

HIBERNIAN

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HIBERNIAN



CELTIC

SUNDAY

6 MAY 2001

Kick-off 3.00pm



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HONOURS

SCOTTISH FOOTBALL LEAGUE CHAMPIONS
Winners 1902/03, 1947/48,
1950/51, 1951/52

SCOTTISH FOOTBALL LEAGUE FIRST DIVISION
CHAMPIONS
Winners 1980/81, 1998/99

SCOTTISH FOOTBALL LEAGUE CUP
Winners 1972/73, 1991/92

SCOTTISH FA CUP
Winners 1886/87, 1901/02

MANAGER'S REPORT

ALEX McLEISH



Welcome back to Easter Road for tonight's match with Celtic. When we were last in action at home we drew 1-1 with Kilmarnock. That game was typical of the Hibs-Kilmarnock clashes of this season. It was our sixth meeting and each and every one had been a close encounter, indeed the fact that we are third and fourth in the league respectively dictates that we are close. I felt that on the day we got a deserved draw despite not being at our best.

We took the opportunity to freshen things up a bit for the visit of Killie, and there is a good opportunity to continue doing this in the lead up to the Cup Final as I strive to keep an edge to my squad whilst seeking freshness. It was important that we did not lose the Killie game and held on to our 12 point advantage with only 4 games to go.

Whilst we would have loved to have taken all three points and chased Rangers to the wire for the Champions League spot I have to say I am very happy with what my players have done this season. To have clinched 3rd spot with four games to go is most impressive and a



magnificent achievement. I think that everyone connected with this club; players, staff, and fans have shown good spirit throughout the season.

Moving on to Dens Park last Sunday it was satisfying to record a fine away win. Whilst recognising that we have had a very strong home record this season, part of the reason that we have qualified for Europe has been due to our good away record. Given that we have not played at our best since the winter break the result was doubly pleasing.

We won thanks to two clinical finishes by our French strikers Marc Libbra and David Zitelli; but whilst we played well in patches there were still periods where I thought we were sloppy and casual. We must tighten up on this before the end of the season.

In recent weeks I have had a good look at the younger boys at our club and Garry O'Connor, in scoring six goals for the Under-21s, forced his way into my thinking. We had him on the bench at Dundee last Sunday and he came on for the final twenty minutes, which was an important milestone for the youngster, and another notch on his career belt.

Injuries have decimated our central defensive ranks of late

and with Martin McIntosh, Mark Dempsie, Ulrik Laursen and Paul Fenwick all unavailable at Dundee last weekend I had a difficult selection problem. I could have fielded Ian Murray, who is very versatile, in central defence but that would have weakened our left wing-back area so I turned to Dirk Lehmann. Dirk has been playing in this position recently for the Under-21s and I felt he could do a job for us. He had an excellent match, displaying great composure, and with his obvious prowess in the air he

season is due to injuries to key players at crucial stages of the season. However, we kept our Scottish Cup run going during that spell and that satisfies me greatly. Before the Scottish Cup got underway I asked the players to have a special focus for this competition and stressed to them the significance of peaking for these games; they have done that.

Thanks to their ability to focus on these games we find ourselves in the final against tonight's opponents – the league champions – Celtic. We

“ Before the Scottish Cup got under way I asked my players to have a special focus for that competition”

actually ended up giving me some food for thought in that position. I can recall Paul Hegarty converting from centre-forward to centre-half in the seventies very successfully, and even going on to win Scotland caps in that position, so it can be done.

Probably part of the reason that we have lost some momentum in the league this

aplaud Martin O'Neill, his players and his back-room staff on their marvellous achievement of winning the league. However, we like to make it tough for teams visiting Easter Road and we hope that we can give Celtic something to think about today as we move towards the cup final clash with them.

Alex McLeish

THE MANAGER