

Magnificent Hibs overcome Italian giants Naples at Easter Road



November marks the 50th anniversary of arguably the greatest European night in the history of Hibernian Football Club.

The Inter Cities Fairs Cup was the idea of Swiss pools supremo Ernst Thommen, Ottorino Barassi from Italy and English FA Secretary Stanley Rous to promote international trade fairs.

Hibs were drawn against Italian giants Naples who at the time of the game were domestic league leaders. They also had two world class players in their ranks, goalkeeper Dino Zoff who would later captain his country to a World Cup victory and Brazilian genius Jose Altafini.

Despite losing 4-1 in the first leg in Naples, Hibs had been far from outclassed and had been the better side for large parts of the opening period.

To add insult to injury however when Hibs were in Italy, sterling was devalued by 14% and they were unable to pay their hotel bill !

Not even the most optimistic fan gave Hibs any chance of overturning the scoreline in Edinburgh apart from manager Bob Shankly who was convinced that not only would his team win the return leg but that they would go through to the next round.

Just before the second leg, Hibs received a huge confidence boost with the news that the Altafini would not be travelling to Edinburgh due to a minor injury picked up the previous weekend.

Because of what was thought to be an unassailable lead, the Naples manager decided not to risk his star striker.

21,037 fans paid to watch the game and within five minutes Hibs took the lead when right back Bobby Duncan collected the ball on the half way line, evaded a couple of tackles and fired in a sensational left foot drive from 35 yards which flew high into the corner of the net.

Hibs mounted attack after attack and Peter Cormack was brought down inside the penalty box but the referee inexplicably awarded an indirect free kick. Zoff produced a superb save from a Pat Stanton header and Blanchi cleared an overhead kick from Colin Stein off the line.

Just before the break however Hibs added a second when Zoff was unable to hold a Stein strike and Pat Quinn was on hand to stroke the ball into the empty net.

The second half was played at a pulsating pace with the home side playing down the famous old slope toward the Cowshed which was packed with expectant Hibs fans.

In the 67th minute, Peter Cormack met an Alex Scott corner to increase Hibs lead to send the home supporters in the huge crowd into a frenzy.

While the celebrations were in full swing Scott sent over a cross to the far post and Stanton was on hand to head the ball into the net.

The Hibs fans were singing 'Easy Easy' which infuriated the Naples players and with 15 minutes remaining, full back Gerardo was sent off after a reckless tackle on Eric Stevenson.

A few minutes later the Italian's misery was complete when Stein intercepted a clearance before going through to score a fifth goal to give his side a famous victory and the Hibs

players a well deserved lap of honour at the end before their ecstatic supporters.

Alan McGraw who played in both legs told the Edinburgh Reporter: "In Italy the heat was unbelievable. Before the game we were all given a bunch of flowers by our opponents. None of us knew what to do with them so someone told us to throw them to the crowd but there was a moat round the pitch so they all ended up in the water.

"They beat us 4-1 but the score flattered them. The only difference between the teams was their striker Altifini who had unbelievable speed. Naples presented us with silver musical cigarette boxes afterwards.

"Bob Shankly told the press that the tie wasn't over but no-one believed him although when we found out they had left Altifini at home we were confident of progressing and we did, winning 5-0.

"That night was the highlight of my time at the club. Bobby Duncan scored early with a great goal and we were 3-0 up at half time leaving the Naples players shocked. We just kept going and never eased up. I don't imagine Dino Zoff conceded five goals very often but there was nothing he could do about any of them. After the game I remember one of their players kicking the dressing room door."

The teams that day were as follows:

Hibernian: Wilson; Duncan, Davis, Stanton, Madsen, McGraw, Scott, Quinn, Stein, Cormack and Stevenson

Napoli: Zoff; Narota, Fagliana, Zuritini, Fanzanato, Bianchi, Cane, Juliano, Orlando, Montefusco (Substitute: Girardo) and Barison