

Paul Hanlon's testimonial match ends in defeat to Blackburn Rovers



English Championship side Blackburn Rovers proved to be too strong for Hibs this afternoon in Paul Hanlon's testimonial match at a sun-drenched Easter Road.

Neil Lennon's men had the better of a hard fought and entertaining first half but were unable to capitalise on their chances.

Blackburn brought on a completely different side after the break, and two quick goals were enough to secure the victory.

Hanlon received a standing ovation from both sets of fans before the kick off and the Hibs' supporters also gave a warm welcome to former manager Tony Mowbray who started his managerial career with a successful spell at the club between 2004 and 2006.

Mowbray was responsible for blooding the 'golden generation' of youngsters who later won the CIS League Cup under his successor John Collins.

The big talking point ahead of the game was the inclusion of John McGinn who has been strongly linked with a move to Celtic.

New signing Adam Bogdan made his home debut while Stevie Mallan had to be content with a place on the bench.

Paul's son Ollie was a mascot for the game which was sponsored by The Vittoria Group.

Lennon took his place in the dugout for the last time ahead of a potential seven game ban including three domestic and four European matches.

From the outset it became clear that both sides were taking the game seriously with tackles flying in. McGinn in particular, demonstrated the skill and aggression that has made him a target for several clubs.

Hibs started brightly and won three corners in quick succession. David Gray almost opened the scoring with a powerful volley in the opening minute but Blackburn's keeper Jason Leutwiler produced a fine save.

The small band of travelling supporters tried to bait the home fans with a chorus of 'Football's Coming Home' but the Scots didn't bite.

In the 19th minute McGinn went close with a long range effort which Luetwiler did well to tip over the bar.

At the other end Bogdan did well to hold an effort from Peter Whittingham just before the referee decided that both teams needed a water break in the sunshine.

Both sides spurned great chances to take the lead just before

the break. McGinn slid an inch-perfect through ball into the path of Oli Shaw but Luetwiler denied the youngster with a superb diving save then Lewis Stevenson produced a sensational last-ditch tackle to rob Joe Nuttall who was clean through on goal.

Mowbray changed the entire team at halftime whilst Hibs replaced Efe Ambrose with Martin Boyle and Bogdan with Ross Laidlaw.

Rovers took the lead three minutes after the restart with a superb curling effort from Craig Conway then moments later Charlie Mulgrew struck the bar with a powerful free-kick.

The English side doubled their advantage in the 52nd minute when Willem Tomlinson broke clear. His initial shot was well saved by Laidlaw but the midfielder was on hand to net the rebound.

Kamberi tried an ambitious shot from a narrow angle as Hibs tried to get back into the game.

The hosts continued to press forward and Shaw should have done better after being put through but the keeper palmed away his lob.

Gray then produced a fantastic tackle to deny Bradley Dack as the Englishmen looked dangerous on the break.

On the hour mark Mallan replaced McGinn who left the field to a standing ovation. Vykintas Slivka also took over from Danny Swanson.

Mallan did enough in the last 30 minutes to convince the fans that he will be a valuable addition to the squad as Hibs tried desperately to get back into the game.

A great one-two between Boyle and Kamberi ended with the winger firing a low cross which just eluded Shaw. Stevenson

collected the ball at the back post but was crowded out before he could shoot.

Simon Murray and Steven Whittaker then replaced Shaw and Swanson and moments later Marvin Bartley and Stevenson made way for Lewis Allan and Sean Mackie.

Despite late pressure from Hibs, the visitors held out to take the honours.

Like his friend and team mate Lewis Stevenson who earned a testimonial match last year against Sunderland, Hanlon will generously donate a proportion of the gate receipts to local charities including CRY (Cardiac Risk in the Young) in memory of David Paul.

The 28-year-old made his debut under Mixu Paatelainen in January 2008 in a 3-0 win over Inverness Caledonian Thistle. Since then has gone on to make 335 appearances for the club, scoring 19 goals. His equaliser at Tynecastle which secured a famous 2-2 draw en route to Hibs winning the Scottish Cup will never be forgotten by the supporters.

Ahead of the game Hanlon said: "I have a lot of people to thank who have helped me along the way. First of all, and most importantly I want to thank my very supportive family. From the age of six, my parents have followed me up and down the country dragging my sister along with us. There is no doubt I would not have got to where I am today without their time and commitment.

"Also thank you to my wife, Danielle. She has supported me through the good and the bad and is always there to pick me up when I need it. On Sunday I'll also have my number one supporter here, My Nana. She has had a tough time recently, but her determination is inspiring, and I am so pleased that she will get to watch this game.

"A massive thank you must go to all the staff and players I

have seen come and go throughout the years, all of whom have played their part in my career. From Mixu Paatelainen handing me my debut through to our current manager, Neil Lennon, as well as all the players I have been lucky enough to share a dressing room with.

“I really believe our current squad is as strong as it has ever been during my time at Hibs. To everyone behind the scenes from the physio’s and sport science department to Tam and Joyce the kit team and all the rest of the staff, thank you!

“The most important part of any football club are the fans. Together we have enjoyed plenty memorable matches over the years. One of the highlights of playing for Hibs for me, is standing on the pitch at full time listening to you all sing ‘Sunshine on Leith’. No matter how many times I hear it, nothing makes me prouder to represent this special club. For your continued support, thank you!

“Finally, I would like to say a special thank you to Graeme Cadger and all my testimonial committee for dedicating their time and effort in to making all this possible. It is greatly appreciated that you have come together to mark this milestone in my career.

“This has also led to me having the opportunity to donate to Cardiac Risk in the Young (CRY) in memory of former academy player, David Paul and various other local children’s charities.”

Hibs now face NSI Runavik from the Faroe islands on Thursday night at Easter Road in the first qualifying round of this year’s Europa League.

Hibs: Bogdan, Gray, Stevenson, HANLON, McGregor, Bartley, McGinn, Ambrose, Kamberi, Shaw, Swanson. Subs: Laidlaw, Mallan, S.Murray, Whittaker, Boyle, Slivka, L.Allan, Mackie

Blackburn Rovers: Leutwiler, Bennett, Bell, Lenihan, Wharton, Travis, Evans, Rothwell, Butt, Nuttall, Davenport. Subs: Fisher, Graham, Mulgrew, Platt, Nyambe, Smallwood, Conway, Tomlinson, Whittingham, Dack.

Referee Gavin Duncan