

Hibernian 0-1 Kilmarnock: Devastation as Hibs are resigned to play-offs



A solitary goal from Kilmarnock's Kris Boyd was all it took to turn Hibs' torrid season from bad to worse, the striker costing the Easter Road side a guaranteed spot of safety and sending them to the playoffs.

The home side had been on a miserable run of form, the loss making it thirteen matches without a win and only three goals in their last ten games. Struggling Kilmarnock came to Easter Road in the better position, needing only a point to ensure their SPFL safety, while for Hibs, nothing less than a win would do.

Fans turned out in numbers for both teams, giving their respective sides noisy encouragement from the start. During the opening stages it seemed like the Hibs players were taking heart from their support, enjoying plenty of possession and moving forward with a confidence that has been missing in recent months. A series of corners in the opening minutes was followed up with a carefully-directed header from James Collins, but Killie keeper Craig Samson managed to save the effort. The goalkeeper was called into action minutes later when he tipped over a powerful drive from Scott Robertson, conceding another corner.

Were it not for some stoic Kilmarnock defending, including a header off the line from Barry Nicholson, Hibs might have been able to get their noses in front. The breakthrough didn't come, however, and the home fans were incensed when referee Craig Thomson refused a penalty appeal after Michael Nelson appeared to be pushed in the box.

Despite the early pressure, Hibs still lacked that cutting edge that has been missing from their football for some time now. As half-time drew near, Kilmarnock managed to get in front when Ross Barbour swung in a low cross to Kris Boyd. Boyd – who with 22 goals this season is an example of the striker Hibs sorely lack – finished off the move with a composed finish, sending his team into the lead only a few minutes before half-time.

The goal was a blow to Hibs, who now needed to score two to win and ensure SPFL survival. Despite having the upper-hand in the first half, the disappointment of conceding seemed to have got into the minds of the players, who surrendered much of their earlier possession to the visitors as the second half began.

Ben Williams was forced into action in the Hibs goal as Boyd broke free and sent a header towards the corner, with the Hibs keeper scrambling but somehow managing to tip it past the post. At the other end, it seemed as though captain Liam Craig would offer Hibs a lifeline but his shot hit off the bar and was cleared away.

Hibs brought on Alex Harris and Jason Cummings to try to salvage the two goals they most desperately needed, but time was on Kilmarnock's side and the longer the match went on, the more comfortable the visitors seemed. A couple of goalmouth scrambles made for nervous viewing, but time after time Kilmarnock managed to somehow clear the danger. As time ticked towards the end, Hibs won another set of corners but could not convert them into goals.

The final whistle brought delight to the large travelling support, who were ensured of a place in the SPFL next season, but Hibs fans were despondent, faced with the tough realisation that they will have to beat either Hamilton or Falkirk over two legs in order to remain in the top flight.

Hibernian: Williams, McGivern, Nelson, Robertson (Tudur Jones 66'), Craig, Collins, Maybury, Watmore (Cummings 79'), Forster, Heffernan, Stanton (Harris 76').

Substitutes not used: Murdoch, McPake, Stevenson, Handling.

Kilmarnock: Samson, Tesselaar, Irvine, Nicholson (Muirhead 66'), Boyd, Barbour, McKenzie (Slater 66'), Eremenko, Maksimenko (Clingan 33'), Pascali, Ashcroft.

Substitutes not used: Reguero, Johnston, Gros, Bouzid.

Referee: Craig Thomson.

Attendance: 15,057