

Rugby – Edinburgh v Zebre, BKT United Rugby Championship

After losing both matches in the 1872 Cup to Glasgow Edinburgh had to get a win against Zebre to keep their place in the top eight and ensure an end-of-season play-off place.

Zebre, on the other hand were trying to claw their way off the foot of the tabel with some wins.

The home side had not made things easier for themselves as, notwithstanding a raft of injuries, following protocols, six key players had come up for a rest period.

The first 15, or so, minutes of the match were fairly even, with Zebre, possibly playing further up the pitch than Edinburgh, but neither side creating any clear chances. However, both teams managed to turn the ball over through badly formed, or defended, rucks, mauls and lineouts.



Mark Bennett was to prove a thorn in the side of Zebre all match © 2023 J.L. Preece

That all changed in the 17th minute. A penalty lineout inside the visitors' 22 gave Edinburgh the chance to form a maul, creating space on the outside. Scrum half, Charlie Shiel, then received a short pass and darted around the outside to dot down in the corner for the try.

Wing – Yes... 'Wing!' – Blair Kinghorn missed the conversion, so the score stayed at 5-0.

With the hosts now in the driving seat, it only took a further five minutes before they added to their score.

Centre Mark Bennett made the initial break, taking some of his team mates with him. A combination of Bennett, Charlie Savala and Nick Haining opened up a gap and Haining's final pass put wing, Jack Blain, thorough a yawning gap to score the home side's second try.

Again, Kinghorn missed, but it was now 10-0 with just over 15 minutes left in the half.



Zebre's Pierre Bruno doing his best to avoid Edinburgh's Harry Paterson. © 2023 J.L. Preece

It was now Zebre's chance to dominate, if not possession, then at least territory as they kept their opponents pinned back in their own half for a large part of the next period of play.

However, the home side found a way out and, creating a minor overlap, made space down the right wing. Bennett's final pass to put Blain clear was then 'interfered with' by Zebre wing, Simone Gesi, earning the No. 11 a 10 minute stay in the sin bin.

However, Edinburgh couldn't really capitalise on the man advantage and Zebre finished off the half as, clearly the stronger side, with only another turn over from Edinburgh saving a try.

Zebre then started the second half as they had finished the first, pressing the Edinburgh defence back and creating a few problems.



Zebre's 10, Tiff Eden, opened up the Edinburgh defence on his way to his try. © 2023 J.L. Preece

With Gesi back on, just reward came their way with a well worked move that made space down the left for the wing to trot in his side's first points of the afternoon in the 43rd minute. The conversion was missed, but it was now 10-5 to Edinburgh.

Continuing as they had started, Zebre kept up the pressure and scored their second in the 50th minute. Again, the scorer was Gesi, but this one came off the back of a lineout maul in the same corner, with scrum half, Alessandro Fusco, supplying the final pass. Again, the kick was missed, but it was honours now even at 10-10.

Another 10 minutes of to-and-fro play lead up the the next score of the match. Working their way up into the home 22, Zebre took play down the middle and a neat piece of play from stand off, Tiff Eden saw the No. 10 skip past a couple of feeble tackle attempts from the edge of the 22 to go in under the posts. He then converted for 10-17.



Cameron Hutchinson was another Edinburgh player to make Zebre's life difficult. © 2023 J.L. Preece

Edinburgh immediately went on the offensive, winning a penalty which was sent to the corner. Setting up a powerful rolling maul, the home side drove Zebre back with Connor Boyle being dragged over for the try. Kinghorn converted this one, so the sides went into the final eight minutes at 17-17.

It was an eight minute where Edinburgh crossed the line twice from mauls, but were prevented from grounding, before another rumble from the pack was rewarded in the shape of a try from sub, Paddy Harrison (top image) off the back of his own turnover ball. Kinghorn then converted with a drop kick for a final score of 24-17 after having to replace the ball twice on the tee when it fell off due to the windy conditions.

So, a sigh of relief for the home support, but, at time of writing, both the Cell C Sharks and Glasgow Warriors trail Edinburgh by only one point, but both have two games in hand, so all is not settled for the Capital team.