

Hibs' Betfred Cup dreams end following Hampden defeat



Hibs' hopes of a Betfred League Cup final place ended with a comprehensive 5-2 defeat to Celtic at Hampden Park this evening and although two of Celtic's goals were controversial, Neil Lennon's men were deserved winners and the only question amongst the Hibs' fans leaving the stadium was whether the performance was enough to keep Paul Heckingbottom in his job.

Heckingbottom made two changes to the starting XI that drew with Livingston on Wednesday. Adam Jackson and Josh Vela replaced the suspended Ryan Porteous and Glenn Middleton.

Celtic started brightly and had a claim for a penalty when Mohamed Elyounoussi's corner appeared to strike the arm of Paul Hanlon but referee Bobby Madden waved away the appeals.

Seconds later the Norwegian striker opened the scoring with a powerful header from James Forrest's cross.

Moments later Celtic doubled their advantage when French striker Odsonne Edouard who looked well offside ran onto a Kris Ajer ball before setting up Callum McGregor to finish from close range.

Hibs pulled one back against the run of play when Boli Bolingoli challenge rebounded into the path of Melker Hallberg, who fired the ball past Fraser Forster.

Just before the break the Hoops regained their two-goal advantage when Edouard unselfishly set up Elyounoussi to make it 3-1.

Both teams made changes at half-time. Florian Kamberi came on for midfielder Josh Vela – while Celtic swapped Bolingoli for Jonny Hayes.

Neil Lennon's men continued to press forward and were twice denied by the post in the space of three minutes.

Elyounoussi's angled effort rebounded off the post into Chris Maxwell's arms then Forrest's effort rebounded to safety.

Celtic made it 4-1 in controversial circumstances after Maxwell came to claim an Elyounoussi corner and appeared to be impeded by Christopher Jullien. The ball dropped into the path of Scott Brown, who fired it into the net from close range.

Once again the referee ignored the Hibs' players' protests and the goal stood.

Hibs refused to line down however and Kamberi headed home a

superb Tom James cross then he almost set up Christian Doidge with a wonderful cross but the ball just eluded the striker.

In the dying minute Celtic broke at speed and Brown exchanged passes with Elyounoussi before firing a powerful effort which Maxwell saved but the ball fell kindly to the former Hibs' midfielder who stroked it into the net.

After the game Heckingbottom told BBC Scotland: "It's the league where we're judged

"I've got to park that, get rid of it. Because we're playing a cup final next week. We all know things could have been so much better in the league, but it's not so we have to put that right."

"It wasn't a performance good enough to win the game and get to a cup final, I said before that was my focus.

"You can't expect to get anything when you go two down to Celtic that early on. That's where the game was lost for me.

"Whether that was the occasion – Hampden for a semi-final – or the pressure Celtic put on us because of how quick they were making us play. That's where it was lost, that first part of the game."

Hibs: Maxwell, James, Jackson, Hanlon, Stevenson, Hallberg, Vela, Mallan, Allan, Horgan, Doidge

Subs: Marciano, Whittaker, Slivka, Boyle, Newell, Naismith,

Kamberi

Celtic: Forster, Frimpong, Jullien, Ajer, Bolingoli, Brown, McGreogr, Rogic, Forrest, Elyounoussi, Edouard

Subs: Gordon, Bitton, Hayes, Elhamed, Ntcham, Christie, Johnston

Referee Bobby Madden.

Attendance 46,782