

American Football – Edinburgh Napier Knights v Edinburgh University Predators



**Edinburgh Napier Knights v Edinburgh University Predators,
Varsity Match 3 February 2013**

Report and Photos By John Preece

Someone once famously said that a football match was ‘a game of two halves..’ Well the American version – which relies on very little ‘foot’ball – could be said to be a game of four halves. Or, more accurately – a game of two halves split into two halves. Or four quarters...

For the uninitiated, that’s only the start. The rules are many and complex, but, essentially, the point of the game is to move the ball up the field of play in a succession of, at least, ten yard (yes, ‘yard’) chunks. For this, the team is allowed four chances – or downs. The two teams line up facing each other in attack and defence formations as a scrimmage, and the ball is passed back to the quarter-back, the ‘main man’ in any AF team, who will throw, or pass, the ball forward to one of the ‘receivers – only one forward pass is allowed per down – or hand the ball to a running back, who, as his title suggests, will attempt to run the ball upfield.

If they succeed in gaining ten yards, they get another four downs, the object being to score a touch-down over the opposition’s goal-line. Except that, unlike rugby, the ball doesn’t have to touch the ground, but only to break the ‘plane’ of the goal line. So why ‘touch-down? Who knows? Once this achieved, and six points scored, a ‘conversion’ is attempted – always from the centre of the field, not from

where the line was crossed – for one point.

If – it's a game of 'ifs' – the team in possession fails to gain the ten yards after three downs then the ball is usually kicked. As a set-piece field goal if thought to be within the kicker's range, for three points, or somewhere toward the opposition as a 'punt', from hand, if they are too far away. Still with it? There are, indeed, many, many rules, which, to the casual observer, are just too complicated to follow, so you just have to trust the 4-6 officials! And just how does a game which is scheduled for four 15 minute quarters, take up to three hours to play? And how did it go?

Boroughmuir RFC's Meggetland was the host for this encounter and a full programme of events was planned. From come-and-try sessions to a brass band and cheerleaders, it was all there to keep the crowd entertained before, during and after the match.



With only two match weekends to go, and the two Edinburgh teams in 4th and 5th places in the five team BUCS–Scottish league, the game was only really for bragging rights – and a very nice trophy.

The match started badly for Napier. Playing into a stiff Northerly wind, it was difficult to move the ball upfield and a couple of minutes in, they were forced into their own goal area in possession of the ball for a 'safety' and two points for Edinburgh. Forced to kick from their next period of possession, they were under the cosh straight away as Edinburgh battled their way deep into Napier's half and ran in the first touchdown of the match from close in. Six points and, with the kick going over, the extra point gave Edinburgh a 9-0 lead at the end of the first quarter. By the end of the half they had stretched this out to 17-0 with another touchdown and another safety.

And that was the story of the match. Edinburgh dominated possession and territory and, using their running backs more effectively in the blustery conditions, ran in another two touchdowns, one of which was converted, and forced another safety to finish the match 30-0 winners. Napier rallied a bit in the final quarter, putting together some nicely constructed plays, but were foiled by a solid defence and, it has to be said, far too many mistakes. From the first quarter there only looked like being one winner as Edinburgh seemed the more competent, but Napier are a new, young team and, given time, should improve hand over fist in the coming seasons.

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