

# Defeat for Hibs at Celtic Park now all eyes on Ibrox in race for third place

Celtic Park continued to be an unhappy hunting ground for Hibs as the Edinburgh side fell to their fourth defeat of the season at the stadium, having exited both cups there.

Hibs head coach David Gray made one change to the starting XI that beat Dundee United last weekend with Junior Hoilett making way for the more robust Josh Campbell in midfield.

For Celtic Breandan Rodgers made three changes. Kasper Schmeichel returned from a shoulder injury. Defender Auston Trusty and winger Nicolas Kuhn also returned in place of Cameron Carter-Vickers, James Forrest and keeper Viljami Sinisalo.

Ahead of kick-off the Hibs players gave their opponents a guard of honour by applauding the champions onto the pitch as a mark of respect for their achievement this season.

The game kicked off in sunny conditions and the Hibs players, wearing their purple and green striped third strip wore black armbands in memory of former owner Sir Tom Farmer who sadly passed away earlier this week.

Celtic started on the front foot and piled the pressure on the Hibs defence. Chris Cadden did well to clear an Arne Engels

cross from the right before Jordan Smith saved an effort from Adam Idah.

Following a wonderful move that started in their own box Diazen Maeda set up Idah but the striker just failed to connect with the cross.

Despite Celtic's domination it was Hibs that almost took a shock lead against the run of play when Myko Kuharevich flicked on a Nectar Triantis cross into the path of Martin Boyle but Schmeichel produced a wonderful star jump save reminiscent of his father Peter to deny the Hibs skipper.

Kuharevich then fired wide from the edge of the area. The Hoops continued to press forward and at one stage had a 95% possession stat.

Hibs did take the lead in the 25<sup>th</sup> minute when Cadden collected a Smith free-kick. His cross from the right wing found Campbell on the edge of the area.

Campbell's strike then deflected into the path of Boyle and the skipper slotted the ball into the net from 12-yards to the delight of the travelling supporters.

At the other end Engels controlled a long ball from Anthony Ralston but his strike flew high and wide over the bar.

In the 32<sup>nd</sup> minute the Hibs fans held their breath when the ball struck Cadden's arm inside the penalty box but a VAR check decided that the referee was correct in not awarding the penalty.

Celtic equalised in the 40<sup>th</sup> minute when Nicolas Kuhn got on the end of a long ball from Ralston rounded Smith and slotted the ball into the net.

Two minutes later Kuhn turned provider with a superb dinked through ball to Idah who made no mistake with a powerful

angled drive from close range.

Hibs won their first corner of the game within 15-seconds of the restart but the danger was cleared.

Moments later Rocky Bushiri headed a long throw from Jack Iredale inches wide.

Iredale and Kuhn were both booked following a confrontation after a foul on Campbell.

Celtic added a third in the 57<sup>th</sup> minute when the Hibs defence were unable to clear a cross from the left which Smith failed to gather and following some neat one-touch play from the champions Reo Hatate stroked in a lovely third goal.

Hibs introduced Nicky Cadden, Kieron Bowie and Junior Hoilett in an effort to get back into the game.

Seconds after coming on, Cadden crossed an excellent ball for fellow substitute Bowie but the big striker was unable to properly connect.

Hoilett then tested Schmeichel from a decent position, but the keeper did well to deny the Canadian.

Rocky was next to try his luck heading wide from Cadden's out-swinging corner.

Dwight Gayle replaced Campbell in the 75th minute.

Chris Cadden and Nectar Triantis both had their name taken by referee Colin Steven for stopping Celtic counter-attacks.

Dylan Levitt made way for Alasana Manneh, for the final 10 minutes of the tie.

But Celtic managed the game well and deservedly took the three points.

After the final whistle Gray told BBC Scotland: "The timing of

the goals is against us, that was the killer today. Celtic will always have periods when they dominate and we knew that.

“Coming in 2-1 down [at half-time] was a big blow mentally for the players. The goals we lose we have to look at because they were quite soft from our point of view. The second half reaction was positive, but the third goal takes the stuffing out the game.

“Everyone knows what’s at stake, it’s the final push of the season, three games in a week. It’s about who’s got the mentality and I believe the group is good enough to do it.”

All eyes are now on Ibrox tomorrow where Aberdeen face Rangers looking for a victory that would see them draw level on points with Hibs in third place with two games remaining.

Celtic: Schmeichel, Ralston, Trusty, Scales, Taylor, McGregor, Engels, Hatate, Kuhn, Maeda, Idah.

Substitutes: Sinisalo, Yang, McCowan, Schlupp, Nawrocki, Kenny, Bernardo, Forrest, McArdle.

Hibs: Smith, O’Hora, Rocky, Iredale, C Cadden, Triantis, Levitt, Campbell, Obita, Boyle, Kuharevich.

Substitutes: Bursik, Miller, Ekpiteta, Alasana, N Cadden, Bowie, Moriah-Welsh, Hoilett, Gayle.