

Rugby – Scotland victorious over Italy



Scotland v Italy, RBS 6-Nations, 9 February 2013

Given the respective results from last weekend, the feeling was that, yes, Scotland could win, but not by much if they did. With one try in the first half and three in the second, it turned out to be the emphatic victory that no one was expecting.

Starting well, Scotland looked good for the first few minutes, with good running and passing play, but it was the visitors who had the first chance to score from a penalty with five minutes gone. Luciano Orquera hit the woodwork, however, and Scotland had dodged the first bullet.

It was to be 15 minutes before the score was opened following a fairly even period of play, Greg Laidlaw putting the first points on the board for the Scots with a penalty just outside the Italian 22. 10 minutes later, the home side scored again from a second penalty for an offside infringement at a lineout. Laidlaw slotted this home too, to put the Scots six points clear.

Two minutes later, the crowd thought the first try was in the bag. After an exchange of turn-overs, Ryan Grant got the ball to Matt Scott who took off down the left for the line. He was a few metres out when a scything tackle saw him put a foot into touch just short of the line. However, the home supporters didn't have long to wait for that first try. From another turnover, Tim Visser ended up with the ball and with the slightest sniff of the line he was off. A neat side-step

saw him through and over the line for the try. Laidlaw scored the conversion and it was 13-0 to Scotland. The final 10 minutes of the half were dominated by Italy, but a strong defensive performance from Scotland kept them out and they were left to settle for three points just before half time.

☒ Three minutes of the second half was all it took for Scotland to get back on the scoreboard. Collecting the ball from a lineout, Visser broke through with Scott in close attendance, then he passed the ball out left to put the centre in the clear for a 25 metre run in for his first International try. Laidlaw stuck the ball over again and the score moved out to 20-3. The Italians fought back from the restart and forced Scotland onto the back foot deep in their own half. Stuart Hogg was in just the right spot to intercept a loose pass and he was away in the clear to run in his try to the right of the posts. A spectacular dive (pictured), a clean touch down and a Laidlaw conversion took the points tally up to 27, with Italy wondering what had hit them.

The visitors then stopped wondering and got on with what they are good at. Encamping themselves on the Scotland line, they used their scrum dominance to keep the pressure on the Scots line, but holding them out and, eventually turning them over, gave Scotland a boost. Controlling the scrum, they cleared their lines and in the following minutes forced Italy back into their own half. Winning ball from their lineout first Sean Maitland, then Hogg moved the ball into the centre of the field, Hogg kicking over the defence for Richie Gray to run on to. Gray didn't try too hard, but when he arrived at the ball, in the hands of Tobias Botes, he resisted the temptation to put the scrum half up into the fifteenth row and settled for heaving him just over the touch line. Scotland got a drive on from the lineout, but it was Maitland and Hogg who combined again on the right. The ball was passed the width of the field and Maitland managed to keep his hands clear of the two man

tackle to pass out to Hogg in the clear. Over he went, big cheer went up and the referee's hand went out, signalling a forward pass and no try. Big cheer turned into big groan...

But, they weren't to be denied for long. Another loose ball in the centre of the field was scooped up by Sean Lamont and with nobody to stop him, he charged off to score Scotland's fourth try of the afternoon. Man-of-the-match, Laidlaw scored his sixth kick of the game to put the score at an unreachable 34-3 with just over 10 minutes to go. With just over seven minutes to go Italy scored their 'consolation' try. With a lineout from a penalty, the visitors worked the ball across the field and a neat inside pass left Alessandro Zanni a big space to dive over for the try. Chris Burton scored with the kick to take the score to 34-10.

With five minutes to go, Scotland weren't for sitting back. They got within a couple of metres of the Italian line, but lost the ball and in the ensuing break out attempt, Geoff Cross managed to get himself yellow carded on the 80th minute, but it didn't matter. The game ended with the visitors in possession but pinned to their try line. A dropped ball was all that was required for referee Jaco Peyper to blow up for full time.

So, there we have it. Scotland's first win in the Six-Nations for two years, when, fittingly, it was the Italian side who were on the end of the defeat. Fewer, much fewer, mistakes this week compared to the England game and better ball retention all round seemed to be the key. Scott Johnson seems to be a breath of fresh air around the team and it's good to see a team coach, in that endearingly Antipodean way, not giving out the formulaic, corporate replies to the usual questions. "Are we going to win? I'm not going to stand here

and tell you we're going to win...." Long may it continue.

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