern head the ball goalwards from an Alex Harris corner. Former Hibs keeper Mark Brown clawed the ball out although it appeared to have crossed the line however the referee waved away the claims.

Instead of being 3-0 up, County made it 2-1 with a terrific free kick from Brittain.

The impressive Stanton almost restored the two goal advantage from a corner kick which Brown fumbled on the line then Hanlon and Nelson both went close with headers.

The Staggies fought back bravely and dominated the late possession although in the last minute a terrific run by Stanton ended with a great save by Brown.

County almost grabbed a point deep into injury time when Cikos hooked his shot over from close range and the Easter Road men held on to secure a valuable three points.

After the game Terry Butcher said: With the form that we've been showing at home recently you could sense the jitters were there, but, I thought we held on really well and I thought we deserved it. You can sense the nerves throughout the fans and the team because we've lost our last three matches here."

"It was hairy at the end. We made it that way because we've had some good chances and not put them away. It should have been 3-0; Danny Handling had a great chance and probably should have squared it to Danny Haynes, but shot. Brown saved it, and they've gone up the other end and it's a great free-

kick from Brittain and it's 2-1.

"The young ones in particular are showing no fear – there's been a lot of bravery, we took the ball well. I think in the first ten minutes we passed the ball more than we had in the whole of the 90 minutes against Raith Rovers the previous week. I asked for a lot of steel, I asked for a lot of passing which I thought we got, so I'm very pleased."

"You can sense the nerves throughout the fans and the team because we've lost our last three matches here, and the way we've lost to Raith Rovers is still in people's minds of course. We didn't do enough to put the game beyond doubt but we're just delighted, and we said it was one of nine cup finals and we've scored more goals than the opposition which is the name of the game."

"He (Sam Stanton) has a great burst of pace. He seems to run quicker with the ball believe it or not. He's got great feet, good movement, long legs, takes the ball up to people and pushes it past them. He hasn't got Alex Harris's pace but he's got that trickery on the ball. He had a great game today and he can play in behind the striker and he can play left centre of midfield which I think is probably his best position. He gives you effort and excitement and he's got a fantastic touch as well."

Hibs: Williams, McGivern, Hanlon, Nelson, Harris (Cairney 77, Stevenson, Handling (Boateng 86'), Taiwo, Forster, Stanton, Haynes (Collins 81'). Substitutes not used: Grant, Maybury, Heffernan, Cummings.

Ross County: Brown, Cikos, Brittain, Quinn (Cooper 46'), Tidser, McLean, Carey, Slew (Luckassen 73'), Oikonomou (Gordon 77'), Arquin, Songo'o. Substitutes not used: McCarthy, Boyd, Kettlewell, Glen.

Referee: Bobby Madden

Attendance 8411

Photo by John Preece

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