

# Gridiron/Britball – Edinburgh Wolves so close to victory on Premiership debut

On a windy and deceptively cold day, Edinburgh Wolves started their first British American Football Season in the Premiership North with the relatively short trip to East Kilbride Pirates. It is no easy feat as the Pirates while having a down year this past season had been division champions 3 out of the last five seasons.

In a game that was played out with some ferocious and tenacious play on both teams, the Wolves will be disappointed they didn't hold on for what would have been a surprise victory. The game came down to the last few minutes with Edinburgh leading with a little over 5 minutes left by 12 points. A spirited and dogged run game from the Pirates saw them score two running touchdowns late in the game but miss the all-important extra point with less than a minute on the clock.

The season started with a solid defensive performance from Edinburgh and the resolution of the efficient passing game. In particular, the partnership between Quarterback Jamie Morrison and Wide Receiver Lloyd Dignan who connected early on a 20-yard pass after a solid 1st drive and some excellent route running by the receivers allowed Dignan the freedom to catch the ball unchallenged.



WR Lloyd Dignan catches the Wolves first touchdown pass of the season.

With the ball in the end zone on their first possession of the season the much-vaunted air raid game of the Wolves looked to be back in sync and they were in the lead. 6-0

Meanwhile, the Pirates were struggling with their own passing game as Quarterback Neil Baptie couldn't find a rhythm with his receiving core. With their moving of the ball against a stout Edinburgh defense coming in such small portions, it was a surprise when a high arching pass over the top split the Wolves defense in half and brought the Pirates a score. After the long pass, the Pirates tried to force the ball over with a couple of runs, but it wasn't until QB Baptie, fooled the defense with a fake handoff, rolled to the left and stepped into the end zone. The Pirates added the extra point on a kick and took the lead 7-6.

The Wolves were straight back on the offensive as they returned the kick-off to the Pirates 35 yard line and a penalty on the defense moves the ball to the Pirates 15 yard line. With such a great field position the Wolves were disappointed to have a 3 and out and miss the field goal attempt after the holder fumbled the ball.

The continued missed passes for East Kilbride led to an interception for the Wolves by Stephen MacDonald. After three plays gaining no ground, the Wolves looked to have missed another opportunity for points only for Morrison and Dignan to connect in the back of the end zone.

On 4th down and 12 yards, Morrison rolled out of the pocket to the right, and Dignan found space in the back corner of the end zone between two Pirates defenders and hauled in the pass. Again the Special teams unit missed the extra point, but the Wolves were in the lead at 12-7.

With nothing going the way of the Pirates offense it was no surprise when Wolves Defensive End Martin Punter broke into the backfield and sacked QB Baptie for a large loss of yards on 4th down. The Wolves didn't move the ball very well on this drive and punted away to the Pirates after a 3 and out.

The Pirates, with a lack of passing game, started to run the ball more with Baptie often rolling out of the pocket and picking up yards himself.

With their grip growing on the fixture and the new run game proving effective the Pirates moved the ball with ease to the Wolves red zone. Presented with a 1st down and goal and seemingly guaranteed to score it was a surprise when the Pirates reverted to the pass and throwing for the corner Baptie must have been devastated to see a redshirt appear and pluck the ball out of the air. With the ball in hand, Cassian Graham took a knee, and the Wolves had the ball on their 20-yard line.

The next few drives saw both teams fail to move the ball resulting in punts as the first half was coming to a close. The Wolves received the ball at the Pirates 40 yard line after a muffed punt, and with excellent field position, Jamie Morrison will not want to see the film of this play.

Dignan managed to find yards of space and Morrison made his only real mistake of the game as he under threw the ball and a Pirates defender happily received the gift catching the ball and going to ground. In typical sporting fashion after an incomplete pass Pirates QB Baptie, after another incomplete pass showed why he still in the game,



Edinburgh's defensive line celebrates a good stand.

He took the snap and started off at a sprint sidestepping tacklers and leaving bodies in his wake he took the ball over 50 yards for a Pirates touchdown. With the extra point added the lead was back with the Pirates as half time arrived, 14-12.

The second half started with the Wolves receiving the ball, and a kick returned 45 yards. With good field position and a couple of passing plays, the Wolves moved the ball into the red zone. A quick handoff to Ross Young sees him smash through defenders up the middle and score a touchdown to give the lead back to Edinburgh. This time the special teams make the kick and add the extra point to make it 19-14 to the Wolves.

With both defenses becoming active the next couple of drives see each team fail to move the ball. Midway through the 3rd quarter the Wolves once gain received possession in good field position after their punt pins the pirates inside the 10-yard line. A three and out and disrupted punt gave the Wolves the ball back on the halfway line. A couple of solid run plays and a sweep helped to move Edinburgh within range, and once again



Wolves quarterback Jamie Morrison primed to throw.

Morrison throws a perfect pass, Stuart Harrison pulls it in before making a run into the end zone. Again the extra point is added, and the Wolves were up by 12 points at 26-14. The 3rd quarter ends with the Pirates continuing to struggle to move the ball through the air and a Wolves defense being efficient enough to stop them running the ball.

The 4th quarter saw the Pirates return to the running game and break some big plays with a 60-yard run standing out and only stopped by a last ditch tackle from the Wolves. With the pressure on the Wolves defense once again stepped up and bad snap resulted in seeing Baptie sacked again. It was the turn of the Wolves offense to struggle now as the Pirates defense made some solid plays slowing the Wolves down.

When the Pirates offense got the ball back, they showed how

good they could be. Baptie clearly had a word with his receivers as they picked their way downfield making short passes before what seemed like the game ending play. Baptie threw the ball up and once again a Wolves player came down with it, not content with the interception spotted open field and with a few key blocks, he returned it 50 yards for a pick-six. The celebrations were quickly muted as the play was pulled back by the referees and a holding call was made against the Wolves. With the play wiped from existence, the sporting gods struck again as on the next play Scott Widdowson ran the ball through the Edinburgh defense and scored a touchdown. The extra point was tipped by an Edinburgh hand and blocked, and the score was 20-26 to the Wolves with just 4 minutes left.

With the tension building in the stands and on the benches, the first competitive game between two teams from Scotland in almost four years was on a knife edge. The nerves carried on to the field as after three plays for little gain a wild snap on a punt resulted in Lloyd Dignan seemingly trapped in the backfield with Pirates defenders closing in.

He ran to his right and stopped the swept right across the field to his left and managed to pick up a first down to huge cheers from the large traveling section of fans. The next play was just as dramatic as Morrison, taking a leaf out of his opposite number, runs up the middle and loses the ball on a big hit. With a mad scramble on the floor, the ball comes back out on the side of the Wolves.

With the two-minute warning called the stands all breathe a sigh of relief. The Wolves come back on the field and fail to move the ball any further. With less than one and a half minutes on the clock, the Pirates become increasingly desperate to score Baptie takes to the open field again throwing to the side-lines as the Pirates move the ball into Edinburgh's half.

A couple of hard runs up the middle moved the Pirates within

striking distance and with a handoff, once again, to Scott Widdowson, he breaks through a few tackles and powers over for a touchdown and ties the score at 26-26. With the extra point to kick for the Wolves, fans were calling for another block. The kick went up and sailed to the right of the posts. The fans waited for confirmation as the line judges stepped and crossed their arms to say "no good."

The Wolves received the ball off the kick-off but with no timeouts left the 30 seconds or so left ran off. A gallant effort from the newly promoted Edinburgh will see them take pride and confidence as they join a few elite teams who have travelled to East Kilbride and come away without a mark in the loss column.

The Wolves will have a week off now before traveling to Sheffield to play the Giants on the 23rd of April before returning home with four home games in as many weeks starting on 7 May 2017 at Peffermill. Be sure to check out more information at <http://www.edinburghwolves.com>.