

Marr 1st XV v Selkirk 1st XV

DEFENDING champions Marr's struggles continue, as Selkirk – one spot ahead of their hosts in the league table heading into the game – ransacked 'Fortress Fullarton' to come away with maximum points with the last play of the match, snatching away their home team's losing bonus point at the same time.

After an incredibly tight first-half, it was Marr's inability to make full use of the stiff breeze to their backs in that opening 40 which cost them dear, with chances going a begging, and only one **Blair Jardine** score while Selkirk were reduced to 14 to show for it.

"We had a number of opportunities. In the first half we were held up over the line, there's a dropped pass with a two-on-one, and then we've spilled one just a yard short of the line, so there's three or four in the first half, then in the second half we've another held up over the line, then we get in the lead we gave away a simple penalty," said a frustrated **Craig Redpath**.

"Fair play to Selkirk, they stuck at their game and we didn't execute anything. They dug in, got the result, and right at the end we knock-on, they score so we don't even get a losing bonus point."

The Marr team selection contained a mixture of vast experience and youth, such as **Ross Brockert** making his debut, but it was the experienced players who Redpath felt had let the side down more than the youngsters

"It was our big players who didn't play the conditions, it's them who are meant to control the game, and they didn't do it. Ross came in and he's carried hard and done all the things we asked him to do, Jake (Jacobson) on the wing has done well, but some of our senior players are just not doing it.

"When you're struggling a bit you make mistakes, the disappointment for us is our levels have dropped, and other teams can come here and beat us. First and foremost we have to play better, and play smarter. We need to look at things as a coaching team and how we pick and set up the team. We got very frantic in that game and lost structure."

Selkirk had raced into the lead in under 45 seconds, Marr winger **Andrew Ramage** was a little isolated and on the receiving end of a double-tackle which saw the ball pop out from the breakdown, allowing one of his tacklers, **Ryan Cottrell** to pick up and sprint clear down the left-hand side into the corner.



As expected, Marr came back, but squandered two of the opportunities Redpath mentioned before Jardine squeezed over after a succession of penalties had gone to touch and **Scott McClymont** had gone to the sin-bin.

Kicking in to the wind, Selkirk's pack had to do most of the heavy lifting – as forwards will always tell you they have to, regardless – and their dominance at the scrum helped them gain field possession.

From a penalty that would under normal circumstances be a sure-fire three points, just right of centre on the edge of Marr's 22, **Aaron McColm** went to touch. Selkirk picked and probed, until eventually they overloaded the openside with speed merchants, and Cottrell was in for his second, this time in the right corner.

Cameron Young became the second Marr player held up over the line, then Jardine's lovely offload looked like it would lead to a score for **Nairn Calder** until he lost possession under pressure.

A final chance to score going in to the break was awarded to Marr when Jardine won a turnover on halfway, **Scott Bickerstaff** went to the corner but Jardine overthrew, into the waiting arms of hulking tight-head **Zen Szwagrzak**.

A three-point lead away to the defending champions at half-time is a decent spot to be in, but it's certainly not comfortable, and when **Ryan Godsmark** was unfortunate to see a clearing kick carry just into touch, you automatically assumed Marr would take advantage, but they took their time in doing it thanks to the rock-solid efforts of the Selkirk defence.

The pressure eventually became too much, and after conceding a penalty for offside, **Ben Johnston** – one of the experienced players in the Marr side who emerged with credit – managed to burrow over to restore the home side's lead, however **Colin Sturgeon** was unable to convert thanks to the attentions of **Andrew Grant-Suttie** who raced out to block and then clattered into the stand-off on his follow through, forcing Sturgeon off the field for a few minutes to receive medical attention.



Almost straight from kick-off McColm put Selkirk back in the lead, stroking over a penalty from 40 metres, and then set up the key score of the match with a wonderful 50-22 kick when he spotted acres of space on Marr's right flank. Line-out to Selkirk became try to Selkirk when McClymont carried over.

The score was now 12-18 with just under a quarter of the match left to play, Jardine was the next Marr player who looked destined to score, after sitting down McColm, but again the ball popped out his grasp when he was close to the line.

Ross Nixon was then yellow carded, and with Marr fearful of kicking to touch with the wind howling in their faces, they opted to take tap penalties. Selkirk repelled them successfully for a while, until Bickerstaff showed his qualities, charging through a tackle on the right, and belting over the line.

Calum Inglis converted to give Marr a one-point lead, but again, and this time straight from kick-off, rather than almost straight from kick-off, they gave away a kickable penalty when **Craig Miller** was pinged for not releasing. With McColm now off the pitch, the responsibility fell to Cottrell, who took his personal points tally to thirteen, with 75 minutes showing on the clock.

Selkirk head coach **Scott Wight** must have been having kittens the size of lions when a forward pass in their own half gave Marr the scrum put-in with the clock ticking ever closer to dead-time, but again the visitors were awarded the penalty, although it looked like both sides were responsible for the wheeling.

Hunting a bonus point, Selkirk went deep into Marr territory with the kick, won another penalty at the scrum when they knocked on, but then conceded a scrum penalty when they had opted to scrum.

Marr were at Desperation Station and would have to run the ball from their own 22, they made it a few phases and a few metres up the field until they knocked-on, and McClymont

had the presence of mind, and just enough gas left in the tank, to run home the bonus point score.



“It definitely wasn’t pretty at times, but to a man, defensively, work-rate, energy, turnovers, I thought we were outstanding. To come here and get a win, and to get five points is outstanding,” beamed an almost shocked Wight afterwards.

“We’re in a really positive place, we’ve had a good start to the season but today was a serious example of where we are, to come to the champions and claim five points, but the games keep coming. We’ve got Currie at home next week, and Hawick the week after, but these are the games you’ve got to win if you want to be in the top-four at the end of the season.



Report by The Offside Line and photos by Grant Kinghorn