

# Rugby – Scotland v Japan


*Scotland score six tries in their win over Japan at Murrayfield*



Scotland played Japan in the opening match of the 2013 Viagogo Autumn Test series at Murrayfield and overcame, what has become, a much stronger opponent than their World ranking would suggest.

The match started well for the hosts, pinning their opponents back in their half early on and they were awarded a penalty from a scrum infringement after six minutes which Greg Laidlaw converted for the lead. The Japanese side came back strongly, however and went on an attack of their own, pushing the Scotland side back and it was only a massive tackle from, eventual Man-of-the-Match, Tim Swinson, that put paid to any further possession. From the ensuing scrum, the visitors pushed Scotland off the ball, but had, again, managed to attract the referee's attention for foul play. The next few minutes were fairly even, with Scotland just gaining the upper hand and they were awarded another penalty, which, this time, Laidlaw rattled off the upright, but he was to come up trumps a few minutes later with a successful kick which took him to 199 points for his country and put his country ahead 6-0.

The following period of play had both sides on the attack and defence with Japan almost exploiting an overlap due to, what appeared to be, a serious injury to Ryan Grant. It was at this point that some of the crowd showed their 'football credentials' as they started to whistle and boo because the Japanese wouldn't kick the ball dead to stop the match! Strange game that football... But, it was to be the hosts who scored the opening try. The pack took the ball up the centre of the pitch, coming to within a few metres of the line, but quick

recycling from Laidlaw had the ball out wide to Tommy Seymour, who beat his man on the outside to go over in the corner for his debut International try in only his third match for Scotland. Laidlaw missed the conversion, but the Scots now had an 11-0 lead. Japan went on the offensive straight from the kick-off and drove and ran the ball up the Scot's five-metre line before being stopped. The ref, however was playing a penalty advantage and the visitor's full back, Ayumu Goromaru, scored to put them on the board with three points. With less than five minutes to go in the half, it was Scotland's turn to gain the upper hand. A pass to Nick De Luca in heavy traffic appeared to put the Edinburgh player through a gap in the defence and he broke through and gained 20 metres or so. A last ditch tackle from two defenders brought him down, but the ball ended up with Sean Lamont who powered through to score next to the posts. Or had he? Referee JP Doyle was alerted to a possible obstruction at the initial pass and detailed analysis of the footage by the TMO showed this to be the case. No try, penalty to Japan. That more or less ended the half with the score at a, non too comfortable, 11-3. 

The second half started badly for the Scots as, almost from the kick off, Japan were awarded an early penalty which scrum half, Fumiaki Tanaka, took quickly giving the visitors a quick advantage, An advantage which they exploited to the full, the sudden start, and quick passing, giving wing, Kenki Fukuoka, a clear run in to the touch down. Goromaru scored the conversion and the score was now, an even more uncomfortable, 11-10. It was now the home side's turn to score from the restart. Lamont managed to bat the ball back from the kick off, putting the Scot's on the front foot, which they used to blast up the middle. setting up a ruck a couple of metres out from the line, Laidlaw gathered the ball and seeing that there was a 'Laidlaw' sized gap in the defence, dived under the tackle to score his try and take his Scotland points tally to 203 – a

tremendous milestone. He then scored the conversion to pull the home side two scores clear at 18-10.

And then deja-vu broke out all over again, as the Japanese played a repeat of their opening try to score through the same combination of players, with a little more resistance this time, to draw them up to within a point once more. But that was to be the last they saw of the score board as Scotland exerted their growing dominance on the match scoring a further four tries to put the match out of sight. The first of these came from the backs less than two minutes after the Japanese try. Another restart ball win and drive gave the Scot's a scrum on the left. Quick ball had the defence scrambling across to, ultimately, fail to stop Seymour from scoring his second try of the match, again in the right corner. Laidlaw missed this kick as well, but the score was 23-17 with 25 minutes left. Next try was started from a ruck. Kelly Brown carried the ball up to within five metres of the line, but the Japanese infringed, which earned No. 8 Ryu Koliniasi Holani a yellow. Winning ball, the Scots then promptly lost it, and the visitors cleared. But, they cleared to a side with their tails up and the ball was run straight back. The backs had the first go and were soon up to near the line. A couple of plays later, Alistair Dickinson was passed the ball in front of the posts and he was off, dragging two opponents with him to score Scotland's fourth try under the posts. Laidlaw couldn't miss this one and the score was now a healthy 30-17 with still 15 minutes left on the clock.



The fifth try was scored by sub, Duncan Weir, after less than five minutes of him coming on the pitch. Again the ball was carried up to the 22 by the backs, and Sean Maitland ran the ball up the line, only to be tackled by three defenders. He released the ball 'into the wild', but a defender got in the way and knocked the ball away. The loose ball was then pounced on by Weir who slid over in the corner for the try. Again, the

'was-it-a-try' committee had a wee chat, but this time the decision went in favour of Scotland and with Laidlaw having a bad-ish day at the office, and missing the kick, the score was now 35-17. The sixth and last try was to be another scrambled affair. Following a good bit of possession and play by the visitors, Lamont chased a cleared ball into the 22. However he was tackled off the ball, which resulted in a yellow card for Goromaru. From the line out win, the rolling maul was stopped, but again, quick thinking by the Scots saw new scrum half, Henry Pyrgos, chip the ball over the pile up for Lamont to run onto. One of the defenders got to the ball first but just failed to touch the ball down, leaving Lamont no option, but to do it for him. Another conflagration resulted in another try, and with just a minute or so left, Weir converted to take the final score up to an impressive 42-17 for Scotland.

Memories of the 100-7 win in Perth 10 years ago were suppressed by the Scotland management team well in advance as the Japanese have come a very long way since then. They currently lie 15th in the IRB rankings and have a couple of players playing Super Rugby in the Southern Hemisphere. However, nothing should take away from, what was, a mighty impressive performance – albeit with a couple of defensive glitches – by a Scottish side in the process of being built for the forthcoming World Cup in 2015, which in sporting terms, is just around the corner....

On a final note, there was a young man in the crowd who celebrated his 10th Birthday on the day up in Perth. He celebrated his 20th at Murrayfield. Happy Birthday, Allyn.

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