

Newell to rescue as Hibs fail to hit heights

Hibs kicked-off their European campaign this season in the tiny Principality of Andorra in the mountains between France and Spain, but they failed to scale the heights.

In fact, the Easter Road men have left themselves a hill to climb in the Europa Conference League second-leg after jetting home disappointed with a 2-1 defeat in the Municipal Stadium.

Joe Newell's (pictured) goal one minute into injury time from a free-kick could, however, provide a lifeline for the Scots.

They showed early promise, breaking the opposition's midfield press in this second qualifying round first-leg and Elie Youan shot from the edge of the box.

The effort was saved by the Inter Club d'Escaldes' goalkeeper Adria Munoz and Josh Campbell also tested the home goalkeeper, firing for goal and his shot was also dealt with.

The men from Easter Road did however have to survive two early shocks at the picturesque ground nestling between tree clad hills.

And the visitors suffered a shock when they went behind after 15 minutes. Poor defending allowed the home side to advance down the right and into the box.

Morocco-born Ander El Haddadi sent the ball across the Hibs box and defender Adria Gallego sent the ball home from close range after an initial shot was parried by David Marshall.

The home side were backed by an enthusiastic support in a stadium with a stone wall on one side and only a small stand behind one of the goals. It was populated by a knot of Hibs fans.

They had high expectations but the hard-working Andorran side had proved in the opening 30 minutes that they are a competent side and, indeed, Hibs had few telling attacks during that period.

The Scots were pressed hard by the eager home combine who are in their fourth European campaign and Hibs were forced into playing the long ball out of defence.

The Easter Road side struggled to build attacks and appeared to lack ideas but they also had to suffer some robust challenges.

When they did find an opening chances were wasted with overhit balls and misplaced passes.

The visitors cause was not helped when new skipper Paul Hanlon suffered a facial injury in a midfield challenge and had to receive medical treatment.

Mintues later Youan danced his way into the opposition box down the left and fired for goal. The Hibs players appealed for handball but the referee was unmoved.

But the official brought out a yellow card after a strong tackle by Irish midfielder Jake Doyle-Hughes near the half-way line.

Manager Lee Johnson obviously had work to do in his half-time talk but it was evident that the Scots needed to move the ball more quickly and to cut out errors as the unfancied opposition

continued to dominate play.

However, Hibs broke upfield as the break approached and Elias Melkersen had an opportunity on the right hand side but produced a tame finish.

The Andorran outfit could feel well-pleased with their performance in the first 45-plus minutes but Hibs had work to do and Melkerson was left in the dressing-room at half-time.

Johnson's men were playing against a side keen to sit deep and counter attack and Hibs upped their tempo with substitute Newell testing the opposition goalkeeper.

Christian Doidge was also introduced and he had an early opportunity with a header but Hibs account remained blank. They took over from Dylan Levitt and Melkersen.

And Inter had a chance at the other end with Marshall having to save near the crossbar from a looping header from the edge of the box.

The home side looked as if they could add to their lead but Hibs brought on Jeggo for Doyle-Hayes and they began to force the pace in a bid to salvage something from the game as the clock ticked down.

But disaster struck. A long ball into the Hibs' half was picked up by El Haddadi on the right hand side of the box. His innocuous looking shot from an angle was parried by Marshall but the loose ball was pounced on by Ivorian player Jean Luc Assoubre who made no mistake from close range with the former Scotland stopper ruing his error. Time: 71 minutes.

Adam Le Fondre latched onto a knock down by Doidge and sent his shot inches wide as Hibs pressed for a goal and Doidge had a chance seconds later but he failed to convert.

Hibs had a great chance from a free-kick in a central position at the edge of the box after turning the ball over in midfield

and Newell found the net with a low shot with his left foot. The man lying behind the ball failed to stop the effort and the goal could have a massive impact in the final result after the return on Thursday, August 3 (19.15) at Easter Road.