

Rugby – Edinburgh v London Irish, 22nd January 2012



For the first time since 2004, Edinburgh Rugby have qualified for the knock-out stages of the Heineken Cup. And they did so in some style, winning five of their six matches, topping their group, finishing third in the overall standings and coming out with a home draw in the quarter-finals. Admittedly this will be against one of Europe's, if not the World's top clubs, Toulouse – a club whose budget reputedly exceeds that of many International federations...

Nearly 10,900 spectators turned out to watch Edinburgh give themselves the best chance of simply qualifying by having to secure the win in the first instance. A bonus point win and match results elsewhere would determine where in the table they ended up and who they would play.

London Irish, with their token Irishman Bob Casey at the helm, were the first with points on the board. An early attack from Edinburgh was absorbed fairly easily and, with a quick foray up the field, a penalty was secured and the first three points were racked up with ten minutes on the clock.

Securing ball from the kick-off, Edinburgh resumed the assault, using their big forwards to move the ball up the park, before Greg Laidlaw saw a wee gap, and with Tim Visser prowling on the wing, slid the ball in behind the Exiles' defence for him to run on to and score Edinburgh's first of four tries. With Laidlaw in fine form, the conversion went over and it was 7-3 to the home side.

And it continued, with London Irish on the back foot, another ten minutes of, mostly, Edinburgh ball left Laidlaw with a simple penalty to take the score out to 10-3. London Irish

fought back from the kick-off and came away with their own score from a penalty a few minutes later. After a period of fairly even play Laidlaw was presented with another chance to put the home side further ahead, and, in what was to be a flawless kicking display, he duly obliged – 13-6 to Edinburgh.

With five minutes of the half remaining and following a drive deep into the visitors 22, the ball ended out wide on the right wing in the hands of Jim Thompson who crossed the line to score Edinburgh's second try. With Laidlaw again kicking the points, the home side went into the break 20-6 ahead.

The second half started fairly cautiously for both sides with a few probing kicks up and down the field, before London Irish took the initiative and spent a lengthy period of time encamped deep in the Edinburgh 22, hammering away at the Edinburgh defence. Even with two penalty awards, one taken quickly, the other a scrum, they couldn't break through the superb host's defence and only a turn-over ball from Thompson prevented what really should have been a try. Having weathered this storm, Edinburgh again moved the field, ending up with Roddy Grant with hands on the ball. A brilliant pass from out of a tackle saw the ball in Matt Scott's hands. His pass went out to Visser who galloped home round the outside of Delon Armitage to cross the whitewash in the corner. The team went wild. The crowd went wild. The referee... Well, the referee blew up for a forward pass from Grant. Shame.

Securing ball from the scrum, it was Irish's turn to have a go. And this they did and were awarded with a try from Jonathan Joseph. A wide move up the wing, a kick through, and Joseph gathered to romp home outside the defence to score. With the kick missed the score stood at a slightly worrying 20-11.

The home side didn't quite see it that way and two tries in the final ten minutes, one from close in by Man-of-the-Match, Netani Telai and the second from another back's move leaving

Lee Jones (pictured) to sprint up the line, finished off a superb display from the Edinburgh side. With Laidlaw scoring from both kicks, the final score was 34-11 to the home team – a team who, at the beginning of the tournament, were ‘granted’ a possible third place in the group by Sky Sport’s panel of ‘experts’. What do they know? Given that Edinburgh currently lie ninth out of twelve in the RaboDirect league, you can almost see where they were coming from.

So, with the big boys of European rugby coming out to play at Murrayfield at the beginning of April, what chance a semi-final place? Well, after this season’s HC display, anything’s possible.

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