


Rugby – Edinburgh v Zebre

Edinburgh survive another final minute onslaught to win their second RaboDirect match in succession.




Zebre were the visitors to Murrayfield on Friday night, giving Edinburgh their second home match in a row against Italian opposition. They were also to weather another nail-biting finish to run out eventual victors in a very close affair.

The home side had the first chance after eight minutes of fairly even-sided play, but the kick from Harry Leonard slid wide. Following the drop out, both sides resorted to a bit of kicking and probing at the other's defence, before it was Zebre's turn to win a penalty in the Edinburgh half. This time there was no mistake as No. 10, Luciano Orquera, slotted the ball home to put the visitors 3-0 in the lead. The home side managed to lose the 'traditional' post-restart line-out, but forced the Italian side to kick possession away. This gave Edinburgh the opportunity to run the ball back at them. The forwards carried the ball down the right side where Wicus Blaauw took the ball into a ruck. Quick recycling soon had the ball with Leonard, who then put the ball in the hands of right wing, Dougie Fife, who had come off his wing and popped up in the centre. He then beat his man and drew the defence in. A long, looping pass found Greg Tonks far out on the left touchline and, with only the No. 11 to beat, he went over in the corner for the first try of the night. Leonard missed this  kick as well, but Edinburgh had taken a 5-3 lead.

The next ten minutes or so were fairly dominated by the home side, with Zebre being forced to kick to clear their lines. Approaching the half hour, the home side forwards blazed a trail up the middle of the Italian defence, driving the ball close to the line. Once again, quick recycling won the day and

Willem Nel dived over in a flurry of bodies to score the second home side try. Leonard scored this conversion and the score was now 12-3 to Edinburgh. Just as the crowd were settling down, there was a third try scored. This time it was for Zebre. Straight from the kick off, they gained possession and winger Giovanbattista Venditti tore up the Edinburgh defensive structure leaving Tommaso Iannone no option but to dive over for the visitors first try. Orquera kicked the conversion and the home side were now only 12-10 in the lead.

With ten minutes to go in the half, Edinburgh took the match up to the Italian 22, but the attack was rebuffed and the rest of the period was spent in the Edinburgh half. A period of time which ended with a controversial try in the corner for Zebre. The visitors managed to conjure up a three man overlap on the left and Leonardo Sarto broke through the final tackle to score. Or did he? With no TMO available, the referee had a wee chat with the linesman while the 'score' was played on the big screen. Neither official looked up and the try was duly awarded. However, the pictures seemed to show that the ball had not been grounded cleanly, backed up by the **ER** 'man on the spot' being shown a photo of that very incident at half time. 'Looking-at-a-photo-on-the-back-of-someone's-camera' non-officials decided it hadn't been a try, but that was too late and very 'non-official' anyway. The try had been 'scored' and so had the conversion, so the match went into the break, with the visitors 17-12 in the lead.

Edinburgh took an early lead in the second half, thanks to a Harry Leonard penalty, but then were put completely on the back foot by a strong comeback from the Italian side.  Indeed they nearly went over for another try in the corner, but full-back, Dion Berryman's pass out of a Sean Kennedy tackle just a couple of metres short of the line, was fumbled, giving the scrum, and a moment of relief, to the home side. Although the scrum was put under supreme pressure, the ball was retained and swiftly moved up the field. From a line out,

the pack drove the ball deep into the 22, Ross Rennie was almost forced over the line, but the ball went to ground and another bit of quick play saw the ball out to Cornel Du Preez, who broke through two tackling players to ground the ball over the line for the third Edinburgh try. With Leonard scoring the conversion, Edinburgh were back in the lead 22-17, with just over 20 minutes left on the clock. And they were soon back in the driving seat, taking the ball upfield to win yet another penalty, Leonard scoring this one as well, to give them a two-score gap, 25-17. With not much of the match remaining, Zebre struck back with two penalties in quick succession to bring them within two points. And then there was that final assault. With less than five minutes left on the clock, Edinburgh were pushed well back into their 22 and had to suffer a sustained pummelling, with the ball going from side to side and no leeway for error. Zebre then put themselves in a drop goal position. Brendon Leonard fired the ball back to Orquera, but a charging Harry Leonard – no relation – forced the kick wide. From the restart drop out, it was back to the grind stone and repeat of the previous play was foiled this time by Orquera's kick being charged down by Kennedy. The ball rebounded out to a Zebre player, but his quick pass was dropped and the referee had a wee look at his watch Time up, game over, relief all round.

25-22 win for the home side to take them up into seventh place in the table, but they might not stay there for long as the teams below them have a game in hand and are within a couple of points. Still, a win's a win, and it must give the side a bit of confidence as the Autumn International's take centre stage, which will be where the ER are reporting from for the next three weeks. "Come on Scotland!" and all that...

On another footnote, the evening started well for one young man who managed to corner several non-selected Edinburgh players for autographs, before being cornered by the **ER** photographer/reporter/thingy to have a photo taken with David

Denton and Matt Scott, which has now been forwarded to his mum. Oh, we're such nice people here... (Only you John...only you! Ed.)

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