

# Hibs produce sensational second-half comeback to secure European victory



Hibs produced a sensational second half performance to secure victory over a very good Asteras Tripolis side at Easter Road tonight.

Neil Lennon's men looked to be down and out at half-time after two 'sucker punches' but a stirring fightback sent the fans home happy and leaves their European dreams very much alive.

Lennon made four changes to the starting XI that disposed of NSI Runavik 6-4 in the Faroe Islands last week.

David Gray, Ryan Porteous, Marvin Bartley and Oli Shaw made way for Paul Hanlon, Darren McGregor, Vykintas Slivka and Martin Boyle.

John McGinn who has been involved in speculation all week about a potential move to Celtic started in the centre of the

midfield.

The visitors were without three key players, full-backs Christos Tasoulis, Valentin Vlachos who were injured during pre-season training in Poland and Spanish midfielder Marc Fernandez who joined the club in the summer from Murcia.

An impeccably observed minute's silence was held ahead of the game as a mark of respect to those who died in the fatal wild fires in Greece this week.

The game kicked off in temperatures more suited to Asteras with the capital basking in heat, reportedly six degrees hotter than Greece.

Once again Lennon watched the match from the Director's Box as part of a European ban.

A tiny band of approximately Asteras supporters occupied a corner section of the South Stand.

Both sides had chances in the opening period but it was the Greeks who took the lead in the 11<sup>th</sup> minute when the impressive Georgios Kyriakopoulos cut in from the left and blasted the ball off Adam Bogdan and into the net from an acute angle.

Despite going a goal down, the supporters remained in fine voice and continued to back the team who responded with a sustained spell of pressure.

Hibs fought back immediately and McGinn fired inches over the bar from 30 yards then Steven Whittaker should have scored after finding himself free at the back post but his shot went over the bar from close range.

Kostas Triantafyllopoulos was booked for complaining once to often to the referee then annoyed the home fans by twice feigning injury.

McGinn was running the show, demonstrating why he is so highly

rated and he sent an inch perfect pass to Slivka who fired a low cross into the danger area which just eluded Florian Kamberi.

It looked only a matter of time before Hibs equalised but in the 34<sup>th</sup> minute the visitors struck again on the break, against the run of play.

Ambrose did well to block an attack but the ball fell to Kyriakopoulos who fired a superb strike into the net from 25-yards.

Lennon replaced Whittaker with David Gray at half time and the change of formation galvanised the team and the fans.

Hibs started at 100mph, fighting for every ball and Boyle almost pulled a goal back in the 48<sup>th</sup> minute after a lung bursting run by Ambrose but his 20 yard strike was well saved by keeper Giorgos Athanasidis.

Once again, the fans got right behind the team and the Greeks resorted to fouling at every opportunity.

In the 54<sup>th</sup> minute Lewis Stevenson and McGinn were both booked for simultaneous fouls on different players as play raged from end to end.

Asteras continued to be dangerous on the break, particularly down the left side with Ambrose having difficulty dealing with the speed of Nikos Kaltsas.

Hibs pulled one back in the 63<sup>rd</sup> minute when Ambrose headed Mallan's corner onto the bar before bundling the rebound into the net. He celebrated in typical Ambrose style with a double somersault.

Two minutes later the referee missed a blatant handball inside the penalty box and booked Boyle for his protests. Had VAR

been available there is no doubt that a penalty would have been awarded.

Stevenson then sent an inch perfect cross over from the left but the unmarked Slivka headed over the bar from eight yards.

McGregor was the next name in the book after a stramash involving Matias Iglesias, although when things settled down, Hibs were awarded the free-kick.

Moments later Easter Road erupted when Hibs grabbed a deserved equaliser. Another superb Stevenson cross was flicked on by Kamberi into the path of Gray. The full-back took a good first touch before drilling the ball into the corner of the net from eight yards.

Slivka was then tripped on the edge of the box by Triantafyllopoulos who was then rightly shown a second yellow card followed by a red.

Mallan's free-kick struck the wall before being cleared then McGinn fired over the bar as Hibs pressed for a winner.

McGinn sent a fantastic looping cross to the back post which Gray headed toward the bottom corner of the net but one again the keeper produced a great stop.

In time added on Ambrose ran 50 yards with the ball before sliding a pass to Mallan. He crossed to Boyle who beat his man inside the area but shot just over the bar.

That looked to be it, but with seconds remaining, Boyle sent in a powerful shot which Athanasiadis saved with his feet but the ball fell to Kamberi who bundled in into the net from close range sparking mayhem inside the ground.

The second leg takes place in Tripolis next Thursday.

Hibs: Bogdan, Whittaker, Ambrose, Hanlon, McGregor, Stevenson, Boyle, McGinn, Mallan, Slivka, Kamberi. Subs: Laidlaw, Gray,

Bartley, Swanson, S.Martin, Shaw, Porteous.

Asteras Tripolis: Athanasiadas, Pasalidis, Triantafyllopoulos, Munafo, Manias, Bellocq, Iglesias, Tsilianidis, Kotsiras, Kyriakopoulos. Subs; Papadopoulos, Valiente, Rolle, Douvikas, Martinez, Christopoulos, Bastianos

Referee Andreas Ekberg (Sweden)

Attendance 14,148