

Hibernian 3-3 Motherwell: Late equaliser denies Hibs



An injury time equaliser from Motherwell's John Sutton scuppered Hibs' chance to take all three points in what was a frantic game at Easter Road.

The home side went 2-0 down in the first half before pulling one back before the break. They managed to turn the game around in the second half to go into a 3-2 lead late in the game, but sloppy defensive play saw Motherwell come back in the dying minutes and in the end, both sides had to make do with a point apiece.

Hibs started the game brightly, and could have been ahead early on when Danny Haynes beat the offside trap and raced towards the Motherwell goal. Lewis Stevenson had made himself available on the left but Haynes left it too late, and nothing came of the move.

The home side forced a couple of corners in the early stages, but it didn't take long for Motherwell to settle into the game and they made their mark after 12 minutes when Lionel Ainsworth drilled a ball across the Hibs goal for Sutton to tap in ahead of the stretching Ryan McGivern.

The goal seemed to give the visitors more confidence, and they began to exert more control over the game. It was just before the half-hour mark that Motherwell doubled their lead. This time, provider Ainsworth got a goal of his own with a right-footed shot which curled past Ben Williams into the top corner.

By this point, the home fans were beginning to grow frustrated with their team, and the sounds of boos began to follow every

misplaced pass from a man in green and white. Just before half-time, however, Hibs were given a lifeline when Jordon Forster rose high to meet a cross from Paul Cairney, sending his header past Motherwell keeper Lee Hollis and into the back of the net. The move had come about after a corner which had been won after some tricky play by Sam Stanton, arguably Hibs best player on the day.

Hibs could have gone into the break on level terms, but a good turn and shot by James Collins was saved well by Hollis. Forster then found himself completely unmarked but couldn't direct his header on target for a second goal before half-time, meaning that Motherwell retained their slender lead going into the second half.

The home side started the second half as they had finished the first, with high intensity and another good chance for Collins. The striker saw his initial shot come thundering back off the post, but he could only direct the rebound into the arms of the Motherwell keeper.

Again, it was Hibs who took the game to their opponents in the early stages but Motherwell soon began to assert themselves on the match again. In a bid to inject some pace and freshness into the Hibs attack, manager Terry Butcher sent on Alex Harris in place of Stevenson and Paul Heffernan for Haynes. Motherwell followed suit with Craig Moore replacing the impressive Ainsworth, while Christopher Cadden came on for James McFadden.

With less than 15 minutes to play, it was Hibs that managed to step up and get back on level terms. Again, it was Cairney with the cross as he swung the ball into the Motherwell box where it was won by centre-half Michael Nelson. His header smashed off the crossbar before bouncing and there was a moment of confusion before the fans and players alike realised that the goal had been given.

The remarkable comeback from the home side was completed only a few minutes later, when Cairney once more set up a goal with a well-timed pass out to Heffernan on the right-hand side of the pitch. Heffernan showed experience and composure as he calmly lifted the ball over the goalkeeper to the opposite corner and peeled away to celebrate what many believed to be the unlikely winner.

The game was not over yet, however, and it was mere moments after the fourth official indicated an additional three minutes of added time that Motherwell managed to stage a late comeback of their own. A sloppy clearance from a throw-in saw Ian Vigurs skip past the defence before setting up Sutton for his second of the game.

Speaking after the game, manager Terry Butcher said it was a tough one to take:- "We are very sore; very disappointed. We had a tremendous comeback and showed great character and that's been spoiled by an unbelievably soft goal although it was great play by Vigurs and I must give him credit but we had umpteen chances to clear the ball.

"We will be working all this week on throw-ins, for and against, and clearances because that was schoolboy defending. It was a bizarre game which sums our season up. Jekyll and Hyde.

"The natives were very restless and understandably but having said that for the first ten minutes we've done really well in the game and they have scored with their first meaningful attack.

"The last 10 minutes of the first half lifted the crowd and there was not a lot of ranting and raving at half time because we felt that if we could get a second goal we could go on and win it.

"When we got the third goal we thought great and the headlines would have been about a magnificent comeback. Then we can't

defend a throw in in the last minute of the match and I'm bitterly disappointed by that."

Paul Heffernan said: "It felt a little bit like a defeat especially when you get yourself in front. Late goals always feel like that when you concede late. There were a few harsh words said in the dressing room as we are all disappointed in there. We showed good character and spirit to get back into the game so there are some positives.

"It was good to get on for 15 minutes to try and make an impact and to catch the eye and obviously it was good to get the goal so hopefully that will give the manager something to think about for the next game."

Hibs: Williams, Forster, Nelson, Hanlon, McGivern, Cairney (Handling 84), Stanton, Craig, Stevenson (Harris 66), Collins, Haynes (Heffernan 75).

Substitutes not used: Murdoch, Boateng, Maybury, Cummings.

Motherwell: Hollis, Reid, Hutchinson, McManus, Murray, Ainsworth (Moore 70), Vigurs, Lasley, Leitch, McFadden (Cadden 74), Sutton.

Substitutes not used: Stewart, Hammell, Shirkie, Thomas, Neil.

Referee: Steven McLean.