

HUNGARY UPSET SLOVENIA, FIRST AWAY WIN IN 4 YEARS

Hungary fullback **Matthew Holzl** scored a brilliant individual try in the dying minutes to complete a 15-12 come from behind victory over Slovenia in their Europe Group 3B rugby match in Ljubljana on Saturday (8 October).

The result was Hungary's first victory against Slovenia in 9 years, ranked twenty places higher than them in the IRB world rankings, and confirms that a real renaissance is currently under way in Hungarian rugby. Following their thrashing of Bosnia-Herzegovina a fortnight ago, and credible performances against top opposition Spain & Croatia last season, Hungary is starting to turn heads.

On a gloomy, chilly autumn afternoon in Ljubljana, the local crowd dutifully turned up expecting a comfortable Slovenian victory over the same opponents they beat 41-0 last year. However, with Slovenia playing their first match of the season, and without several key players, along with Hungary looking more cohesive from their recent run of form, the match was by no means a formality. Indeed, as the match developed, Hungary turned what could have easily been forgiven as a respectable narrow away defeat, into a historic victory that has the team showing glimpses of their true potential.

With an out of sorts Slovenian making too many handling errors from their own ball, and struggling to stop Hungary's lineout possession & rolling mauls, the scarlet reds sensed an upset. With the match delicately poised at 5-12 going into the final ten minutes of the match, the Hungarian pack secured quick turnover ball, which their backs used to counterattack. Stretching the Slovenia defense out wide, it drew an illegal head-high tackle from the Slovenia winger **Gumzej Marko** on fullback Holzl; which forced the Italian referee to show Marko the yellow card.

That careless act of recklessness proved to be the turning point in the match. In the 71st minute, with Slovenia now down to 14 men, Hungary kicked the ensuing penalty into the corner for a lineout 5 metres from the Slovenian's goal line. From the lineout take, the rampant Hungary forwards drove the line, feeding scrumhalf **Tibor Pasztor** who scrambled over the try line to score. Goal kicker Holzl could have brought the teams level, but missed a simple conversion and the scores remained 10-12 to Slovenia. The pressure was palpable.

Within 4 minutes, Hungary struck again, to go into the lead for the first time in the match; a lead they would never surrender. Pinned into their own quarter, Hungary forced a defensive lineout on their own 22 metre line. From yet another solid lineout win, they drove a rolling mauling up the field 30 metres. Once they had the Slovenian defence in disarray, flanker **Robert Deli** broke clear on the half way line. To stop this momentum the frantic Slovenian defence had no choice but to kill the ball. **Karoly Suiogan**, playing hooker in this game, reacted the quickest; tapping the penalty immediately and running at the first defenders. Enter stage right **Mathew Holzl**, who arrived first on Suiogan's inside shoulder 35 metres from the Croatian try line, and put on a blinding burst of speed to outpace four tacklers to race to the try line, for the match winning score of 15-12.

Man of the match Holzl, who also made four try saving tackles earlier in the game, unfortunately had a poor goal kicking game, missing all three conversion attempts and two penalties.

However, it was the Slovenian goal kicker, no 10 and their captain **Peter Kavcic**, who single-handedly kept the hosts in the match, and even had a chance to draw it level in the dying seconds of this tight match. Having stretched Slovenia ahead with a 3rd minute penalty, and then two neatly taken drop goals in the 22nd and 29th minutes, Slovenia went into the break 9-5 ahead. He then extended their lead to 12-5 with another penalty 8 minutes into the second half, after Hungarian centre **Gareth Lloyd** was yellow carded for a professional foul. Kavcic had one final chance to save the match for Slovenia with a final penalty attempt five minutes into injury time, but his kick slide outside the right hand upright, and the referee blew his whistle for fulltime.

Hungary's only points of the first half came seconds before the halftime whistle. **Zoltan Heckel** finished off another well worked driving maul from a lineout, after Slovenian flanker **Andrej Lozar** was sin binned for foul play. In fact, Hungary could have been ahead at the break, in the 25th minute no 4 **Peter Novak** dropping the ball over the line, and Holzl missing two penalty kicks.

In the end though, history will show it was the persistence of this Hungarian team, based on a strong defence, and a bit of luck that was the difference. And, oh, and that heart stopping last minute try from the Hungarian fullback.