Rugby – Edinburgh v London Irish, European Rugby Challenge Cup

Edinburgh hang on for a narrow win

Following the previous weeks hammering by London Irish in Reading, the Edinburgh side had a lot of ground to make up to keep their European Rugby Challenge Cup campaign on the rails and a narrow 18-15 win in the traditional, mid-group stage double header gave them that chance.

10 changes from the previous weekend lined up at BT Murrayfield to face a visiting side who had made a few changes of their own and from the whistle it looked to have paid off as the home side were quickly deep in the opposition half.

However, a couple of dropped passes put London Irish right back into the game and they swiftly drove up, deep into the home 22 where they scored the opener from prop, Gerard Ellis who was driven over the line by the pack. Shane Geraghty was unable to add the extras so, just over eight minutes in, the score was 5-0 the Irish.

Edinburgh then came right back from the restart, driving the visitors back into their 22 again, but again, a mistake, this time by Phil Burleigh, cost them possession.

But they weren't finished with the pressure and a couple of minutes later, the hosts were once again on the offensive. Winning a ruck penalty on the left of the pitch a few metres out, Sam Hidalgo-Clyne was denied using a quick tap by the referee as he was almost a metre from the spot, so a lineout it was.

The pack mauled the ball nearer the posts and a neat offload to Tom Brown saw the winger through for Edinburgh opening points. Hidalgo-Clyne slotted home the easy conversion and, with 16 minutes played, it was 7-5 to Edinburgh.

Less than two minutes from the kick off, Edinburgh were once again mauling toward the Irish line. This time, the maul was brought to ground illegally, giving Hidalgo-Clyne his second shot at goal. His successful kick stretched the host's lead to 10-5 as the match entered the second quarter.

It was now London Irish's turn to pile on the pressure and, for the next 10 minutes they held Edinburgh mostly in their own half, but Geraghty had another shot at goal for a penalty on the 30 minutes mark and, this time, made no mistake to narrow the gap to 10-8.

With three minutes to go, the Edinburgh pack drew another penalty for Hidalgo-Clyne to have a go at, and, once again, the scrum half was on target to restore the five-point gap at 13-8.

With the half drawing to a close, the visitors put in a sustained attack on the Edinburgh line, only a fine, last-gasp tackle from Mike Allan stopping the score.

The match see-sawed back and forth for the first 20 minutes of the second half with Tom Brown and Damien Hoyland making good breaks for the hosts and the London Irish pack doing the majority of their work. And it was the Irish pack who were first to add second half points to the score board.

Winning their own lineout a few metres from the line, the ball was recycled several times through mauling and through the hands before the forwards took charge once again and fired sub, No. 17, Tom Smallbone over the line for the second visitors' try. Geraghty was, once again successful with his kick and it was 15-13 with 20 minutes left on the clock.

It proved to be a good 20 minutes for Edinburgh as several breaks forced the visiting side into desperate defence, only some last-ditch tackling stopping a score – as did a penalty miss by Hidalgo-Clyne!

With less than 10 minutes to go to the whistle, another fine run from Brown was brought to ground inside the 22. The ball was shifted out to Hoyland on the wing, but he was driven out just short of the five-metre line. From Irish's clearance, Edinburgh were once again in possession and, from the line out, flanker, John Hardie – ably 'assisted' by Hoyland and Mike Coman – went over in the right corner for the lead. Hidalgo-Clyne then missed his attempt at goal, but it was 18-15 with just over six minutes left.

London Irish pressed hard in the final minutes, but good discipline – for a change – by the Edinburgh side saw the visitors pushed back toward their own half and a final error gave the host team a scrum to finish off a hard fought win.

Images from the match will appear here over the next few days