

Rugby – Scotland v France, RBS 6 Nations, 26 February 2012



Scotland faced France at Murrayfield with two defeats in the bank from two matches and hoping for 'third time lucky'.

It wasn't to be, however. France sneaked ahead with a 58th minute try and sealed the win with 12 minutes to go with a Beauxis drop-goal.

It wasn't all bad news. Scotland played with tremendous attacking flair and had France pinned back for long periods of the match. They went into the lead after the eighth minute with a try from Stuart Hogg in the right corner after a move which switched play from one touch-line to the other leaving enough room for Hogg to dive over for his maiden try, in his first start. Greg Laidlaw put the kick between the posts to give the home side a 7-0 lead.

For the next 15 minutes, Scotland had the majority of the ball, a French foray upfield being snuffed out by Rory Lamont – later to be stretchered off with a suspected broken leg – before a penalty award gave Laidlaw the chance to make it 10-0. The French, demonstrating why they are one of the World's great teams, only took three minutes to come back with a try of their own. Securing ball from the kick off, the forwards drove up the field in several phases before the ball was released into the hands of Wesley Fofana. With only Mike Blair between him and a score there was no way the Frenchman was going to be stopped.

In spite of Blair's best effort, Fofana crashed over for the

try. Morgan Parra's conversion then had the visitors to within three points. A Parra penalty from a scrum infringement with 90 seconds left pulled the French back level at the break. Just prior to this, Scotland suffered the loss of two players. Mike Blair with a 'dead leg' and, more seriously, Rory Lamont with that suspected broken leg.

France went on the attack from the start of the second half, but were held out by a powerful Scots' defence. At least, they were until another breakdown infringement gave Parra the chance to kick France into the lead. 'Nuff said 13-10 to France!

The next 15 minutes or so were a bit cagey with neither team really dominating, until Scotland drove up into French territory and pulled in enough of the opposition to leave a three-man overlap on the left. Vernon received the ball from de Luca, then waited (and waited) until Francois Trinh-Duc committed himself to the tackle before releasing the pass into the arms of Lee Jones. The Selkirk man dived over to score his first try for Scotland (pictured) and with another 'new boy', Duncan Weir kicking the conversion – and his first points for the National side – Scotland were 17-10 ahead.

Before the Murrayfield faithful had regained their seats – and breath – the visitors were once again on the attack from inside their own half. Jones, who moments earlier had been the hero, was bumped off a rather ineffectual tackle on Malzieu, who then handed the ball to Maxime Medard, leaving the full back to cruise in for a score under the posts. Another Parra conversion and 20-17 to the visitors.

With twenty minutes to go, the French used all their experience to slow the ball and the game down at every opportunity and, in spite of a couple of promising plays by Scotland, the drop-goal from Beauxis sealed the deal and, frustrating the best efforts of the home side in the last few minutes, the French finished the match off 23-17.

A much better display from Scotland this time out, but still too many mistakes and turned-over ball at the breakdown when in good position let the side down a bit. Still, they at least now know their way past the try line. On a brighter note, the three new players, Hogg, Jones and Weir, all played their part, with only Jones' 'non-tackle' taking the shine off some impressive play.

Photo and Report – John Preece

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