

Selkirk v Melrose – Border League Final

SELKIRK came out of this tense cup final at Netherdale with only their seventh win in the Border League since it all started at the very beginning of the 20th century. It was clear at the end how much this meant to the whole team and the town, but Melrose, from a division below, made them fight all the way for the silverware in what turned out to be your typical low-scoring, scrappy yet somehow irresistible Border derby where the constant rain played its part in the whole affair.



Border League President Fiona Skeen presents Selkirk's Co-Captains Luke Pettie and Aaron McColm with the Border League Trophy.

It certainly wasn't pretty and it was one for the purists but at the end of the day it will forever be Selkirk's name on the trophy as winners of the title in 2022-23.

It was Selkirk who got off to the best possible start, immediately taking the game to Melrose and scoring a try on six minutes when **Aaron McColm** scythed through a gap in the Melrose defence to slip in under the posts with **Craig Jackson** on target with the conversion to give them a 7-0 cushion.

Melrose struggled with their set-piece and squandered early possession, putting pressure on themselves, but full credit to their defensive effort as they repelled the Souters wave of attacks and got themselves down the other end of the pitch for the first time as we entered the 22nd minute.

From that territory Melrose captain **David Colvine** bagged a penalty but the Selkirk response was quick and impressive. The ball went out to the left flank where centre **Ryan Cottrell** was lurking and he put in an unorthodox grubber kick which he immediately followed up, and with sheer pace reached the ball first, kicked again and got over the line for a sensational individual try.

Jackson missed the conversion but it was all Selkirk to the end of the half. They should have added to their 12 point tally but fair play to Melrose who defended like demons and stopped their opponents from adding to their total.

It was the confidence boost they needed as they came out for the second half believing they could get something out of this game.

The first 15 minutes of the second period was scrappy to say the least – fumbles, knock-ons and moves breaking down – and though referee **Ross Mabon** would have liked to have officiated over a flowing game of rugby, he couldn't help but blow his whistle during this error-strewn game.

Packing down in the front row to everyone's surprise was Selkirk's Polish international **Zen Szwargzak**, who had played the full game the day before for his country against Belgium, but flew in specially so he could appear in this final. The big man put in a big performance before being replaced, but what an effort!



Zen Szwargzak charging in to the Melrose defence. After playing full match for Poland against Belgium on Sunday then went on to play 60 minutes on Monday night.

David Colvine slotted home a second penalty to reduce the deficit to six points and the longer this game went on, the more Melrose came at Selkirk.

Selkirk thought they'd got a third try in the corner when young full-back **Finlay Wheelans** dived on the ball in the own goal area but he was judged after a consultation between Mabon and assistant referee **Sean Niven** to have knocked the ball on.

Jackson had a chance to extend Selkirk's lead with a 40 metre kick in front of the posts but he pushed his effort wide and it was another let-off for the black and yellows.

Melrose bounced back and produced a rolling maul which will live long in the memory, pushing back the star-studded Selkirk pack fully 20 metres. It was an impressive move which resulted in a penalty and a yellow card against Selkirk's **Scott McClymont**. A kick to the corner followed by a drive to the line was on the menu, but the line-out didn't go to plan and a gilt-edged opportunity to win the game for Melrose went begging.



Scott McClymont on the charge for Selkirk.

Streetwise Selkirk dusted themselves off and buckled down to see out the game with 14 men and they succeeded.

Full credit to their defence who were tremendous all match. It was an energy-sapping game in which all 46 players in the squads gave their all but it was Selkirk who deservedly came out on top.

Teams –

Selkirk: F Wheelans; J Welsh, R Cottrell, Aaron McColm, E McViker; C Jackson, J Hamilton; L Pettie, B Riddell, Z Szwagrzak, J Head, A Cochrane, R Nixon, S McClymont, Andrew McColm. Replacements: J Bett, K Thomson, C Mackintosh, C Turnbull, C Ward, C Easson, L Ferguson, M Reid.

Melrose: D Colvine; C Spence, D Crawford, R Brett, H Weir; S Hutchison, B Colvine; W Owen, S Fairbairn, C Crookshanks, T Brown, G Lindsay, W Ferrie, E Ruthven R McConnell. Replacements: L Kirk, E Compton, J Dobie, A Weir, G Andersson, E Lindsay, Z Ramage, A Pilcher.