

# Rugby – Scotland v Georgia, 2016 Autumn Test Series

*Four first half tries seal the match for Scotland at Rugby Park.*



The Autumn International circus moved to Kilmarnock's Rugby Park for the third and final match in the three match series. Coming off the back of a last gasp win over Argentina, Scotland were widely expected to, if not have a field day, at least win the match comfortably.

And it was a comfort that was disturbed early on as Georgia took the lead with five minutes of the match played. A break up the left gave the home fans some early optimism, but a penalty award to Georgia gave them a lineout a few metres from the Scots' try line.

With the lineout won and the maul set, Georgian scrum half, Vasil Lobzhanidzi, grabbed the ball at the back and, easily avoiding Scotland's Tommy Seymour, darted in to touch down. Referee, Matthew Carley, called for TMO assistance to check 'something', but all was well and it was 5-0 to the visitors.

Seymour then had a chance to redeem himself a couple of minutes later with kick chase which saw him dive over for Scotland's opener. Eventually regaining the restart ball, play was moved out to the left where No. 15, Stuart Hogg, spotted a gap and slotted the ball through from Seymour to run on to. He won the race to the ball with Lobzhanidzi and appeared to touch the ball down. Many TMO slow-motion replays later and he had indeed made up for his error and the try was scored. Greg Laidlaw then kicked the touch line conversion to put the home side ahead 7-5.

Before 15 minutes of the match had passed, it was 14-5. Dominating both possession and territory, Scotland had forced a couple of clearances from Georgia, but the telling moment came just before the quarter hour when the defending side pulled down a Scot's rolling maul a metre, or so, from the line forcing Carley to award a penalty try and a yellow card. Again Laidlaw knocked over the kick and it was 14-5 for Scotland.

A 17<sup>th</sup> minute penalty for Georgia gave full back, Merab Kvirikashvili the chance to make it 14-8, but the writing was on the score board and Scotland came straight back with another try.

Hogg won the restart ball, which immediately put Georgia on the defensive in their own 22. The ball was moved up to within a few metres of the line and went quickly out right to wing, Sean Maitland. He was stopped in his tracks, but a couple of recycles later, he had the ball again and this time he crashed over, carrying his two tacklers in for the try. Again Laidlaw scored the conversion and it was 21-8 as the game entered the second quarter.

Scotland were now well on top, but a 28<sup>th</sup> minute penalty from Laidlaw was wiped a few minutes later by a second from Lobzhanidze to give a 24-11 score line with less than 10 minutes to play.



Regaining possession from the restart, Hogg received the ball just inside his own half and with few options, chipped the ball over the advancing line and chased through. A fortunate bounce saw him regather on the Georgian 10-metre line and, with a clear pitch in front, sprint in to touch down near the left corner. Another difficult conversion from Laidlaw then sailed through and, with around five minutes to the break, it

was 31-11.

General play stayed at the 'right' end for the remainder and the teams went in at 31-11 with a hotly anticipated second half to come.

The anticipation appeared to be justified when, two minutes in, Scotland scored their fifth try of the match. Winning their own lineout on the opposition five-metre line, the ball was passed on to Edinburgh Rugby's Hamish Watson on the ground and the flanker fired through the bodies to crash over for his first International try, which Laidlaw then followed up with the conversion for 38-11.

The 'appearance' of justification now turned sour as the next 30-odd minutes of the match belonged to the visiting side. Whatever 'switch' was turned on, it was a much improved performance from the visitors, which, not only kept the game in the Scottish half for much of the time, but led to a try and the risk to the home side of a few more.



However, only the one try was scored and it came via the Georgian's scrummaging ability. The Scots' pack had been under pressure the whole match and this came good for the visitors in the 54<sup>th</sup> minute. Choosing to go for a five-metre scrum following a penalty on the left, they won a second penalty and went for the scrum again. This time, their sheer power shone through and they had the Scottish pack marching backwards over the line. As their No. 8, Beka Bitsadze went to pick up, a stray foot knocked the ball onto his boot and it joggled clear and back out to where Lobzhanidze was on hand to pick up and dive through the legs to score his, and Georgia's, second try of the match. This conversion was also missed by Kvirikashvili, so 38-16 was the score on the board.

The next 20+ minutes of the match were more of the same.

Scotland made a few breaks, but the defence held and Georgia resumed their dominant position, running in from all angles and recycling and retaining possession fairly easily.

They came closest to adding to their tally around the 70<sup>th</sup> minute, but the looping pass out to the wing gave the Scottish defence the chance to get over and the ball carrier was bundled into touch by three of his opponents.

Now Scotland could draw breath and take stock. However, drawing breath and taking stock wasn't exactly what new cap and Laidlaw replacement, Ali Price, quite had in mind. With Georgia penalised for taking the lineout down, the No. 21 chose to tap-and-go. Catching the opposition napping, he was soon across half way. He then passed the responsibility on to another sub, No. 23, Rory Hughes, who, with Hogg on his shoulder, made a few metres before putting the full back in the clear on the 22 with another fairly straightforward run in for his dive to score the sixth Scottish try on the day. Unfortunately, Finn Russell was unable to maintain Laidlaw's good work and the kick was missed. Still it was 43-16 and, with less than five minutes to play, all the home side had to do was retain the ball until the final whistle went just over the 80.

Apart from the momentary lapse early on, the first half was all Scotland's. After the first few goes, they accepted that the Georgian pack was superior and played the match accordingly. The visiting dominance of the second half, however, gave the home side a few scares, but the defence showed great patience and they repelled – most of – the danger that emerged.



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