

**TT No.145: *Justin Holmes*** - Saturday 23rd January 2010; **Hibernian** v Hamilton Academical; Scottish Premier League; Venue: Easter Road, Edinburgh; Score 5-1; Admission: £22.00; Programme: £3.00; Attendance: 11,481; Match Rating: 4\*.

This was yet another game that I hadn't planned to take in until the last minute. Spending the weekend in Edinburgh thanks to a bargain return train ticket from London to Edinburgh for just £18, I had intended to watch an East of Scotland League game at either Spartans, Edinburgh City or Preston Athletic. However, a visit of the wonderful Edinburgh Castle took longer than anticipated, meaning that I would miss the earlier 2pm kick off at those grounds, and so I headed off on the half hour walk towards the Edinburgh suburb of Leith for the Scottish Premier League game between Hibernian and Hamilton.

Easter Road is a stadium that has seen considerable redevelopments in recent years, with three sides having large, impressive, modern stands with excellent views of the pitch. Unfortunately, I sat in the one stand that has not been redeveloped, the East Stand, which runs along one side of the pitch, as this was the one stand with cash turnstiles. For the other stands, one had to queue at the ticket office to get a ticket prior to entering the turnstiles. I wish I had made the effort to queue. The East Stand has had seats installed on a former terrace, with the seat rows at such a low incline that views of the action were frequently obscured and it was necessary to stand frequently to see distant parts of the pitch. Combined with a low roof made even lower with a television gantry, this was one of the worst locations I can remember for watching a top tier football game, and I would urge others not to make the same mistake by sitting in this stand!

On a more positive note, the game itself was one of the more entertaining games I have witnessed this season. Hibernian have been doing well this season, lying in fourth place and chasing hard for a European spot. Perennial strugglers Hamilton were down in 10th place out of 12, and so this game certainly looked a home banker from the outset.

Hamilton, however, can count themselves very unlucky to have lost by such a wide margin in the end. They looked the stronger team for the first quarter of an hour, carving out some good chances with Hibernian looking sloppy and struggling to string passes together. However, once Hibernian scored their opening goal, Hibernian transformed into an irresistible force, admittedly aided by some calamitous defending, and had opened up a three-goal lead by half time, and it could easily have been more.

Hibernian would not have wanted half time to come, but their domination continued into the second half, and with 55 minutes on the clock, Hibernian had opened up a five-goal lead. Unfortunately, this seemed to be the signal for a quite breath-taking game to disintegrate, as Hibernian clearly decided to stick with what they had and became sloppy and guilty of showboating at times for the rest of the

game. To their great credit, Hamilton never gave up in this game, and for the last half hour of the game, were by far the better side. They scored a consolation goal on 69 minutes, had several other chances and it would certainly have been a fairer reflection on the game had Hamilton scored one or two more.

So, Hibernian continue to push hard for European qualification, and for 24 hours at least, rose to third place in the league, and perhaps more importantly, opened up an eight-point lead having played a game less than their bitter Edinburgh rivals, Hearts. Hamilton's position still looks quite precarious with just three points separating them and bottom club Falkirk, although with only one club being relegated from the Scottish Premier League, their chances of staying up look reasonable, despite the apparent hiding they received today.

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