

Rugby – Edinburgh v Zebre

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✘ Report and Photo – John Preece

Edinburgh won their second match in a row on Friday night by scoring five tries past RaboDirect new boys, Zebre.

With much expected of the home side, they had a good start with a Greg Laidlaw penalty after five minutes, but it took Edinburgh another 20 minutes or so to break down a very well organised defensive set-up by the Italian side. Receiving the ball from the tackled Nick de Luca, scrum-half, Richie Rees, broke through to carry the ball into the visitors 22. With Ross Ford and Sean Cox on his right shoulder, he passed the ball to Cox, who avoided a desperate, lunging tackle to score the opening try to the right of the posts. Laidlaw scored the conversion to take the score to 10-0 to Edinburgh.

As seems to be the form these days, Zebre pulled three points back from a penalty awarded almost immediately from the restart, Daniel Halangahu being the scorer. Another Laidlaw penalty, again almost from the restart, brought the 10 point gap back. The score 13-3 for Edinburgh.

But, the home side had found their way to the try line and only by conceding two penalties during the next period of play, which Laidlaw choose to kick for the line, did the visitors keep Edinburgh out. It couldn't last and a scrum on the right wing, five metres out, saw the ball swiftly through the hands of the backs, to leave Tim Visser with only a forward to beat to score his fifth try in three matches. Laidlaw again scored to leave the half time score 20-3 to Edinburgh.



The second half started as the first had finished. Securing the ball from the kick-off, de Luca and Stuart McInally (pictured) – deserved Man-of-the-Match – went on the offensive. Getting the ball to Matt Scott, the centre swerved and jinked his way towards the right hand corner. Only a last gasp tackle from the visitor's full-back, Sinoti Sinoti, kept him out. However, the quick arrival of Sean Cox and a few mates, saw the ball recycled quickly and end up, again, away across the pitch to give Ross Ford the ball a few metres out. Taking two players with him the Edinburgh hooker went over in the corner to score Edinburgh's third try. Laidlaw had, seemingly, found last year's boots in the back of a cupboard somewhere as he slotted home another kick to bring the score to 27-3 in favour of Edinburgh.

A throat high tackle on Lee Jones (followed closely by a face high one) gave the referee no option but to bin Zebre's captain, Quintin Geldenhuys. The subsequent play eventually led to a scrum 5 metres out from the visitors line. With the home side forwards exerting their dominance, the third collapse by the Italian outfit left the ref with little choice but to award a penalty, and bonus, try to Edinburgh. Another successful kick from Laidlaw and the score was 34-3 with 22 minutes left on the clock.

Zebre were not for giving in and the next 10 or so minutes saw their best period of play on the night. Setting up their stall in the Edinburgh 22 full back, Sinoti crossed the Edinburgh line twice, one being disallowed for a forward pass, to give the visitors, what could only be, a consolation try. And that might have been that were it not for the Flying Dutchman (or should that now be 'Scotsman'?) Visser. With seconds left on the clock, the ball was fly-hacked from deep in the the Edinburgh half, and the race was on. For a few metres it

looked as if the Zebre stand off, Alberto Chiesa was going to overhaul Visser, but he gave up a few metres out to leave the Edinburgh wing to gather the ball and fall over the line for Edinburgh's fifth try. Laidlaw rounded off the game nicely with the conversion and the win was in the bag, which it had been for a while, really, 41-10 being the final score.

One of the few high points to come from the Zebre performance was their full back with the repeated name, Sinoti Sinoti. Here is a man who has never heard the phrase 'side-step'. When he found himself with nowhere to go, he just fired his body into the nearest player, no matter how big! Far from being a one-trick pony, however, he backed this up with his try-saver and his own 'two' tries. A man to watch, perhaps?

On paper it looked an easy win for the home side, but a few good Italian, like Mirco Bergamasco and other International players, mostly from the Southern Hemisphere, have given the Italian side a decent base to start from. One time whipping-boys of the 'Celtic' league, Connacht are now doing well and are attracting some big name players so it might only be a matter of time before the Zebre team move up the ranks. Assuming, of course, that their backers don't give up the ghost after a season or two, anyway.