

Hibs promotion hopes end at the Falkirk Stadium



Hibs will spend at least one more season in the Championship after losing 3-2 to Falkirk in a dramatic play-off semi-final second leg at the Falkirk Stadium tonight.

A last gasp goal from Bob McHugh secured the victory but once again a controversial refereeing decision was the main talking point amongst the dejected Hibs fans leaving the stadium.

Head Coach Alan Stubbs made one change to the starting XI that drew 2-2 with Falkirk on Tuesday night with top scorer Jason Cummings making way for James Keatings. Marvin Bartley recovered from a tight hamstring injury and was listed amongst the substitutes.

For Falkirk, Paul Watson replaced former Hibs' midfielder Tom Taiwo whilst goal-scorer Bob McHugh started up front in place of Lee Miller.

Hibs started poorly and despite kicking off conceded a corner within the first 20 seconds. In the early stages Falkirk were first to every ball as Stubbs' men struggled to maintain possession and the Bairns took a deserved lead in the 12th minute.

After some good work down the left wing, the ball was fed into the path of Blair Alston who calmly slotted the ball past Conrad Logan.

Hibs first chance came in the 18th minute when Keatings set up Anthony Stokes but the striker's shot was blocked. Moments later Stokes was shown a yellow card for kicking the ball away after being penalised for a foul on Aaron Muirhead.

Hibs started to get back into the game and John McGinn tried a long range effort which Danny Rogers saved comfortably.

Hibs deservedly equalised in the 30th minute when Liam Henderson sent a superb through ball into the path of Keatings and as the striker was about to shoot, he was chopped down by David McCracken. Referee Craig Thomson had no hesitation in pointing to the spot but unbelievably he did not produce a red card for the Falkirk defender.

In fact the referee who is unpopular with the Hibs fans did not even show McCracken a yellow card which mystified everyone inside the stadium.

When the furore died down, Keatings coolly sent the keeper the wrong way and rolled the ball into the bottom right hand corner of the net.

Three minutes later Keatings added a second with a looping header from a Stokes cross, sparking wild celebrations amongst the 2000 travelling supporters.

Dylan McGeouch was replaced by Bartley after going down with a groin injury and Hibs ended the first half on top, winning two late corners.

After the break Muirhead was booked for a trip on Lewis Stevenson then seconds later he was lucky to escape a red card after a clash with McGinn which left the Hibs' midfielder with a cut lip.

Both teams created chances as play raged from end to end and McGinn went close with a shot from the edge of the box.

McGinn then sent a free kick to the back post and Gray's header was cleared off the line by Luke Leahy.

Hibs had the ball in the net in the 69th minute after Stokes set up Keatings but the striker was correctly ruled offside.

With 12 minutes remaining however Falkirk equalised when Gray's clearing header landed at the feet of Leahy who fired an unstoppable strike past Logan from 22 yards.

Cummings replaced Keatings and the youngster almost won the game with a sensational 30 yard strike which Rogers managed to tip onto the bar then with extra time looming, McHugh pounced on a long throw from Will Vaulks and knocked the ball into the net from close range.

After the game Stubbs told BT Sport: "There's not really a lot to say. The players are obviously disappointed. they put an awful lot into the game. at one point they gave themselves a chance of winning the game but it wasn't to be in the end.

"I can't applaud the players enough. They have been unbelievable and I am so disappointed for them. We have got to get over this as quickly as possible and get ourselves ready for next week."

Falkirk: Rogers, Muirhead, Watson, McCracken, Leahy, Alston, Vaulks, Kerr, Sibbald, Baird, McHugh. Subs: Deniz, McCann, Miller, Hippolyte, Shepherd, O'Hara, Gallacher

Hibs: Logan, Gray, McGregor, Hanlon, Stevenson, Fyvie, McGinn, McGeouch, Henderson, Keatings, Stokes. Subs: Oxley, Fontaine, Gunnarsson, Bartley, Boyle, Dagnall, Cummings

Referee Craig Thomson

Attendance 7851