

South Africa a Little Too Much for USA in QFs

Written by Alex Goff

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The USA were defeated by South Africa 17-7 Sunday in the Cup Quarterfinals of the Nelson Mandela Bay 7s in Port Elizabeth, South Africa in a game where they played well, but squandered some precious scoring opportunities.

South Africa got on the board first. Twice they looked to make the wide kick from Paul Deport to Frankie Isbell to use Isbell's speed.

The first one the Eagles bottled Isbell up well enough, but the second time the wing took the ball on the fly and raced into the corner with Nick Edwards draped over him.

That try took almost two minutes, and through that time the USA had hardly touched the ball. They got it back on the restart, though, and looked effective in making little breaks from Luke Hume, Nick Edwards, and Jack Halalilo.

Finally Hume had a break down the left sideline and tried to feed Halalilo on his inside, but the pass didn't quite go to hand. Had Halalilo even just let the ball go past him, Colin Hawley was there also.

Penalty trouble helped South Africa work their way downfield. This they did, but the Americans got the ball back as Matt Hawkins forced a turnover in the tackle. After a couple of phases Zack Test passed to Edwards in space, and he did superbly, beating four men with two sidesteps, a turn of pace, and a fend.

He was in under the posts and with the conversion that put the USA in the lead 7-5.

Time for one more possession, and both Test and Chris Dry went up high for the restart. The South African came down with it, and that started his team on the front foot. After a little run from Cecil Afrika, Frankie Horn burst through, and fed Cornal Hendricks, who was dragged down by Hume just short of the line. But Hendricks had just enough reach to score. Afrika's conversion made it 12-7 South Africa at halftime.

The second half started with the USA getting a penalty in their favor, but Hawkins, after tapping and running, seemed a bit in two minds whether to pass or run, and as a result had the ball stolen. The USA defense in transition was impressive, though, and Test held his runner up off the ground to force a scrum.

Luke Hume toed the ball away from that scrum and gathered it up well, slicing downfield with his support. He found Folau Niua who offloaded to Hawley. Had Hawley caught it, it was probably a try, but the ball bounced off his outstretched hand to give South Africa a scrum ten meters from their line.

Once again the Eagle defense was solid and forced a forward pass, and with 3:30 to go the USA had an attacking scrum. They won the ball and went wide to Edwards. He was bottled up,

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but the Eagles sent the ball back the other way, where Halalilo beat one man and offloaded. The ball rolled around and Test picked it up and quickly passed away, but a South Africa player coming back to his side in open play got in the way of the ball and turned the ball over. South Africa took off, and while the USA cover defense was there to stop a breakaway, the Blitzbokke got the ball to Cheslin Kolbe, who spun out of Hume's tackle and scored in the corner.

One more shot for the USA, but a long kick ahead for Carlin Isles didn't take, and South Africa escaped with a 17-7 victory.

In the end the USA played fairly well. They looked dangerous enough in attack and were only undone by little errors that turned likely tries into a get out of jail card for South Africa.

The Blitzbokke will have been unhappy with the number of missed tackles, while the Eagles will lament their higher number of errors.

The USA is now in the Plate Semifinal, against Wales at 9:05am ET, 6:05am PT.

Notes: Maka Unufe, who was taken off the field injured on Saturday, did not play. Captain Shalom Suniula did not start for the third straight game.

This was one of Zack Test's strongest games on defense.

USA Starting Lineup:

Hawkins, Hawley, Test, Hume, Niua, Halalilo, Edwards

Subs used: Suniula, Thompson, Isles, Augspurger

USA 7

Tries: Edwards

Convs: Niua

South Africa 17

Tries: Hendricks, Kolbe, Isbell

Convs: Afrika