

Rugby – Edinburgh v Racing Metro 92, Heineken Cup, Round 2



What a game! If the sponsor had been a different brewing company “We don’t do Rugby, but...” would have fitted nicely. 11 tries and 95 points in a thrilling Heineken cup encounter at Murrayfield saw Edinburgh come away victors by one point against French side, Racing Metro 92.

It looked as if Racing Metro were going to confirm French team’s legendary lack of away form – or interest – in European matches when, inside 10 minutes, Edinburgh were 17-3 ahead after a try from Tim Visser in the first minute and another from Greg Laidlaw with less than eight minutes on the clock, Laidlaw converting both and still managing to fit in a penalty, the visitors three point coming from a Jonathon Wisniewski penalty. Three minutes later, Racing scored their first try from a wide passing move that had winger Julien Saubade breaking through the Edinburgh defence and slide in near the posts. Kick over, 17-10 to Edinburgh.

Three minutes later another Racing try, this time from Juan Imhoff and another conversion from Wisniewski and the score was now 17-17 – and less than 15 minutes into the match. From here the French side took control and through another two converted tries from Jonathon Wisniewski and Henry Chavancy had them stretch away to a 31-17 lead, with only a penalty from Laidlaw in answer to leave the half-time score at 31-20 in favour of the visitors.

It only took Racing 13 minutes of the second half to turn the screw and put another two tries and a penalty past the

Edinburgh team to have a 24 point lead, at 44-20 and with less than 20 minutes to go it looked like it might be game over. With 63 minutes of the game gone, Edinburgh finished a period of possession and attacking play with a try under the posts from Netani Talei and with Laidlaw converting Edinburgh were now only (only!) 17 points behind. Soon it was up to 20, as a penalty from Wisniewski took Racing up to 47 points. A yellow card for Orlandi gave Edinburgh possession and with 13 minutes to go another break through the defence from the home side put the ball in the hands of Tom Brown who dived over in the corner, Laidlaw again converting. 47-34.

And it went on. A superb succession of passing and rucking from their own 22 ended with Edinburgh No. 7, Roddy Grant, going outside the defence and running round to score under the posts and take the score, with the conversion from Laidlaw, to 47-41, Edinburgh closing in and with at least two bonus points. That wasn't enough, though, and with barely four minutes to go, Edinburgh secured ball deep in the Racing 22 and a wide move to the left had a two man overlap and, with try machine Visser getting his hands on the ball five metres out, there was only going to be one outcome. With Visser's second and Edinburgh's sixth try, it was down to Man-of-the-Match, Greg Laidlaw, to convert from two metres in from touch and to take the lead. No pressure then!

On a roll, the ball sailed between the posts and the crowd went wild. 48-47 and all the home side had to do now was to secure and hold possession from the kick-off for the remaining three minutes and the game was theirs. Apart from giving away a penalty with 40 seconds to go, at least. Too far out for a shot at goal, the French choose to go for the line-out and try and work a drop-goal in to the attack. And it so nearly came off. Inside the 22 and in front of the posts, scrum-half Mattieu Lorre passed the ball back to Juan-Martine Hernandez and as he lined up for an easy drop, Edinburgh screamed off the line and put enough pressure on the French kicker to make

him fluff the kick. With the final whistle going, the home side weren't sure whether to leap about in excitement or pass a collective sigh of relief. A mixture of both seemed to be the order of the day and Edinburgh had secured their second win in the competition, both against highly respected opposition. London Irish, who lie second in the Aviva Premiership and Racing Metro, last year's French Championship runner's up.

Edinburgh's biggest crowd of the season, just over 5,000, will have to wait a long time to see a game as exciting as this one. The action was never ending and it is with great credit to the fitness and skill of both sets of players that they thrilled and entertained for eighty minutes and left the Edinburgh supporters, all too often disappointed, on a high after the game. One indicator of a great match was the Photographer's Room after full time. Usually a hive of quiet muttering and keyboard tapping as photos get edited and sent around the publishers and agencies, it was instead, for a few minutes at least, a hive of excited conversation.

Finally, it appeared from exchanges with supporters that French Rugby icon, Sebastien Chabal, was one reason for at least a few of them being there. So no apologies for the photograph!

Edinburgh's next home match is against Aironi on the 2nd December in the RaboDirect PRO12 League.

Report and photo – John Preece

Web – <http://www.photoboxgallery.com/jlp-photography>