

Neil Lennon sent to stand as Hibs suffer narrow defeat to Brondby IF



Head Coach Neil Lennon's Hibs' career started with a narrow defeat to a very good Brondby side tonight, but there was plenty for him to be optimistic about for the forthcoming campaign.

Otso Virtanen took the goalkeepers' jersey following the departure of Mark Oxley to Southend United whilst the remainder of the team was as expected with new signing Grant Holt starting up front alongside Jason Cummings who earlier this week signed a new four year contract with the club.

Former Celtic midfielder Teemu Pukki who played under Lennon at Parkhead started on the bench for the visitors.

Before the game started, Hibs fans in the East Stand unfurled a banner which read Heroes and listed the names of the Scottish Cup winning team. As they did so, one of the 'heroes,' Liam Henderson took his seat in the West Stand alongside several of his Celtic colleagues including former Hibs' players Scott Brown and Leigh Griffiths.

Hibs got off to the worst possible start, conceding a soft goal after only 17 seconds. Brondby kicked off and straight away six players sprinted toward the Hibs' goal. A long ball forward fell to Christian Jakobsen and the striker fired in a speculative strike from 25 yards. There appeared to be no danger but Virtanen somehow let the ball slip from his grasp and Kamil Wilczek pounced to hammer the ball high into the net stunning the large Hibs' support into silence.

The Brøndby fans in the South Stand celebrated and literally never stopped for the remainder of the game.

Hibs fought back and Lewis Stevenson set Cummings up on the edge of the area but his powerful shot was punched away by Frederik Ronnow in the Brøndby goal.

The game was being played at a pulsating pace with no quarter asked or given as players from both teams clattered into tackles.

In the 18th minute a Dylan McGeouch free kick found Holt at the back post and Ronnow produced a superb save, tipping the ball past the post with his fingertips however the flag was raised for offside.

Three sides of Easter Road erupted on the half hour mark when John McGinn sent Martin Boyle clear down the right. The winger sent in a low cross which Cummings fired into the net however once again the linesman's flagged for offside. The Hibs' players and staff protested the decision and referee Juan Martinez Munueara sparked fury amongst the home fans by sending Lennon to the stand.

Holt then headed a McGeouch cross into the path of Stevenson but the defender was fouled as he struck the ball over the bar. From the free kick the ball was passed to Boyle but the keeper did well to save his low strike.

Hibs almost equalised in the 42nd minute when Holt flicked the ball into the path of Boyle but his shot with the outside of his foot was saved by Ronnow. The ball fell to Cummings who found Holt but the striker's cross was cleared.

Just before the break Marvin Bartley sent a low cross from the right which just evaded Holt at the back post.

Four minutes into the second half, goal-scorer Wilczek was shown a yellow card after a late challenge on Virtanen.

On the 50th minute there was a rousing round of applause from the supporters in memory of Hibs' fan David Drysdale who sadly passed away last week.

Although Hibs dominated possession, Brondby looked dangerous on the break and Paul Hanlon did well to block a goal-bound shot from Wilczek just before Lennon made a double substitution. McGeouch and Bartley left the field and were replaced by James Keatings and Liam Fontaine.

Paul Hartley moved from defence into midfield as Hibs looked to level the tie.

Cummings was booked in the 66th minute after being caught offside and throwing the ball to the ground in disgust. On this occasion however the linesman's decision was correct.

A minute later, McGinn picked up the ball in midfield and ran at the Brondby defenders before cutting the ball back to Holt. The veteran striker slipped the ball past the defender who appeared to bring him down. Three sides of the ground demanded a penalty but the referee waved away their appeals sparking outrage in the stadium. The fact that he did not book Holt for diving tends to suggest that he wasn't sure one way or the other but the Hibs' fans were in no doubt.

Hibs continued to press forward but Brondby defended stoutly and continued to hit on the break.

Virtanen did well to produce a double save from the Brondby strikers before Alex Harris replaced Boyle, making his first competitive appearance for the club in over a year.

The biggest cheer of the evening came in the 79th minute when the referee eventually gave a 50/50 decision to Hibs.

Harris set up Hanlon on the edge of the area but his strike went over the bar, as did McGinn's long range effort with two minutes remaining and the Danes held on to secure the victory.

Afterwards Neil Lennon said: "My team were superb against a very good side." he also indicated that he would speak to Leeann Dempster regarding whether to appeal against the decision to send him to the stand.

Hibs: Virtanen, Gray, Hanlon, McGinn, Bartley, Holt, McGeouch, Stevenson, Boyle, McGregor, Cummings. Subs Laidlaw, Fontaine, Stanton, Handling, Keatings, Harris, Crane

Brondby IF: Ronnow, Larsson, Albrechtsen, Røcker, Silva, Norgaard, Austin, Holst, Greko, Stickler, Wilczek. Subs: Toppel, Juelsgaard, Crone, Hjulsgaard, Pukki, Borring, Corlu

Referee Juan Martinez Munueara

Attendance 13,435