

Rugby League – Strathmore Silverbacks v Edinburgh Eagles

Eagles lift Scottish Title on aggregate score



Edinburgh Eagles were crowned Scotland Rugby Leagues National Champions for 2018 on Saturday following an aggregate win against Strathmore Silverbacks avenging last season's final defeat against the same opposition.

An entertaining game in terrible conditions saw Strathmore claw back the 8 point deficit from the first leg in May at the end of 80 minutes, meaning a golden point situation to find out who would be champions.

The visiting Eagles started brightly and scored their first try of the afternoon on four minutes when Lucas Reid ran over the try line on the left wing following a cross field passing move which stretched the Strathmore defence to give the Eagles an early 4-0 lead.

Strathmore were clearly going to defend their impressive home record and hit back on eight minutes with a try of their own under the posts which was converted to give the Silverbacks a 6-4 lead.

A combination of weather, which saw a string of handling errors, and stout defence from both teams meant neither was able to dominate until the 22nd minute when Strathmore gave away a penalty for being offside. From the resulting set of six, the Eagles moved the ball to their right edge, only for Fergus Simpson to spot a numerical advantage on the left wing, and place a well weighted cross field kick which Mark Robertson collected to score and put Eagles back in the lead at 8-6.

A determined Strathmore hit back and thought they had again scored under the posts, only for the referee to judge the ball had been dropped in the act of grounding it. With the Eagles back in possession, and taking play deep in to Strathmore territory, Jakub Jablonski forced his way over the try line only to be held up. Edinburgh Eagles were not to be denied for long though as they quickly passed the ball to their left wing again and Reid was able to score his second try of the afternoon on 33 minutes. This time, Simpson was able to convert to give the Eagles a 14-6 lead which they held until just before half time when Strathmore scored to bring the score back to 14-10 to the visitors.

The rain, which had been ever present in the first half, got worse in the second and both sides now accepted they would make handling errors causing frustration amongst both set of players.



It was a handling error which resulted in the first try of the second period when Strathmore scored in the 45th minute and, following the conversion led 16-14. This time they would not relinquish it and now sought to build up a lead of more than 8 points to be ahead on aggregate and be crowned Scottish champions. It got better for Strathmore soon after when they scored 2 more tries, one of which was converted, to lead 26-14 and putting them in touching distance of the title.

Eagles had travelled determined to win and with the knowledge that a try would bring the aggregate scores back level, they finally managed the try their dogged play deserved when Jakub Jablonski scored to make the score 26-18. The kick was missed and with the final whistle soon after, Strathmore had clawed back the 8 point deficit from the first leg to tie the score on aggregate at 60-60.

After a consultation between the referee, the coaches and captains of both teams, plus Scotland Rugby League representatives, it was agreed that golden point extra time would be played to decide the 2018 champions.

The Eagles kicked off and had the first opportunity to score

when Strathmore were penalised 35 metres out from their try line in front of the posts. Stuart McBain stepped up to take the kick but it fell short in the atrocious conditions. Strathmore now had possession and were able to march the length of the field and created an opportunity of their own to score but the drop goal attempt sailed agonisingly to the right of the posts.

If this were boxing, both fighters would be barely able to stand by now and would be trading punches on the ropes. Eagles players were able to summon their last reserves of energy to now go the length of the field themselves, and following clever set up play, the ball was released to Jakub Jablonski on the Eagles right wing, who crashed through two desperate tackles to get over the try line and see Edinburgh Eagles named as Scottish Champions.

Final match score: Strathmore 26 – Eagles 22

Aggregate score: Strathmore 60 – Eagles 64



Following the final whistle, coach Barry McGuffog said; “firstly I’d like to commend both sets of players for their

contributions to today's game. Every single player from both teams stood up to be counted and left nothing in their lockers, they're a credit to their clubs. The weather meant that it would likely be a scrappy game, and it was, but it was entertaining and nerve wracking to watch. Golden Point is an unfortunate but exciting way to conclude a game. Next I must thank the officials in what wasn't an easy game to referee. The conditions and what was at stake meant teams getting frustrated. I'd like to apologise myself for allowing my own passion and frustration to overflow at times, shouting and balling from the sidelines. Lastly, I'd like to thank the supporters, particularly our own who have really gotten behind the lads this season and have travelled to all games to cheer us on, it really makes a difference."

On game itself: "It's actually quite hard to talk about the game as we both lost and won today. Although we didn't win the game itself, we achieved what we came here to do, become Scotland Champions. We set ourselves a couple of goals or objectives at the start of the season and have hit the first one. The lads deserve a massive pat on the back as today we've shown that determination and desire to win. Credit to the boys we "won" ugly today but it shows a different side to our team as we're probably naturally more suited to dryer conditions. We've picked up a couple of injuries which we'll look at during the week, ahead of the Catterick game next Saturday, but hopefully everyone enjoys the weekend before we start again on Wednesday at training." Added McGuffog.

Next up for the Eagles is their home semi-final tie against Catterick Crusaders in the NE Cup semi-final on Saturday 23 June with a 2.30pm kick off at the Jack Kane Centre.

As always, its free entry and supporters both old and new are welcome.

Match report courtesy of Eagles' Andrew McPhail

Photo credit OG Blakeman Photos