

GHA v Selkirk 07.01.23 - Breathing Space Cup

IT was, perhaps, appropriate that by winning the Breathing Space Cup for the first time, Selkirk simultaneously gave themselves breathing space of a different kind in their race to get into the top four of the Premiership.



There is now clear daylight between the group competing for the play-offs and the chasing pack and though the Borderers have a tough run-in, **Scott Wight**, their coach, can take some confidence from maintaining their unbeaten run in on-the-road games.

The match itself started with a bang but as soon as a heavy shower arrived, it fizzled out into a game where both sides struggled to get anything resembling decent set-piece possession and mistakes followed as they tried to make things up in the loose.

That made it a game of character, and for Wight, that was where his team really game good. "We had spoken about doing the basics well but were 14-nil down after four minutes," he pointed out. "It was tough. We also lost two key players so the character we have in the squad shows.

"Some of the defensive play at the end of the first half and the start of the second was outstanding. Then, the sin-bin at the end seemed to galvanise us again. The way they adapted, we have to give the players credit."

It was different for **Callum Forester**, the GHA coach, who was clearly a frustrated man as he reflected on a match where a perfect start only produced a losing bonus point.

“It was a great start but then we made too many errors down the Selkirk end of the pitch,” he said. “It is an area we are working on. We are getting into attacking positions but then struggling to get anything from it.”

It does mean that after going into the match with an outside chance of the play-offs, Forester is now more worried about beating relegation and he knows he has to find a solution to the fundamental problem of turning attacking positions into points.



Which, oddly enough, became an issue only for the final 75 minutes of the match. Though Selkirk had claimed the long December lay-off had given them a chance to get over some niggles, they started the game as they were still on holiday. The opening minute saw GHA Under 20s flanker **Jonny Morris** bouncing off tacklers before the ball swung out to the right. Lock **Harris MacLeod**, another on Glasgow Warriors' books, made the vital carry before **Kyle Dixon** finished the job.

It failed to shock Selkirk out of their stupor as wing **Luca Bardelli** produced a scorcher of a score for try number two. He came off the blindside wing to accelerate past a line-out, sidestep through the next line of defence and give himself the angle to go outside visiting full-back **Callum Anderson** for the touchdown. **George Baird** converted both.

Four minutes into the game and Selkirk were already up against it – at last, that jolted them to life, helped by a high hit from Morris that earned him 10 minutes on the side-lines.

With a man advantage, Selkirk kicked to the corner and the inevitable rolling maul ended with **Bruce Riddell**, the hooker, getting the ball down. The comeback was on.



The Glasgow side did hold on until the final seconds of the sinbin but in the end, they were pulled across the pitch and back before running out of defenders on their left as **Josh Welsh** cantered over with acres of space to run into. **Craig Jackson** added both touchline conversions and the scores were level.

That remained the case for the rest of the half as heavy rain disrupted any attempts at handling rugby, though both sides were awarded kickable penalties. GHA opted to for for the corner on theirs while Jackson missed his long-range effort for Selkirk.

GHA got the scoreboard going in the second half with Baird converting a penalty, but it was Selkirk who made the bigger impact. They should have scored earlier when Anderson was put through with support on his left, only to look right and get caught, but it didn't matter too much.

From the period of pressure, the ball went loose from a line-out and **Jack Hamilton**, the visiting scrum half, exploded through the gap and had the strength to ride two tackles to reach the line. With Jackson again converting, it was advantage Borderers for the first time.

With both sides struggling for set-piece ball, the game settled into a mistake-ridden stalemate. GHA did finish with a man advantage after Anderson was sin binned for taking out an opponent in the air – more a timing issue than anything malicious.



All game, however, they had struggled to turn pressure into points and even with that in their favour, nothing changed. Selkirk rode out the final minutes with sterling defence and taking advantage of the home side's mistakes.

"We have a vital run of games, Marr, Currie and Edinburgh Accies coming," Wight pointed out. "That was a huge part of the jigsaw but the way we stuck to the task and our unbeaten record on the road has got to give us confidence. It was great to come away with a win, so if we can come out of next week at home with a win, we will be in a strong place."

Full Time Score – GHA 17 Selkirk 21

Teams –

GHA: C King; L Bardelli, C Lonergan, K Dixon, A Caqusau; G Drummond, G Baird; E Cavan, L Barron, M Fox, A Kerr, H McLeod, J Morris, D Ewing, L McCutcheon. Subs: A Falconer, C Norrie, A Barnett, F Johnston, A Bogidrau.

Selkirk: C Anderson; L Ferguson, R Cottrell, C Jackson, J Welsh; Aaron McColm©, J Hamilton; L Pettie, B Riddell, Z Szwagrzak, J Head, A Cochrane, D Nichol, S McClymont, M Job. Subs: J Bett, K Thomson, C Turnbull, E McVicar, C Easson.

Referee: G Lazenby

Report by The Offside Line