

Rugby League – Gateshead Storm v Edinburgh Eagles, North East Cup

‘Golden Point’ win for Eagles in Newcastle



In the North East Cup preliminary round, Edinburgh Eagles travelled to Kingston Park, home of professional League club Newcastle Thunder and Union club Newcastle Falcons, but it is difficult to imagine that either of these teams have featured in a duel as dramatic as was seen on Saturday between Gateshead Storm ‘A’ and Edinburgh Eagles which saw The Eagles win in “golden point” extra time.

The visitors kicked off and during the early stages both teams traded sets of six with neither dominating play until a surging run from Eagles half back, Kaharau Kaihe, on twelve minutes, saw him break Gateshead tackles in centre field and set up Lewis Clarke (*bottom*) to score his first try of the

afternoon towards the right wing. The normally reliable Stuart McBain uncharacteristically missed the conversion from a difficult angle, something which would add to the drama as the match unfolded.

Eagles settled into the game now and continued to pressure Gateshead as they looked for another score which duly came after nineteen minutes when Clayton Woods scored on the right wing after Eagles had forced a goal line drop out. Again the conversion was missed.

The Edinburgh side were now beginning to dominate proceedings but Gateshead were clearly in no mood to be beaten by the Scottish side as they forced their way back into the game with pressure of their own on the Edinburgh goal line which eventually resulted in their first try of the day on twenty-eight minutes. The successful conversion made the score Gateshead Storm 6 – 8 Edinburgh Eagles.

Despite the heat, the first half action wasn't over as Edinburgh sought to press home their advantage. First Fergus Simpson, with a strong display on his debut, made a mazy run to force another Gateshead goal line drop out, and then Seb Jablonski, who has become a fixture of the forward pack in his debut season, showing off his ball juggling skills to prevent a knock on before being held up near the try line. However, Eagles were not to be denied another score before half time with Mark Robertson finding more success on the right edge on thirty-six minutes to make the half time score 12-6 in the visitors favour following a third unsuccessful conversion attempt.

Gateshead kicked off in the second half and Eagles went straight into attack to go the length of the field only to give away a penalty at the Gateshead try line. Storm took full advantage to go the length of the field themselves and score the opening try of the second half, bringing themselves back within two points.

The heat was making players from both sides tired now and resulted in error strewn passages of play with neither side being able to take advantage. Defences held out until the 60th minute when Jakub Jablonski picked up the ball from his own try line after Eagles successfully repelled a Gateshead attack. The centre's break saw him get to the half way line, putting the Eagles back on the attack and hooker Clarke raced in for his second try of the afternoon under the posts from 20 metres. McBain was successful with the boot and restored the eight-point cushion, 18-10 Eagles.



The game was becoming scrappy now and tempers were beginning to fray both on the pitch and the sidelines. It was Gateshead who capitalised on this with the next score of the game to again bring themselves back within two points of the visitors after the successful conversion kick.

With ten minutes left to play, Edinburgh continued to press for what would surely be the match winning score and after another Simpson run, they were back on the front foot. Gateshead managed to get the ball back only to knock on giving Eagles the scrum feed and opportunity to score. A feature of the scrums all afternoon had seen both teams contest them and this one was no different as Clarke picked up the ball to run in his third try for the afternoon, completing his hat trick on the fruitful right wing after seventy-four minutes to make the score 22-16 for the Eagles.

The crowd had witnessed a highly entertaining game but there

was another twist as Gateshead were able to capitalise on an Eagles mistake to score on seventy-eight minutes and to level the scores after the conversion at 22-22 as the final whistle sounded.

As this was a cup tie, there needed to be a winner and after a quick consultation of the rule book, the match entered golden point extra time. Eagles won the toss meaning they had first possession of the ball. After kicking the ball out on the full on the 4th tackle, Gateshead had good field possession for the first attack of extra time which came to nothing after a knock on. Eagles then knocked on themselves to hand the ball back to Gateshead to attack from their 20 metre line however a dogged Edinburgh were able to hold out on their line to prevent a Gateshead score.

Eagles now had possession with Nick Hanmer breaking tackles to surge forward only for his pass to be controversially judged forward after Simpson had collected the bouncing ball to cross the whitewash. Hanmer was then sent to the sin-bin for his protestations. This decision only served to motivate the Eagles players whose tackling forced a Gateshead knock on.



After a short stoppage in play to help players from both teams who were by now suffering with cramp, Eagles attacked again and this time were able to force Gateshead into giving away a penalty near their try line. Sensibly Eagles elected to kick and McBain (*top*) put thoughts of earlier missed conversion attempts aside to keep a cool head and calmly slot the kick over the posts to give Eagles a 22 – 24 win and a place in the next round.

After the game coach Barry McGuffog said; “Obviously I’m delighted with the result and you could see from the elation of the players at the end just how much it meant to them. You’d think we’d won the cup not just a place in the quarter finals but this was more than just a game, this was a matter of national pride, Scotland versus England, and Scotland came out on top. We made hard work of it at times and weren’t as clinical in attack as we’ve been previously but I can’t fault the way we dug in and ground out the win. We certainly showed we can compete at this level. Fair play to Stu (McBain) for putting his hand up to take that shot at goal under such pressure. I could easily single each and every player out for individual praise but alongside Lewis’ captains knock, I think 16 year old Fergus Simpson deserves a mention. His ability belies his age and he showed today that he’ll be a real asset to us”.

Report courtesy of Eagles’ Andrew McPhail

Images 1 and 3 – library v Saluzzo