

Watkins treble puts slick Villa in easy street

England striker Ollie Watkins claimed a treble as Aston Villa recorded a comfortable first-leg victory after a clinical destruction of Hibs in the UEFA Europa Conference League play-off before a full-house at Easter Road.

The sides meet again in the return at Villa Park next Thursday and Unai Emery's men claimed five goals in the game, three in the first-half and two in the second, and enjoyed 71 per cent of possession against only 29 per cent from the home side.

Unai Emery's men had seven shots on target against two and logged 623 passes against 257 from Lee Johnson's men.

The visitors signalled their intention in the opening minutes when lively Lucas Digne headed towards the goal and Hibs' hot-stop David Marshall had to save with his feet but it did not take long for deadlock to be broken.

Watkins headed into the net from a Digne cross and Hibs did threaten with Jordan Obita set-up by Martin Boyle (pictured) but his effort was deflected wide.

Boyle then went down in the penalty box after a tussle with Douglas Luiz but the referee refused a penalty and minutes later Marshall made a great stop to deny Leon Bailey before Watkins headed home at the back post for No 2.

Defence had been a concern for pundits before kick-off and Bailey added a third with a header while lurking at the back post.

There was a frantic start after the break and Elie Youan cut inside and fired goalwards only to see the ball tipped over the bar. A scare for Villa but Watkins added a fourth after a counter-attack.

No 5 arrived when Luiz converted from the penalty spot after midfielder Bertrand Traore had been brought down. A difficult night for the Edinburgh club.