

Selkirk v Musselburgh 30.09.23

MUSSELBURGH steered themselves into a safer Premiership position after reaping a full house of five points from their win over Selkirk at Philiphaugh in a match that did little to counteract the growing darkness of the forbidding sky.

Whether Musselburgh won the game or Selkirk lost it is a moot point but there was certainly little in the tone of the visitors' coach **Derek O'Riordan** to suggest that this was a carefully constructed victory.

"We had absolutely no right to win that game," declared O'Riordan. "Selkirk dominated us in the set-piece during the first sixty minutes but **Darren Miller** and **Ross Hanning** coming on sorted-out the set piece for us and allowed us to get back into the game. Overall, though, I thought we had more firepower on the bench and that was crucial."

Musselburgh, however, did show more ambition behind the scrum, frequently running good lines to thoroughly test what proved to be an unyielding Selkirk defence.

On the matter of Selkirk losing the game, their coach Gordon Henderson commented: "It was disappointing to lose. We were 21-12 up and in control but then gave them momentum through penalties and they took it. We seemed to have the game won and were going for the bonus point but it fell apart."

Selkirk's powerful start to the game in which their forward pack bossed the set scrums produced an early result, emanating from a penalty kick to the corner. **Callum Turnbull** peeled off the ensuing line-out, before ploughing onwards to the line. Musselburgh defended well but could not resist a series of close range drives that ended with **Zen Szwagrzak** barrelling over for the opening try, converted by **Aaron McColm**.



Musselburgh quickly recovered from the early set-back and looked purposeful on the ball. But their opening points came from a driven line-out that ended with hooker **Bob Stott** touching down for an unconverted try.

Having succeeded with this ploy Musselburgh repeated the move with a second maul try, again by Stott, and this time converted by scrum-half **Fionn Call**.

With the driving maul very much in vogue it was Selkirk's turn to show their power up front, moving the maul successfully before releasing the ball for the forwards to indulge in several phases of pick and drive ending with second row **Callum Turnbull** crashing over and McColm kicking his second conversion to give the home side a narrow 14-12 interval advantage.

The arrival of overhead dampness in the third quarter made attempts to play handling rugby a tad more hazardous. In the event it was Selkirk who were the early beneficiaries of the elemental intervention, when Musselburgh attempted to run back a dropped Selkirk pass, the referee having ruled that the ball went backwards, only to repeat the error themselves, giving Aaron McColm the opportunity to hack the ball forward and score under the posts, before converting his own try.



Musselburgh were able to reply emphatically from pressure in the red zone, running a penalty that concluded with replacement **Darren Miller** forcing his way over from close range, fellow benchman **Paul Cunningham** adding the extras to narrow Selkirk's lead to just two points.

Cunningham missed a potentially winning penalty kick but it did not matter for Musselburgh who turned the screw in the closing stages forcing several penalties, the last of which resulted in a five metre line-out and the inevitable series of drives to the line, the final coup de grace delivered not by one of the heavyweights but by nimble wing **Sandy Watt** who picked up from the back of the maul and dived over for the winning score.

Teams –

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

Musselburgh: R Hindhaugh; J Ferguson, R Watt©, B Heber, S Watt; R Smith, F Call; R Brown, R Stott, C Arthur, J Haynes, M Badenhorst, J Arnold, M Crawford, J Lister. Subs: D Miller, R Hanning, G Inkster, P Cunningham, O Craig.

Report by The Offside Line

Photo by Grant Kinghorn