

Hibs hopes of automatic promotion take a knock after suffering defeat in Paisley



Hibs hopes of automatic promotion took a knock tonight after losing 2-0 to bottom of the table St Mirren in Paisley.

Neil Lennon made two changes to the starting XI that drew with Dunfermline Athletic on Saturday with new signing Efe Ambrose taking over from the injured Liam Fontaine, and Grant Holt being replaced by Marvin Bartley.

Fraser Fyvie had the ball in the net after six minutes but his effort was ruled out then St Mirren started to dominate possession and created a number of good chances.

Cammy Smith, Stephen Mallan and Kyle Magennis all had chances before Ambrose almost connected with a John McGinn cross inside the six yard box.

Jason Cummings fired a free-kick from 35 yards into the hands of Billy O'Brien then Andrew Shinnie went close with a long range effort.

It was the hosts who took the lead however in the 34th minute when Stephen Mallan found Stelios Demetriou who cut inside, before hammering a powerful strike past Marciano.

Fraser Fyvie almost equalised just before the break but his shot flew well over the bar,

Saints made it 2-0 immediately after half time when Demetriou again cut in from the wing and fired home a powerful low strike.

Lennon replaced Bartley with Holt as Hibs tried to get back into the game and the substitution almost paid dividends.

Lewis Stevenson's cross was headed back into the danger area by David Gray and Martin Boyle seemed certain to score but O'Brien managed to block his shot from close range. The ball fell to Holt but he fired his shot straight into the keepers arms.

Hibs continued to press forward without testing O'Brien and St Mirren played on the break and looked the more likely side to score.

Hibs remain seven points clear but Dundee United have a game in hand. The pair meet at Tannadice next Friday night in a game which could go a long way in deciding who gets promoted.

After the game Lennon praised the St Mirren players and said that his team's performance was the worst so far this season.

He told BBC Scotland: "St Mirren thoroughly deserved to win – the hungrier team won, so I've no complaints. We've been on a very good run, but we're stepping off the gas a little bit, and you can't do that.

"We give them all the warnings before the game and they still didn't respond. All the 50-50s, second balls went to St Mirren because they wanted it more. It happens, it hasn't happened very often, it's a game gone, and we're giving other teams encouragement. We have to resurrect it very quickly and get back to where we were a week ago.

"That was the poorest we've played this season. We didn't look ready for the fight, and St Mirren were excellent – the best performance any team's played against us this season."

Hibs face Ayr United on Saturday in the quarter final of the William Hill Scottish Cup.

St Mirren: O'Brien, Demetriou, Mackenzie, Davis, Irvine

(Fjelde, 62), Magennis (Todd, 85), Mallan, McGinn, Morgan, Smith (Baird, 90), Sutton. Unused Substitutes: Langfield, Webster, Loy, Storie.

Hibernian: Marciano, Gray, McGregor, Ambrose, Stevenson, Bartley (Holt, 59), Fyvie, McGinn, Shinnie (Keatings, 70), Boyle (Graham, 77), Cummings. Unused substitutes: Laidlaw, McLean, Crane, Martin.

Referee: Euan Anderson.

Attendance: 3,441.