

Rugby – Edinburgh v Harlequins, European Rugby Challenge Cup

Edinburgh top group after hard fought 11 try thriller



Both Edinburgh and Harlequins came to BT Murrayfield off the back of impressive wins in their respective matches the previous week. While Edinburgh were putting Romanian side, Timisoara Saracens, to the sword with a 59-17 win, Harlequins took full advantage of French sides' woeful away form to thrash their opponents 43-21.

On paper, the Quins win could be said to be the more impressive – and they can field a number of British Lions in their side – but Edinburgh have the uncanny knack of winning in Europe against, allegedly, far superior opposition. So we were all set up for top-of-the-table encounter which went on to be a nail biter to the bitter end.

Before proceedings got underway, however, a minute's silence was observed in light of the tragic death of Munster's coach, Anthony Foley, in Paris the previous weekend.

It looked like bad news for the hosts as, with less than three minutes in, Quins were on the score board with the first try. It appeared to be an nice easy start for the London side as they collected their own kick-off and a couple of phases later, the ball was out on the left wing with No. 11, Charlie Walker and he crashed over for the try. Stand-off, Nick Evans then followed up with a successful conversion and, before the crowd had settled down, Quins were 7-0 ahead.

Just over a minute later, it was 7-5. As Quins set about

returning the kick-off, they lost the ball near half way and Phil Burleigh was off and running. Evans put in a try saving tackle just inside the 22, but prop, Alan Dell, was following up and he collected the off-load and romped in for the try. Edinburgh's 10, Jason Tovey, stepped up for the attempt at goal, but he was to have an uncharacteristically bad day from the tee, with this attempt going wide.

The crowd then had to wait an interminable five minutes before the next points went on the board.



Winning lineout ball, the home pack quickly recycled and ultimate Man-of-the-Match, Blair Kinghorn was there to collect the pass off the back of the ensuing ruck and sprint the 40-odd metres diagonally across the pitch to the line, fending off the attentions of the Quins defence on the way. Tovey's kick fell short, but 12 minutes, in it was the home side who were ahead 10-7.

The rest of the quarter was dominated by defence with both sides probing for a breakthrough but, generally, being forced to kick for territory. The visitors probably saw more of the ball during this time, but were not capable of putting any great pressure on the opposition line.

Just as the 20 minutes were coming up, another try was scored for Edinburgh down the right wing. This time it was another speedster, Damien Hoyland, who made the initial break, chipping and gathering the ball before offloading to No. 8 Nasi Manu, who used his size and strength to haul a gaggle of Quins defenders the final five metres to the line. Tovey managed to slot this kick over and Edinburgh were, impressively, 17-7 to the good.

Or, at least, they were for five minutes. The next try was another Hoyland/Kinghorn initiated score for Edinburgh. Once

again, Quins had a go at the home defence, but the ball was turned over and slung out to the wing. Hoyland easily escaped the clutches of the visitors', Joe Marler, and then, just before Mike Brown stopped him in his tracks, he passed the responsibility on to Kinghorn. He was a bit more closely attended, but Hamish Watson wasn't. Kinghorn's pass to Watson gave the flanker a clear run in and he had time to sit down before touching the ball to the grass for the score. Tovey then scored the kick for a 24-7 score, with 15, or so, minutes left in the half.

☒ Once again, Edinburgh were forced to defend from the restart, a penalty award giving Evans a kick at goal which drifted wide, but just as the half was coming to a close, Quins were on the offensive deep in Edinburgh's 22.

They had rucked and mauled their way up to and across the line for a 'held up' decision – before a penalty award gave them position on the five metre line. Another well produced maul went up to the line and fell apart, but French referee, Romanin Poite, deemed that the maul had been collapsed by Edinburgh, so awarded a penalty try. Evans knocked the kick over at his second attempt – his first going over as the referee had time stopped to assess the infringement on the big screen – and, with just over a minute to go to half time, it was 24-14.

And a busy period it was to prove. Quins may have thought they had nothing better to do but pass the ball around until the break, but Hoyland hadn't read that part of the script and, as the half went into overtime, a loose pass from Evans inside Edinburgh's half landed in Hoyland's hands and he had nobody between him and his dive over the line for Edinburgh's fifth try of the half. Once again, Tovey managed the easy kick and it was 31-14 – a scoreline which, probably, hadn't figured in the minds of either side before the match.

As an addendum to the half, Poite found time to send Tovey and

Quins' Walker to the bin for an off-the-ball incident leading up to the score, so the second half would start with both sides a man down

So, with the score at 31-14 as the teams came back out for the second half, where and how was it going to end?

Two minutes in and Edinburgh's faithful thought they had an inkling...

Quins quickly had the play into the home 22 and set up their go-to play of ruck and maul down the left. The defence were then drawn in leaving a bit of space down the right. The ball was then shifted rapidly across the face of the try line, No. 14, Marland Yarde, being second last man in the line. He drew the attentions of two tacklers, leaving a gap on the wing for No. 3, Kyle Sinckler to trot through for the first try of the half. Evans then kicked the conversion from wide and the score was now 31-21.

It was then Edinburgh's turn to attack the opposition line and a fair amount of time was spent hammering away, but the defence held and play, eventually, came back the home end of the pitch, Yarde almost breaking through, but Edinburgh's Sean Kennedy tackled him a couple of metres out.

As all this was happening, the match had, briefly been reduced to a less-than-15-a-side game as Joe Marler and Grant Gilchrist both saw yellow in quick succession, Marler's, possibly, the more deserving for taking out a lifter at a lineout, and then Ben Toolis being carded as Walker and Tovey returned

With just over 20 minutes left to play, Quins' Joe Marchant made a break into the hosts' 22 and, in the ensuing follow up, Quins won a lineout near the five-metre line. Another rolling maul was set up and, again, seemed to be pulled down as it neared the line, Poite having no option but to, once again, award a penalty try. With Evans kick going over, the score was

now, a much closer, 31-28.



The London side were now in the ascendancy and Edinburgh were forced back to their own 22 as the opposition rolled them further and further into their own territory. Just five minutes from their previous score, Quins were on the score board again. This one was a more 'conventional' try. As Quins rucked across the pitch, Edinburgh eventually ran out of big men on the line and substitute back-row, Mat Luamanu, easily brushed Kinghorn aside to go over in the corner. Evans had, by now, been replaced by Tim Swiel, but the No. 22 took over where Evans had left off and scored the conversion. The score line of 35-31 now meant that Edinburgh had to score a try or two penalties to win the match and, on the evidence of the previous 10 or 15 minutes, that looked like an uphill task for the home side.

Still, uphill task it may have been, but Edinburgh set about the job in hand with a vengeance.

They pretty much dominated the next ten minutes of play, crossing the line for a disallowed try – the officials deeming a pass out to Glenn Bryce to have been forward – but, with seven minutes of play left, a penalty advantage to Edinburgh was exploited by Hoyland who chipped-and-chased over the defence accompanied by fellow wing, Tom Brown. As both players – and Quins' Brown – went up for the ball, Edinburgh's Brown hit the deck in possession of both the ball and a defender and, having great presence of mind, touched down over his head for the try, but as the attempted conversion hit the post, Edinburgh only had a one-point lead at 36-35.

As Quins picked themselves up from the score, the remainder of the match was mostly played in Edinburgh's half and, as full time drew near, their line was once again under threat, but a fumble by Quins gave Edinburgh the possession, Tovey launching

the ball into the stands to bring a fantastic match to a dramatic close.



This result puts Edinburgh at the top of their pool with 10 points from their two matches, and they now await the double header against Stade Francais in mid December.

Images from the match will be available [here](#) over the next few days.