

Marr v Selkirk 23.09.23

AN opening flourish in each half was enough to keep the Marr bandwagon rolling along with a five point win. But, for the second week running, they were outplayed for long spells and know they got the breaks at key moments

They were sharper when it mattered in the so-called 'red zone' and made the most of the chances they had, but they were under pressure for most of the game and even the home support admitted it was only fair that the Borderers fought back to claim a scoring bonus point in the final quarter.

It was also a game blighted by another serious-looking injury. Home hooker **Curran McMillan** was laid out by a blow to the head, resulting in a good 10 minutes of treatment on the field before being carried off to the changing room. To the relief of all, he was soon up and about again but it was a reminder of the dangers in the game.

On a more practical level, McMillan's departure left the hosts short-handed. With his replacement **Scott Clelland** already off for an ankle injury, the game went to uncontested scrums, Marr had to sacrifice a player and the remaining 14 men couldn't stop Selkirk scoring twice in the final 10 minutes to transform the complexion of the game.

"We started like a house on fire, broke out for a couple of scores but then couldn't get a foothold in the game," said **Kenny Diffenthal**, the Marr coach. "We worked hard during the week on our discipline and keeping the ref out of it, but we gave away far too many penalties. A lot of that was down to boys playing in different positions.

"We had worked really hard on our attack. It is difficult, though, everyone wants to get on the and they don't always stick to the system and keep their discipline. In the end, it is still five points from the game and that is the main thing."



A radically different view was put forward by **Michael Jaffray**, the Selkirk coach, who was left wondering how his side dominated territory and possession as much as they did, won the penalty count handsomely, dominated the set- piece and still came away with a defeat.

There was some consolation in the scoring bonus point and the fighting spirit that earned it in the final quarter but he was left knowing it could, maybe even should, have been so much more.

“We lacked a bit of composure and a bit of punch in the final third, but credit to Marr, they defended really well on their own line,” he said. “They punished us when we made mistakes but we worked really hard. The execution of one-on-one tackles failed a few times and that is what really cost us in the end.

“We had a positive start but then went couple of scores down, so I have to give credit to the boys that we stayed in the fight as well as we did. Our attacking shape was good but we need to work on being a bit more clinical.

“When you look at it half way through the second half, I didn’t think we were going to get anything out of the game but in the end we did get the fourth try and that says a lot. We are a young side and this was good exposure for the younger players. There are a lot of positives.”

His real worry should be that despite a strong start, they failed to score and Marr made them pay on their first visit to the visitors’ 22. A beautifully created breakout from their own half with Conor and Scott Bickerstaff, paired in the centre for this game, sparking the move. Selkirk gave away a penalty under their posts and fell asleep as Conor Bickerstaff took it quickly and scored.

Minutes later, the hosts doubled their lead as wing **Jack Scott** picked off an interception on his own 22 and raced 70 metres to score try number two, before adding another after Scott Bickerstaff had shredded the defence. He still had a lot of work to do to get there but two sidesteps and he was over.



Selkirk were still the dominant force in general play, however, and a forward rumble led by prop **Jake Milburn** earned an attacking position before **Aaron McColm** switched the direction of play and Ben Pickles, the wing, crossed.

The visitors thought they had pulled another back on the stroke of half time but skipper **Luke Pettie** was ruled to have failed to ground the ball in heavy traffic, and Marr didn't take long after the break to get back on the front foot with **Robbie Baird**, the scrum-half, finishing a spectacular move, again featuring a dazzling run from Scott Bickerstaff.

Marr made the game safe with as **Cameron Young**, the flanker, and Baird creating the space for prop **Alex Apthorpe** to show his sidestepping skills and cross under the posts, then at 33-7 down Selkirk finally found their attacking rhythm. With the home side under a yellow card warning at a scrum, **Aaron McColm**, the scrum-half, broke blind and forced his way over.

Though Marr made sure there was no threat of a late upset with full-back **Greg Montgomery** finishing after the forwards had done the hard work, the Selkirk bonus point still came with seconds remaining as **Zen Szwagrzak**, who had made a big difference in the scrum when he came on, crashed through.

A game with something for both teams but also one that gave both coaches plenty to work on.



Teams –

Marr: G Montgomery; J Scott, S Bickerstaff, C Bickerstaff (C), J Jacobson; C Sturgeon, R Baird; A Rogers, C McMillan, A Apthorpe, D Andrew, C Folan, F Grant, C Young, B Jardine. Subs: S Clelland, G Dick, M Blair, C Inglis, J MacKinnon.

Selkirk: B Pickles; F Wheelans, A Grant-Suttie, R Nixon, J Welsh; C Easson, Aaron McColm; L Pettie, F Easson, J Milburn, C Turnbull, A Cochrane, R Murray, S McClymont (C), Andrew McColm. Subs: B Riddell, Z Szwagrzak, C Ward, B Cullen, A Penman.

Report by The Offside Line

Photos by Grant Kinghorn