

# Hibs stunned by late Saints strike

Hibs started their opening cinch Premiership clash at home to St Mirren with huge optimism after their crushing UEFA Europa Conference League, qualifying round, victory over Andorran minnows Inter d'Escaldes on Thursday.

Former Scotland goalkeeper David Marshall, injured in the warm-up on Thursday, was back between the posts but for St Mirren, Mikael Mandron was injured in the warm-up and was replaced by Toyosi Olusanya.

Hibs confidence, however, was dented early when the Paisley side netted two goals in two minutes. The warning signs were there as St Mirren exposed the home side's defensive frailties, evident even in the 6-1 win over the Andorran side.

And The Buddies were awarded a penalty after a challenge on Greg Kiltie by Joe Newell, one of Thursday's heroes. Some felt it was a soft award and the decision was reviewed on VAR, it was a long check, but given and Mark O'Hara netted when he tucked the ball home to Marshall's left.

The visitors increased the agony two minutes later they doubled their lead. O'Hara made light of a challenge from Josh Campbell and slipped the ball to Olusanya who left home

defenders in his wake and kept his cool to slide the ball home and silence the Easter Road fans.

The goal highlighted Hibs' lack of pace and Olusanya made them pay heavily. A long way back for the home side, but they upped their tempo and pinned Saints back but were unable to pierce their resolute rearguard.

Unsurprisingly, the fans, who were ecstatic on Thursday, were deflated and made their feelings known.

Marshall was soon under pressure again and fumbled the ball past the post after a heavy challenge from Conor McMenamin, making his Premiership debut. The Saints player was booked.

Lee Johnson, Hibs' manager, reacted. Allan Delferriere and Campbell were substituted by Jordan Obita and Dylan Levitt, however the Easter Road men made it easy for St Mirren by lobbing hopeful passes forward.

Frustration flowed from the terraces and the boos at the end of the opening session said it all.

Hibs tried to up their tempo and Elie Youan took the game to St Mirren but was unable to unlock the tight rearguard. Boyle was substituted after 60 minutes with Adam Le Fondre coming on.

It was the Stockport-born player's first start in the Premiership, aged 36, after a career with a number of English clubs, including Wolverhampton Wanderers, Wigan Athletic and Bolton, plus a spell in India and Australia, and he made it count with a lifeline goal after 72 minutes.

Saints slept at a throw-in and hard-working Christian Doidge picked up the ball and drove down the left before delivering a cross. Up popped Le Fondre and the veteran met the ball first time to send the ball low into the corner. Game on.

The Hibs fans, desperate for success, upped their noise level

and Doidge had a chance, so did Le Fondre. He sent a header onto the roof of the net,

The pressure eventually told and Doidge (pictured) was in the right place at the right time to level in the dying minutes following a pass from Youan. A get out of jail card, possibly but just reward for a player who worked his socks off for Hibs in this game.

Hemming then denied Levitt with a save from a shot which came through a ruck of bodies as Johnson's men looked for the winner but, at the other end, Hibs suffered a massive blow when Kiltie crossed and Alex Grieve stole between two defenders to head the ball home.

That sparked a frantic finish and Levitt's shot was stopped by Alex Gogic's knee after beating Hemming as the match entered injury time but St Mirren held out.

PICTURE: from our library