

Rugby – Edinburgh v Stade Francais, European Rugby Challenge Cup

Edinburgh dodge a bullet to claim home quarter-final



Edinburgh Rugby had to win at least one of their remaining two matches in the European Rugby Challenge Cup pool series to be able to claim home advantage in the quarter-finals. Topping the table after four rounds, the Edinburgh support could take solace from the fact that, no matter Stade Francais' poor away match reputation, head coach, Richard Cockerill, is not a man to be complacent.

With the game moved to BT Murrayfield to give Myreside's conventional grass pitch a chance to recover from two matches in succession – who would have thought? – a half-decent crowd were treated to a fairly nail-biting finish to a match that had promised much, but failed to deliver in the first half.

It was a first half which was more of a kicking battle between Edinburgh's Sam Hidalgo-Clyne and Stade's Jules Plisson than a half of scintillating rugby, with both sides appeared to be fairly wary, but gave their backs a bit of freedom to attack. However, by 20 minutes the score was level at 6-6, with both kickers proving their worth and taking full advantage of the myriad of penalties, a myriad which eventually cost the visitors a player in the bin.

By the break, however, Hidalgo-Clyne had had the better of the exchange and Edinburgh went to the changing rooms 12-6 ahead with the crowd hoping for a more interesting second half.

And, within six minutes of the restart, it was indeed more

interesting. Just not for the home support...

Plisson slotted an early penalty for 12-9, before the visitors recovered the ball early from the restart.

They set off from their own half and appeared to be able to advance with little effort, quickly penetrating the home 22 setting up a series of rucks across the line before No. 8, Sekou Macalou targeted Hidalgo-Clyne on the line and crashed through the scrum half for the first try of the match. Plisson then converted for 16-12.



It was to prove a short lived lead, however, as Edinburgh came roaring back into the game with their own opening try. A fumbled line out by the visitors, fell to Edinburgh's Man-of-the-Match, Hamish Watson, and, needing further no invitation, the flanker set off through the, virtually non-existent, Stade defence to sprint 30 metres to the line. Hidalgo-Clyne then converted for the extras and Edinburgh were back in the lead at 19-16.

The next score was another, successful, kick from Plisson to level the scores at 19-19. Edinburgh had enjoyed a fine run of play, with their other flanker, Magnus Bradbury, making a fine attacking run at one point which put a huge amount of pressure on the visitors' defence. But, a brief scuffle involving Edinburgh's Blair Kinghorn and Stade's Mathieu de Giovanni brought proceedings, briefly, to a halt as other players became involved. After a short chat with the guilty parties, the referee awarded Stade a penalty near half way and out on the touchline, which Plisson, impressively, kicked to level the scores.

Two minutes later, Stade followed up with another try. In a repeat of their first try, the visitors seemed to be able to ghost through Edinburgh's defence at will and ended their

fairly simple looking advance with a try next to the posts, centre, Waisea Vuidarvuwalu, being the scorer and Plisson, again, converting for 26-19.

However, this season, Edinburgh have proven to be a side that doesn't easily accept defeat and, following up on an impressive drive deep into Stade territory, stand-off, Jaco van der Walt demonstrated his own 'ghosting' abilities and sailed through the defence for Edinburgh's second try on the 65th minute mark. He then missed the conversion, so Stade stayed in front at 26-24.

van der Walt then had a chance to atone for his earlier miss with a 70th minute penalty, which he struck through for the lead at 27-26, immediately followed by Stade donning their invisibility cloaks again and scoring another simple try – which Plisson converted – in the left corner, sub, Craig Burden havingstrolled in for the touch down.

With less than eight minutes left and Stade in front at 33-27, the home side had a mountain to climb if they were to secure that, all important, home fixture. So they set to with a will and, again drove deep into Stade's 22. A penalty award was kicked to the corner, which set up a series of further penalties as Stade continually dragged the lineout mauls to ground. The final move which secured the win repeated the maul-off-the-top play, but this time the ball came back to wing, Damien Hoyland, and, with Edinburgh once again playing under advantage, he box-kicked over the top and into the goal area where centre, Junior Rasolea beat the opposition to the ball and grounded for the try and 33-32. All the pressure now fell on the shoulders of Kinghorn, but the young full back knocked over the simple conversion for 34-33 with less than two minutes to play.



Game over? You'd have thought so, but doing the right thing, Edinburgh played 'keep ball' for, almost, the final minute until, with less than 20 seconds left, Fowles decided that a box kick was the way to go!

You could almost see the light come back into Stade's eyes as they, as much as anyone, knew that ball in hand in the second half meant, more-or-less, a try. And they came so close. Easily driving Edinburgh back to near their five-metre line, the bullet mentioned above was finally dodged as they were penalised for going to ground in a ruck, thus sending a huge sigh of relief around the home crowd as the ball was booted into touch to end another nail biting encounter for the home side.

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