

Scotland v South Africa, EMC Autumn Test, 17 November 2012



'A Plan A, but no Plan B..' was how the South African style of rugby was described by a variety of 'experts'. And for 60 minutes of the 80 at the weekend, Plan A seemed to work just fine. With Scotland barely able to touch the ball – apart from their try – for most of the first 60 minutes, the Springboks will be wondering today how they only managed to score 21 points against a home side who looked a bit jaded after the efforts of the previous week.


The event started well enough with the match ball being abseiled into the arena by Royal Marine Commandoes and handed over to Olympic Gold Medal rower, Heather Stanning – who also got to fire the cannon to start the match. Straight from the start the Springboks established themselves deep in the Scottish half and only a bit of desperate defence and an eventual penalty, scored by Pat Lambie after six minutes, kept a try at bay. Greg Laidlaw struck back a few minutes later for the Scots in one of the few bright moments of the first half, only for Lambie to pull the lead back out almost immediately. With Plan A still seemingly on track, the visitors proceeded to pound away at Scotland with their big men – and benching Richie Gray with concussion in the meantime – before a lineout five metres from the Scottish try line was quickly turned into a rolling maul, allowing hooker, Adriaan Strauss, to dive over for the opening try. Lambie missed his kick, so the score stayed at a deserved 11-3.

From the kick-off, Scotland managed to spend a short period in the Springboks half, but were fairly easily rebuffed, with only a, rare, missed penalty from Laidlaw to show for it. So it was back to the plan for the 'Boks and five minutes from

half time. Lambie scored another penalty from yet another ruck infringement to take the score up to 14-3, where it stood at the break.

Another half time parade of Olympians, mascots and marines kept the crowd going during the break and Heather Stanning proved to be a fine sub for Chris Hoy as she took ages to get round, stopping for photos and autographs every few metres and appearing to revel in the adulation.

It took just six minutes of the second half for the Springboks to open their account with another try from Strauss. With Scotland trying to play themselves out of their 22, a loose pass was plucked from the air by the hooker and, in a classic case of 'play to the whistle', he and everyone else paused – waiting for the whistle for off-side – before he reacted first and launched himself at the try line. With only Jim Hamilton vaguely close, it was a non-contest and Strauss (pictured) dived home – very Tim Visser-like – under the posts for his second try of the match. Lambie kicked the conversion and the Springboks were 21-3 ahead.

Following the try, Scotland substituted Mike Blair with  Henry Pyrgos, for his second cap, and the move seemed to spark a bit of an uplift in the team. With less than five minutes under his belt, a cleverly worked lineout gave Pyrgos his first International try. The lineout squad split into two 'pods', Kelly Brown fed the ball from the infield pod to Pyrgos, who galloped through the gap to dive over to the right of the posts. Laidlaw scored with the kick and the score was a marginally more respectable 21-11.

For the next ten minutes or so, the visitors pinned Scotland back in their own half, with both attack and defence, before someone in the Scotland backroom team plugged in the 'How to play like last week' program and for the final 20 minutes Scotland barely left the 'Boks 22. Several penalties, including a yellow card offence, good possession and two

successive charged down kicks inside the five metre line just weren't enough to force a way through the South African defence and the match finally came to an end 21-11 to South Africa.

Not the greatest game ever, but if the Scotland team had been able to play as they had against the All Blacks the previous week the result might have been a whole lot different. As it was, they couldn't and a disappointed crowd wandered off into Edinburgh wondering why the home side didn't appear to have a plan, never mind a Plan A...

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