

Ireland beat Wallabies 26-21 to set up a Test series decider in Sydney



Tadhg Furlong of Ireland scores a try at AAMI Park in Melbourne.

Source: Getty Images



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Source: FOX SPORTS



MELBOURNE: Champion playmaker Johnny Sexton returned to haunt his old mentor Michael Cheika by guiding Ireland to a series levelling 26-21 win over the Wallabies at AAMI Park.



A week after sensationally being left on the bench after a long season guiding Leinster to every trophy in Europe, Sexton returned to his regular No 10 jersey and spearheaded the Six Nations champions to their first victory on Australian soil for 39 years.

Whereas in the first Test Ireland's attack was stifled at almost every opportunity by expert Australian defensive reads, the world's No 2 side were this time a step ahead of their rivals with Sexton calling the shots flat at the line.

The 32-year-old veteran of 81 Tests finished with 16 points as Ireland won despite only scoring two tries to Australia's three.

Sexton wasn't alone in leading Ireland's revival, with his British and Irish Lions teammate Tadhg Furlong exceptional up front in a man of the match performance which included a second half try.

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The Wallabies were their worst enemy, giving away a staggering 16 penalties to Ireland's 10 to frustrate the 29,018 fans.

"I don't know if we played good enough to go 2-0 up today," Wallabies coach Cheika said.

"I know we scored three tries to two, but I just think we need to trust our system a little bit better.

"We went for some 50/50s, they gave away some soft penalties — gave away too many penalties full stop.

"We shouldn't have that doubt, we should just go and believe in ourselves and that'll be our big work on next week.

"Ground ourselves and say 'right, let's just do what we do' and the rest will turn out alright."

As bad as their discipline was the Wallabies' lack of fluency in attack, which wasn't helped either by some terrible kicking.



Star flankers Michael Hooper and David Pocock, who were instrumental in Australia's first Test win, didn't have nearly the same success in slowing Ireland's ball down with No 7 Dan Leavy proving effective in his return for the Irish.

A late try to Taniela Tupou set up an exciting finish, but a knock on from the Wallabies at the base of the ruck on Ireland's 10m line dashed their hopes of stealing a win.

The series will now be decided in a mouthwatering third Test next Saturday in front of a sold out crowd at Allianz Stadium in

Sydney.

On a cold winter's night in Melbourne, the healthy crowd left their arrival late and it was a last minute scramble to take their seats.

The Wallabies were sharp early and they scored in just the second minute, as Kurtley Beale cut back on the inside of Bernard Foley and zigzagged his way to score under the sticks.

But the early excitement and confidence that the Wallabies were playing with soon turned to panic as Marika Koroibete was sent to the sinbin for 10 minutes after a dangerous lifting tackle on Rob Kearney.

Ireland didn't waste any time making use of their numerical advantage.



They kicked to the corner, set up a perfectly formed rolling maul and, sensing an overlap on the blindside, Conor Murray demanded the ball and threw a lovely cut out pass for Andrew Conway.

Sexton's sideline conversion saw Ireland lock the scores up at 7-7.

A knock on and penalty against experienced prop Sekope Kepu then saw Sexton kick Ireland to a 10-7 lead.

By the time Koroibete returned from the sinbin, Ireland led 13-7 after the Wallabies were pinged for holding on.

The home side continued to shoot themselves in the foot with horrible discipline as Caleb Timu was penalised for a deliberate knock down and Sexton was happy to bank another three points.

Back to back penalties saw the Wallabies finally get some field position and for the second time they came away with points, as referee Paul Williams awarded the home side a penalty try after Ireland were deemed to collapse a rolling maul.

While the try brought the Wallabies back into the match, they lost vice captain Will Genia to a broken arm and his departure added to the tense state of affairs.

With Ireland breathing fire as the seconds ticked away in the first half, a steal from David





Marika Koroibete of the Wallabies tackles Rob Kearney of Ireland.

Source: AAP

Pocock saved the Wallabies from trailing by more at the break.

Ireland started the second half how they ended the first, attacking the Wallabies' line with purpose and gusto.

The Wallabies were fortunate not to lose another man to the sinbin after repeated infringements and were perhaps saved by Furlong's try in the 54th minute.

Another Sexton penalty saw the Irish move to a 26-14 lead after 66 minutes.

The Wallabies had their opportunities and eventually Tupou cracked the line, scoring from close range.

But a knock on from Koroibete dashed Australia's hopes of winning, as he fumbled the ball at the base of the ruck.

Overall, Ireland enjoyed 57 per cent possession and 65 per cent territory.

IRELAND 26 (Andrew Conway, Tadhg Furlong tries; Jonathan Sexton 2 con, 4 pen) **AUSTRALIA 21** (Kurtley Beale, Taniela Tupou tries, penalty try; Bernard Foley 2 con)

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