

Rugby – Edinburgh v Cardiff Blues Heineken Cup



Almost literally a 'game of two halves', Edinburgh went into Friday's encounter with the Cardiff Blues needing to do no less than win to keep their hopes of qualification to the knock-out stages of the Heineken Cup on track. After last week's defeat to the Blues, in spite of a good start, Edinburgh were in second place in Pool 2, trailing Cardiff by three points so the win was vital. They duly delivered, but didn't manage to keep the Welsh side from collecting a bonus point in the 79th minute to go into a share of the lead at the top.

The first half belonged to Edinburgh as they again went on the attack from the whistle, being awarded a penalty for holding on, which Greg Laidlaw slotted home to open the home side's account. Laidlaw (pictured), in his 100th match for Edinburgh, went on to score 14 of Edinburgh's final tally of 19 in a typically accurate display of place kicking, only missing one kick on the night.

A fine display of running rugby and strong forward play saw the home side up the score to six after 10 minutes. In between scores Tim Visser – not to be Man-of-the-Match this week! That went to Netani Talei – was only prevented from scoring yet another try by a superb Lee Halfpenny tackle, as 'last man standing', a few metres short of the line. Visser wasn't to be denied for long, however, and a break by Nick de Luca saw the ball out to Visser who romped through two defenders to score in the corner. With Laidlaw kicking the conversion, Edinburgh were 13 points ahead with 15 minutes on the clock. From the resultant kick-off, Cardiff gathered and went on the attack, from which they came away with their first score of the

evening. 13-3 to the home side.

The next ten minutes saw a resumption of Edinburgh's assault on the Cardiff try line, with attack after attack culminating in Visser failing to collect a high ball inside the Cardiff goal area. With 10 minutes to go and the visitors on the back foot, another penalty from Laidlaw took the score out to 16-3. During this period, French referee Pascal Gauzerre managed to get himself caught up in a ruck, but, somehow, extracted himself with no injuries other than to his dignity. The half ended as it had begun, with Edinburgh trying to batter down the doors of the Cardiff defence and coming away with a score to go into the break 19-3 ahead.

The second half was all Cardiff and only a series of missed passes and dropped balls, Halfpenny dropping the ball from less than five metres out, prevented the Welsh team from running in at least three tries, as they pinned Edinburgh back in their 22 for long periods of the match. A few forays upfield from Edinburgh didn't look like scoring and 'normal service' was resumed. However strong and determined defence left Cardiff restricted to nine points from three penalty kicks, the last being that 79th minute, 40 metre success from Halfpenny that left the visitors with a bonus point and retention of the top spot in Pool 2 on points difference, both teams with 13, with it all to play for. With the Pool winners and the two best runners-up from all Pools going through to the knock-out rounds, Edinburgh must gain, at the very least, a bonus point away to Racing Metro and beat London Irish at home to maximise their chances. As it currently stands, 13 points is the top runners-up tally, so if all goes well, then a place in the next round for only the second time is on the cards.

A crowd of 4,384 turned out on a cold night, so things are looking up on the attendance side of things (less than 1,300 to one game last season), And as long as Edinburgh play well and at least look like winners, things should only improve.

Next home match is on Boxing Day as Glasgow travel across the country for the first half of a double header – the David Lloyd 1872 Cup – with the return fixture at Firhill on 1st January.

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