

Rugby – Scotland v Italy, 2017 RBS Six Nations

Cotter bows out with a third win in this year's Championship



Fran Cotter presided over his final match as Scotland's Head Coach with a whitewash victory against Italy at BT Murrayfield. With the Scots having beaten the Italian Women and U20 sides the previous night, it was up to the Senior squad to complete the trilogy. Scotland also had the chance to finish as runners-up in the RBS Six Nations Championship, their highest finish since winning the – as it was, Five Nations – tournament in 1999. To do so, they just had to beat Italy and rely on Wales beating France and England beating Ireland, what could possibly go wrong?

It was a fine start to the match as 15, Stuart Hogg slotted home a long-range penalty in the fourth minute for an early 3-0 lead.

The match then descended into a fairly dull affair, with neither team managing to get a foothold and the match, more or less, grinding to a halt for over fifteen minutes.

Referee, Pascal Gauzerre, livened things up a touch by awarding Italy a penalty for a ruck infringement. Stand off, Carlo Canna, stepped up to take the kick, but, in what was to prove a difficult day for the No. 10, he saw the ball slide past the post as his attempt went wide.

This seemed to awaken the Scots to, maybe try a bit harder and the second quarter of the match started the march to a bonus point win.

Powerful running by both the backs and forwards saw the match

pushed deep into the Italian 22 with Huw Jones – who managed to injure himself in the process – almost breaking the defensive line and Captain, John Barclay, getting over the five-metre line near the posts. Playing under advantage, stand off, Finn Russell, put in a deft lob into the goal area which wing, Tim Visser, almost collected in the air, but just knocked on to take play back for the penalty.

Winning their line out on the left, the home side then proceeded to ruck their way across the front of the line, until sufficient of the opposition had been pulled in. Then scrum half, Ali Price, whipped a pass out to Russell, who, finding a gap in the defence, went over for the opening try. He then converted to take Scotland further clear at 10-0, with around 10 minutes of the half to go.

Canna managed to miss his second, relatively simple, penalty attempt two minutes later, and then it was back to the visitors end of the field for more hammering on the door.

Reward came in the 37th minute when a Matt Scott try – on at centre to replace Jones – opened up the gap further with a second try for the home side.

Lock, Zander Fagerson and Scott made ground up the middle, taking play into the Italian 22 again off the back of a stolen Italian line out, and giving every opportunity to score again. This time it was Price with the deft lob, and Hogg with the jump, but he tapped the ball back, Scott gathered and romped in for a try in the right corner and 15-0. Russell failed to convert this time around, but it was a fine lead they took into the break – helped along by Canna's third penalty miss in over time.



The first 10 minutes, or so, of the second half were, largely spent deep in the Scottish half of the field as Italy came out

to play and went to work through their pack. Sustained pressure on the Scots' line was 'rewarded' when wing, Angelo Esposito crossed the line, but he was deemed to have been 'held up' by the officials.

Another few minutes pressure from Italy then saw Barclay yellow carded for infringing, giving Italy a man advantage. An advantage that they nearly made count as another well worked attacking move almost bore fruit, but for a fine tackle by Hogg on full back, Eduardo Padovani, causing the ball to be lost forward over the line.

And that was the last time that Italy really threatened to Scottish line to any great degree, but things were to be entirely different at the other end.

As the hour marked ticked over, and Barclay was back on, play was in the Italian 22 for a scrum. Winning the ball, play went left and Russell put in another of his delicate kicks over the opposition which was chased through by Visser and Scott. In the ensuing scramble for the ball, Visser slid through and managed to get a hand on the ball for the, potential, score. The referee went 'upstairs' to confirm and it was the third try of the match for the home side. Followed in by Russell's conversion, it was now 22-0 and looking unassailable.

Italy pressed a little in the next period of play, but with just under 10 minutes to play, Scotland scored their fourth, and bonus-point try of the afternoon.

With pressure building through the phases, the ball was passed through the hands, ending up with wing Tommy Seymour, giving the 14 a clear run in for the try. Once again, the deserving Man-of-the-Match to be, converted to give Scotland a 29-0 win and every chance of finishing as runners-up.



All Scotland had to now wait on was Wales beating France. In Paris.... And England carrying on their impressive run of victories with a World Record 19th win in a row against Ireland. The Nation watched... And waited.

Unfortunately, despite Wales leading by five points with less than two minutes to play, France managed to score a converted try in the 100th – as in HUNDREDTH- minute of play following a shambolic series of scrums and penalties, substitutions and cards on the Welsh goal line. Still, England would come riding to the rescue so that Scotland could now finish in third place, wouldn't they?

Well... no. They didn't manage to come up with the goods either as Ireland 'did an All Blacks' and played out of their skins to record a fine victory in Dublin, ending England's clean-sweep, Triple Crown and World record hopes in a single match.

So fourth it was, on points difference, but Scotland are in a better place than they were when Cotter took over the reins and he now hands over to another 'saviour' of Scottish rugby in the guise of Glasgow Warriors', Gregor Townsend. Hopefully, he can gather those reins and take the team to new heights. He'll probably have about 10 minutes into his first match before he's either praised or condemned, though. We're just like that.....



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