

Ten man Hibs return to the top of the Championship



Hibs returned to the top of the Championship this afternoon despite being unable to beat Raith Rovers at Starks Park.

The Easter Road side dominated throughout even though they played the majority of the game with 10-men after Marvin Bartley was sent off in the first half.

Elsewhere Queen of the South lost heavily to Morton at home and Hibs have overtaken them on goal difference.

Head Coach Neil Lennon made five changes to the starting XI that lost to St Mirren last weekend with Kirkcaldy born Lewis Stevenson, Marvin Bartley, John McGinn, Jason Cummings and Grant Holt returning to the team in place of Jordon Forster, Dylan McGeouch, Martin Boyle, Andrew Shinnie and Alex Harris.

Old foe Rudi Skacel started for Gary Locke's team alongside former Hearts' defender Kevin McHattie.

Hibs started brightly and Holt almost opened the scoring with a powerful strike which was deflected wide of the post then Paul Hanlon's header from the resultant James Keatings' corner struck the crossbar.

Midway through the first half Holt was shown a yellow card after a challenge on Ian Davidson then Fraser Fyvie went close with a strike from the edge of the penalty area.

Declan McManus was fortunate to escape a booking for scything down Bartley, much to the annoyance of the large travelling support from the capital however five minutes later he was shown a yellow card after a bad challenge on Stevenson.

Ross Callachan then escaped punishment for a terrible tackle on Fyvie which brought Lennon to his feet in protest.

Just before the break Hibs were reduced to 10 men after Bartley was sent off following a challenge on Bobby Barr, his second red card in his last two games although the previous one against Ayr United was rescinded.

It was unclear why Bartley was sent off although Finnie indicated that the midfielder had kicked out at Barr.

In time added on Thompson was booked for kicking the ball away right in front of the referee.

The referee left the field at half time to a chorus of boos from the Hibs' fans and their mood didn't improve when just after the break, he ignored a penalty claim after Holt was clearly bundled over by Kyle Benedictus inside the box.

Matthews was then booked for chopping down McGinn and from Keatings' free kick McHattie bundled Holt to the ground and Cummings was pushed in the back but once again the referee ignored the Hibs' players pleas.

The furious Hibs supporters behind the goal chanted 'Cheat Cheat Cheat' at Finnie but he redeemed himself when he denied Raith Rovers a penalty and booked Callachan for diving.

Benedictus was then booked for persistent fouling as Hibs continued to dominate possession despite being down to 10-men.

Midway through the second half Keatings dispossessed Davidson before firing a low cross into the area but Holt was just unable to connect with the ball.

Hibs were denied a third penalty claim when Keatings was bundled over then Neil Lennon was spoken to by the referee for his protests.

Great skill by Keatings set up Cummings but the striker was

unable to get the ball under control then Cummings outpaced McHattie and found Stevenson but his cross was cleared for a corner.

With eight minutes remaining Boyle and Brian Graham replaced Keatings and Holt then in the 89th minute David Gray went close with a header but then game ended all square.

Hibs travel back across the Forth Road Bridge next weekend to face Dunfermline.

Raith Rovers: Cuthbert, Davidson, Mvoto, Benedictus, McHattie
Matthews, Thompson, Callachan, Barr, Skacel, McManus. Subs
Brennan, Johnston, Stewart, Vaughan, Coustrain, Roberts.

Hibs: Marciano, Gray, Hanlon, McGregor, Stevenson, Bartley,
Fyvie, McGinn, Keatings, Holt, Cummings. subs: Laidlaw, Boyle,
Shinnie, Forster, Eardley, Graham, Harris

Referee Steven Finnie

Attendance 3753