

Glasgow Hawks v Selkirk 12.11.22

A pair of late tries gave Scott Wight's Selkirk a crucial bonus-point victory over Glasgow Hawks in a match which could have gone either way. More importantly for the Border side, a sixth win of the season lifts them above Hawks in the table while also depriving the hosts of any points from the fixture.

"Our ball retention in the second half today was outstanding and that's what made the difference in the end," said Selkirk head coach Wight. "For some of the tries, we had about 13, 14 phases, so to come away with the bonus point and give them nothing was really important."

Selkirk dominated the early minutes and scored first through winger **Ben Pickles**, but Hawks went on to take charge of the first half.

A creaking opening scrum and a loose kick out on the full left Hawks on the back foot, and Selkirk made good use to gain valuable territory. The Border back three in particular caused all manner of problems for the home side and it was fly-half **Craig Jackson's** dainty chip ahead which allowed **Pickles** to touch down after eight minutes.

Aaron McColm's sensational touchline conversion gave the try the full complement of points it deserved.



Key to Hawks' purple patch was their ability to counter from deep, using the space to turn Selkirk's defence. Quick hands from **Ryan Flett** released **Ruaraidh Hart** down the wing before **James Pinkerton** combined beautifully with full-back **Andy McLean** to send **Sam Graham** close on the right wing.

A penalty line-out followed soon after and Hawks again used their silky-smooth hands to get their first try courtesy of Flett, who latched onto a neat reverse pass out of the tackle by McLean on the near side.

The conversion fell short, but the tide had very firmly turned in favour of the Balgray outfit, and errors and indiscipline began to affect Selkirk as the half-time break approached. Hawks got their second score – converted by McLean – thanks to a pick and go from hooker **Istok Totic** from close range, and Wight’s men must have been grateful to hear referee **David Sutherland**’s whistle as only desperate tackling prevented a third home try. But, as the coach explained, a tactical rethink at the break did the trick.

“We spoke about coming to Glasgow Hawks and playing a simpler brand of rugby and trying to kick a bit more, but fair play to them, they had about four or five boys in the backfield which made hard for us to kick,” he said.

“So we had a bit of a change in mindset at half-time and I told them to just go and play rugby. Keep hold of the ball and back yourself, we’ll get loads of metres. It’s fine to speak about it but for the players to go and do it was really important.”

The revised approach began to bear fruit as Hawks looked nervous in defence, letting Selkirk strike first in the second half. Full-back **Ryan Cottrell** diced his way through the last Hawks defenders following a wave of immense Selkirk attack, but with the conversion wide, the scores were left tantalisingly even at 12-12.



Then Hawks, having soaked up so much pressure through countless waves of charging Selkirk forwards, somehow found a way back into the match. A penalty line-out five yards out from the line suggested a rolling maul pushover effort, but that came to nought as Selkirk applied the heavies in defence. Keen to not waste a rare piece of territory, Hawks spread the ball out and fly-half **Gavin Cruickshanks** sauntered under the sticks following a superb wrap-around with scrum-half **Euan McAra**.

This gave Hawks a seven-point lead which was reduced to two after **Josh Welsh** crashed over on the far side. Again, the conversion missed, and Hawks breathed a temporary sight of relief.

But Selkirk kept on piling on the pressure. The indiscipline which dogged the end of the first half was now cast aside, the handling had improved, and suddenly centre **Ross Nixon** was over for what had to be the match-winning try.

Hawks managed to mount one final attack, but their fate was sealed as **Pickles** latched onto a floating pass from Cruickshanks to claim his second try.



For Wight, the improved discipline in the second half was a key factor in securing the victory on the road. "Nobody has momentum for the whole 80 minutes," Wight added. "It's about being in the right part of the field at the right time, maybe only for five minutes."

His counterpart **Andy Hill** was left to rue what might have been after seeing his side in charge for the bulk of the encounter. "I thought we were in a position to win it with the line-out with about nine minutes to go," Hill said. "But we went away from our processes and had a forward throwing a missed pass which isn't the sort of thing we would do in that circumstance. So, if we controlled the ball, I think we would have seen it through and got the win.

"It's all very well us throwing the ball around and being creative but we only got two scores in the first half. Against Hawick we did that and didn't score, against Heriot's we had four entries and we scored four times. So, we need to work on that again, sometimes it's better to take the ball to ground rather than go for the offload."

Teams –

Glasgow Hawks: A McLean; S Graham, J Pinkerton, K Yule, R Flett; G Cruickshanks, E McAra; M Downer, I Totic, G Strain, S Leckey, R Hart, S Hastings, D Sweeney, Oscar Baird. Subs: Oban Baird, I Carmichael, R Sweeney, E Davey, C Elliot.

Selkirk: R Cottrell; L Ferguson, J Welsh, R Nixon, B Pickles; C Jackson, Aaron McColm©; L Pettie©, B Riddell, Z Szwagrak, J Head, A Cochrane, Andrew McColm, S McClymont, M Job.
Subs: J Bett, K Thompson, A Ferrie, J Hamilton, F Wheelans.

Referee: D Sutherland.

Report from The Offside Line

Photos from Grant Kinghorn (<https://www.grantkinghornpics.co.uk/>)