

Rugby – Gloucester v Stade Francais, ERCC Final

Stade come back to beat Gloucester and take the Challenge Cup



European Rugby came to Edinburgh on Friday night as Stade Francais and Gloucester faced off for the European Rugby Challenge Cup in front of just over 24,000 fans.

The match kicked off at BT Murrayfield under drizzly, misty conditions which did little for the handling as both sides probed for a dominant position. The first score came from an intercept by Gloucester wing, Jonny May. With Stade on the offensive inside Gloucester's half, a loose pass was grabbed out of the air by May and the English speedster galloped in the 50-odd metres to dive over for the opener. Fly-half, Billy Burns then knocked over the conversion for 7-0 after 14 minutes.

The match then got bogged down for a while as, once again, both teams seemed to be trying not to lose rather than going for the win.

Slight relief came in the 22nd minute when Burns scored a penalty to take the English side three points further clear at 10-0, Jules Plisson pulling three points back for the Parisians five minutes later.

Gloucester then upped the ante as they used their forwards to carry deep into Stade territory, putting pressure on the defence but, inevitably, losing possession through handling errors.

Three minutes before the break, the French side were up in the

opposition 22 when scrum half, Will Genia floated a deft kick over the defensive line where the ball was juggled by Stade lock, Tom Savage. The ball dropped back and, fortuitously, bounced up into the hands of the evergreen Sergio Parisse, who then had the simple task of falling over the line for the try. Plisson then converted for the equaliser and, with a couple of minutes left in the half, it was honours even at 10-10.



It wasn't honours even with team numbers for long as a clearance kick from the restart by Plisson was almost charged down by Gloucester 9, Willi Heinz. Unfortunately, Heinz was unable to change direction in mid-air and collected the 10 on his way to ground. Referee, John Lacey, felt that a TMO look was required and that showed that, while Heinz had indeed – unavoidably – crashed into Plisson, he had done so with a hand and elbow to the head was immediately yellow carded for the incident.

A – very – short time later, another Gloucester player almost followed him after a 14 v 15 brawl on the touchline. It appeared that Will Genia had been flattened at the back of a ruck by Gloucester No. 7, Lewis Ludlow. Not content with 'taking the half-back without the ball', he then continued with what our American cousins term 'Unnecessary Roughness' which initiated the punch up.

Then, thank goodness, it was half time at 10-10.

The second half was an altogether different affair. Stade turned up the wick and dominated play, aided and abetted by some sublime handling at times and tempered with the odd bout of sublime mis-handling.

Just avoiding a bullet when Gloucester's Tom Marshall grounded the ball over the dead-ball line, following two over-the-head chips from sub, Greg Laidlaw, Stade's first try of the half

came in the 58th minute as the French side were on the attack from their own territory. A one-handed offload from full back, Hugo Bonneval (*Yes, I had to look twice as well! – JLP*) found centre, Jonathan Dante who sprinted in from nigh-on half way, to slide over in the corner for the try. The kick was missed, but, with just under 60 minutes played, it was 15-10 to Stade Francais.



The French side then piled on the pressure, pinning the English team into their own 22 for long periods and, generally, dominating play and making the defence kick to clear their lines.

Reward came in the 71st minute when a slip by Gloucester's Welsh hooker, Richard Hibbard, opened up a gap which gave Stade's centre, Geoffrey Doumayrou, a huge gap to launch through and dive spectacularly over for a 10 point lead. Replacement, Morne Stein then chipped the conversion over for 22-10 with seven minutes left to play.

He followed this up a couple of minutes later for 25-10, leaving their opponents with the virtually impossible task of scoring three times in five minutes. They did their best, but had to settle for a consolation try from Ross Moriarty – converted by Laidlaw – a couple of minutes from time, but it was too late and Stade Francais took the win and, given their domestic season, gained a back door entry into next years Champions Cup.

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