



Bismarck du Plessis © Gallo Images

Sharks drop to second after Lions scare

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The Sharks narrowly beat a game Lions side 19-17 (halftime 16-11) in their ABSA Currie Cup match in Durban on Saturday. But their failure to get a bonus point means they fall to second on the table behind Western Province, with one round of matches remaining.

The Sharks dominated the first half in terms of territory, possession and turnovers, with their star-studded forward pack in fine form. But mistakes close to the Lions line meant they were unable to establish a significant lead before the break.

In fact, it was the visiting team who created the first try, thanks to a break by Doppies la Grange in the 14th minute. The Lions centre made most of the yards before offloading to Chris Jonck, who scored the try. Herkie Kruger (who'd scored a penalty a couple of minutes earlier) failed to convert, but the Lions still had an 8-6 lead after Ruan Pienaar's two earlier penalties for the Sharks.

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The Sharks continued to rally as they had before the Lions try, but their attacks got them nowhere until Juan Martin Hernandez

landed a drop goal in the 33rd minute and got them back into the lead (9-8).

Then, with just a minute of play remaining in the first half, the Sharks finally crossed the Lions tryline. It began with a series of Lions infringements, which ultimately led to Nico Luus being sin-binned. The Sharks then rolled it from their corner lineout and Bismarck du Plessis crashed over. Pienaar converted, but there was just time for Kruger to add a penalty at the other end before the break, which made it 16-11 to the Sharks at the break.

One might have expected the Lions to roll over in the second half, particularly with Luus still in the sin bin for a few minutes. Instead, they were the first to score, with Kruger landing another penalty after just a couple of minutes. The Lions then got their heads down and fought hard, getting themselves a good deal more possession and territory in a scrappy second period that produced no tries.

Both defences gave it their all, with Kruger's bruised eye in 47th minute testament to the ferocity of it all. It resulted from a clash of heads with Sharks centre Andries Strauss, but in what was turning into a battle of place kickers Kruger was unwilling to leave the field despite one eye being shut.

He eventually went off several minutes later, though, and it was up to Jonck to put his side in the lead when the Lions were awarded a penalty in the 64th minute. He made no mistake, booting his team into a 17-16 lead with sixteen minutes left to play.

The Sharks came close to scoring once or twice, but were simply unable to muster a try. However, Pienaar's penalty in the 72nd minute restored their two-point lead and proved just

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